**POLITICAL SCIENCE 210: Authoritarianism**  
Tues. 4:00-6:00pm, 791 Barrows Hall

Version 9/11/19

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**Course Description:** This seminar explores the characteristics and dynamics of non-democratic regimes: how and why they come about, what sustains them, why some people resist and others do not, and how and why they decline and fall. There are no formal methodological prerequisites for this course. However, during our journey through autocracy we will encounter a variety of approaches, including formal, large-N statistical, small-N qualitative, and narrative. Some of the readings may employ techniques with which you are not familiar. We will not spend lots of time on methods per se, but you should consider those readings notice that you will eventually have to get up to methodological speed to understand cutting-edge research. In any case, you should try to do the best you can for whatever level of methodological training you have.

**Requirements:** Two-thirds of your grade will be based on a term paper, due in my mailbox by Friday, Dec 13, 2:00pm. You are free to choose any topic you wish, provided that it is relevant to the course. Be sure you discuss the topic with me in advance. A two-page synopsis of your proposed paper is due in class on October 15. One-third of your grade will be based on seminar participation. Please come to class prepared to critically discuss issues raised in the readings.

**Course Readings**

**BOOK FOR PURCHASE:**


**ELECTRONIC READINGS:**

All other readings are in bCourses.

I reserve the right to add or subtract readings as needed.

1. (Sept 3): Introduction
2. (Sept 10): Origins of Authoritarianism

Why have most political regimes throughout history been non-democratic? Why are some (autocratic) regimes so much more brutal than others?


3. (Sept 17): Contemporary Authoritarian Politics

What are actually existing dictatorships like? What empirical domain are we trying to explain?

Svolik, chapter 2.

4. (Sept 24): Dilemmas of Dictatorship

Even seemingly all-powerful dictators and dictatorships are less powerful than we imagine. What limits do they face? What are the tradeoffs involved as dictators strive to maintain power?


5. (Oct 1): Authoritarian Power-Sharing
Why do dictators so often voluntarily cede power to other actors in the system?

Svolik, chapter 3-4.

6. (Oct 8): Authoritarian Control: Repression

How does the organization of repressive institutions affect the amount and types of repression? What costs do dictators pay for employing repression rather than other strategies?

Svolik, chapter 5.


Dictatorships routinely feature ruling parties and at least a simulacrum of elections. What are the advantages and disadvantages of these institutions from the ruling group's perspective? From the mass perspective?

Svolik, chapter 6.
Geddes, Wright, and Frantz, chapter 6.

8. (Oct 22): Review of Participants' Paper Ideas

Students will present their paper ideas to the class for discussion.


For most, dictatorship involves diminished freedom and opportunity if not repression. Yet some seem nonetheless willing and perhaps eager to comply. Why?


10. (Nov 5): Why Do People Obey? Is it Manipulated?

Voluntary choice implies the absence of coercion and roughly complete information. How do dictators manipulate information and other factors to induce people to obey?


11. (Nov 12): Why Do People Obey? Is it Habituated?

To what extent are our preferences for dictatorship themselves shaped by forces over which we have little control?


12. (Nov 19): Authoritarian Survival

Is there a formula for long-lasting authoritarianism? What are the tradeoffs between the survival of a dictator and the longevity of a dictatorial regime?

13. (Nov 26): Popular Resistance to Autocracy

Open and violent opposition is rare under repressive regimes. What other modes of resistance are there, and what good are they for?


14. (Dec 3): TBD

15. (Dec 10): Reading Period. No class!

Papers due by Friday, Dec 13, 2:00pm