Political Science 244A/444A: 
Authoritarian Politics

Lisa Blaydes*

Winter 2021

Class: 10:00-11:20 am, Monday and Wednesday
Office Hours: By appointment via Zoom.
Course assistant: Ashley Fabrizio (amfab@stanford.edu)

Course Overview

This course offers a thematic approach to the study of authoritarian politics. We will cover the major areas of political science research on autocratic governance while simultaneously building empirical knowledge about the politics of particular authoritarian regimes. The course goals include:

- To acquaint students with the leading theories and empirical findings associated with the study of autocratic regimes. Each class meeting will focus on a particular theme or case study.
- To expose students to different research strategies.
- To develop seminar skills. Students will be asked to present the readings, to write short papers to be delivered to the seminar group, and to engage in critical discussions of the readings.

Evaluation

Students will be evaluated on the following basis:

1. Writing (30%) — Students will write papers that respond to the readings for a particular class session. These papers should be between 1,000 and 1,500 words. An exemplary paper proposes and defends a thesis related to the topic of the class; addresses anticipated objections to the thesis; and synthesizes the relevant, associated readings. These papers will be posted to the “Discussions” section of Canvas the day before the class meeting so that all students will have a chance to read the papers.

2. Reading and Class Participation (30%)— Students are expected to read all items listed for common reading for the class meeting and be prepared to offer their reactions to the readings.

3. Presentations (20%) — Students will be responsible for presenting the readings during class each week and leading the seminar. Each student should sign-up to present once over the course of the quarter.

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4. Examination (20%) — In the 10th week, a take-home exam will be distributed. The examination will be short and “open book.”

Students will have the option to enroll in PS 244A/444A for 3, 4 or 5 units. The evaluation scheme is common for students enrolled for different numbers of units but the number of response papers will vary depending on the units. For students enrolled for three units, two papers will be required; four units, three papers; five units, four papers.

**Agenda of Topics and Readings**

All readings will be available on Canvas. The agenda of topics and readings is as follows:

**January 11: Introduction**


**January 13: Varieties of Autocracy**


**January 18: Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday**

Optional assignment: Choose one of the following two films (available through library course reserves) and post a short reaction in the “Discussions” section of Canvas: *The Death of Stalin* (2017) and *The Killing Fields* (1984).

**January 20: Authoritarian Coalitions**


**January 25: Case Study — The Rise of German Authoritarianism**


**January 27: Totalitarianism**


**February 1: Case Study — Autocracy and Famine**


**February 3: Parties and Elections**


**February 8: Distributive Politics**


**February 10: Institutions and Economics**


February 15: Case Study — Autocracy and Oil Rents


February 17: Repression


February 22: Political Culture


Huang, Haifeng. 2015. “Propaganda as Signaling.” Comparative Politics. 47(4).


February 24: Censorship and Information Manipulation


**March 1: Resistance Tactics**


**March 3: Coups**


**March 8: Revolutions and Revolutionary Thresholds**


**March 10: Authoritarian Enclaves**


**March 15: Case Study — Police and Policing**


March 17: Undermining Democracy


Note for Students

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) located within the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). In addition, students should retain receipts for books and other course-related expenses, as these may be qualified educational expenses for tax purposes. If you are an undergraduate receiving financial aid, you may be eligible for additional financial aid for required books and course materials if these expenses exceed the aid amount in your award letter.