

POLS 4530/5530: Authoritarian Politics

Fall 2022 – Tuesday 4:15-7:00 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 just 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.

Absences will be excused if they are caused by something that is both unforeseeable and out of your control. Illness is an

35% 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.

