

POLS 4530/5530: Authoritarian Politics

Fall 2022 Monday 7:15-10:00 pm

Professor Matthew Nanes

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 11-12 and by appointment

Course Description and Goals

This course provides an introduction to research on authoritarian politics. The primary purpose is to review, synthesize, and critique existing scholarly literature on the topic, and to build a foundation on which students may begin their own research. Questions we will cover include:

What is an autocracy?

Are all autocracies the same from an analytic perspective? What is to be gained by differentiating and categorizing?

When and why do democracies die?

What problems do dictators face? How do they solve those problems?

Why do autocracies sometimes allow democratic institutions like legislatures, opposition parties, and elections?

How do autocrats rig elections? Why bother holding an election that is obviously rigged?

Why do opposition parties and candidates participate in rigged elections?

How does authoritarianism affect policy outcomes, economic growth, and international interactions?

By the end of the semester, students should be able to a) summarize what existing research has to say about each of these questions, and b) make a coherent case for the way that future research should continue to address these questions. I do not assume that students have any specific knowledge of political science. However, this is an advanced class and we will move quickly.

We will apply a theoretical framework on authoritarianism to several contemporary cases, including China, Egypt, Vietnam, Syria, Russia, Mexico, Africa (cross-national), Jordan, Lebanon, and Uganda.

Attendance Policy

Attendance and active participation are expected. Classroom discussions constitute a major portion of the course, and you cannot make up for missed sessions by doing the readings or reviewing notes. You are allowed 1 unexcused absence with no penalty. Additional unexcused absences will each result in a 5 point penalty on your final course grade. Illness is an excused absence. Do not come to class if you are sick. You can find the full SLU policy on attendance, including COVID-19, at the end of this syllabus.

Grading and Assignments

The assignments are intended to evaluate you based on the course goals listed above, with an emphasis on a) your ability to explain the existing research, including its strengths and weaknesses, and b) your ability to build on the existing research to propose a creative and productive path forward for contributing to our understanding of authoritarian politics.

20% Active classroom participation. You cannot actively participate if you (a) are not present, or (b) have not done the assigned reading. Feel free to check in with me for an update on how you are doing.

20% Discussion Leadership. Each student will lead part or all of a class discussion. Students registered for 4530 will lead the discussion of one or two readings. Students registered for 5530 or who are taking 4530 for honors credit will lead an entire class session. We will assign dates and papers during the first class.

30% Two response papers (15% each). Throughout the quarter you will write two papers in which you a) summarize and synthesize the existing research on the topic assigned for that week, b) highlight one or two strengths of the research, c) highlight one or two areas where the research remains inconclusive, and d) propose a research project to build on existing research OR propose a change in US foreign policy based on the conclusions of the research (your choice). These assignments are open-book, and you are expected to consult the written materials assigned in class. Dates will be assigned during the first class. The paper dates you select should not overlap with the date you lead the classroom discussion.

30% Final Paper. You will choose to write on one out of several essay prompts which ask you to build creatively on the material we covered during the semester. The prompts are designed to give you considerable flexibility in terms of a research or policy focus. Additional details will be provided.

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