**Autocratic politics (STV23XX)**

1. **Personnel:**

**Course administrators (for Spring 2022):** Felix Haass and Carl Henrik Knutsen

**Lecturers:** Sirianne Dahlum, Felix Haass, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Philipp Lutscher, Jacob Nyrup, Jonas Schmid, Tore Wig

1. **Course summary:**

The distinction between democracy and dictatorship (or “autocracy”) is one of the central ones in politics. Yet not all autocracies are alike—relatively open autocracies with elections and other seemingly democratic institutions, such as Singapore, exist alongside brutal and closed autocracies, such as North Korea. What distinguishes autocracies from democracies? And, what characterizes politics under different types of dictatorship? In this course, we address how autocratic regimes emerge, how politics plays out in such regimes once they are in place, and how autocracies die.

In the course, you will become familiar with a wide spectrum of autocratic regimes from across the world, with very different institutions. You will also become familiar with the key players shaping politics and their strategies. In particular, we will focus on how dictators and their support coalitions sometimes repress opposition and sometimes co-opt them and make them allies. We will further discuss how such strategies as well as different autocratic institutions shape not only policy, but also key outcomes such as economic development, income inequality, and war. Finally, we will look into which factors make some autocracies endure for decades, whereas others break down. In extension, we will discuss why the autocracies that do break down are sometimes replaced by new autocracies, whereas others are replaced by democracies.

1. **Learning outcomes:**

**Knowledge**

After having completed the course, students will:

* Know how autocracy is defined and measured.
* Know about different types of autocracies and forms of transitions in- and out of autocracy.
* Understand central theoretical and empirical discussions in the research on autocracies, and be able to draw on these insights when discussing relevant topics.
* Be familiar with theories of autocratization, democratization, institutions in dictatorships, and policy formation in dictatorships, and know how to use these theories when analyzing specific cases.
* Be familiar with central theoretical and empirical contributions to the discussion on the role of individual dictators in policy formation in dictatorships, including the role of dictators in generating economic growth and conducting foreign policy.
* Understand how different actors in dictatorships (in addition to the dictator) affect policy, including the support coalition, the opposition and the military.
* Understand prominent theoretical explanations for varieties of institutions in dictatorships, including legislatures, elections and parties.
* Understand theories of how, when and why, dictators choose to co-opt or repress the opposition, and use these theories to analyze specific cases.
* Be familiar with empirical findings and theories relating to why and when autocratic regimes go to war, and other aspects of foreign policy.
* Grasp discussions regarding different causes of how autocracies die, and why some regime-breakdowns end in democratization and some in continued dictatorship.
* Know about different datasets on democracy and dictatorships and prominent datasets on autocratic breakdown, regimes and institutions in dictatorships.

**Skills**

Having completed the course, students will:

* be able to understand and synthesize arguments and evidence in a systematic way, and communicate this to different audiences.
* have practical skills in conducting systematic searches for literature and data.
* have practical skills in conducting independent empirical studies.
* have skills in distinguishing between theoretical models, and actual cases, and be able to use theoretical concepts and insights to understand particular cases.
* have skills in analyzing how different research conclusions depend on different data sources and measurement choices.
* have skills to distinguish between analysis of dictatorships that is grounded in existing research and those that are not.
* have practical skills in reviewing studies and performing literature summaries.
* have practical skills in providing constructive feedback.

**General competences**

The students will be able to:

* separate between analyses that are founded on science and those that are not
* distinguish between theory, general empirical patterns, and empirical information from specific cases
* analyze and critically evaluate arguments empirically and theoretically
* distinguish between empirical, conceptual and theoretical statements
* investigate social science question using the scientific method
* distinguish between conclusions that are based on specific cases, and those that are based on more general comparisons.

1. **Organization:**

**10 lectures and 5 seminars:** Each seminar and its assignments will pertain to the topics and texts presented in the two foregoing lectures (e.g., Seminar 1 will come right after Lectures 1 & 2)

**Seminar assignments:** The format of these seminar assignments will be review/response papers of about 1000-1500 words. Each student shall write one response paper, and be a discussant on one such paper written by another student, during the seminar series. Students should select *one of the readings* from the readings from the two lectures preceding the particular seminar and provide a brief summary and critical discussion of it.

Specifically they should:

a) Summarize the research question, argument and method

b) Situate the study in the broader literature on the topic

c) Critically engage with one or max. two aspects of the reading. This aspect can be of conceptual, theoretical or methodological nature, and the critical engagement should take up at least 50% of the length of the paper.

Goal of assignment: Students will be incentivized to read individual readings carefully and with more attention to detail. Students will also be trained to view individual readings in the broader literature and to apply different types of knowledge and skills to critically assess research in the field. Students will also learn how to provide constructive feedback on others’ work.

These seminar assignments will not be part of the final grade.

1. **Overview curriculum:**

**Textbook:** Frantz, Erica. 2018. *Authoritarianism: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 154 pp.

**Chapters from other books:** 145 pp. (from four different books)

**Articles:** 548 pp.

**Total number pages:** 847 pp.

1. **Lecture plan, overview:**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Lecture nr. | Lecturer | Topic |
| 1 | CHK | Varieties of autocracy |
| 2 | CHK | Becoming an autocracy |
| 3 | FH | Actors |
| 4 | JS | Institutions |
| 5 | JN | Co-optation |
| 6 | PL | Repression |
| 7 | TW | Foreign policy |
| 8 | TW | How autocracies die |
| 9 | SD | Democratization |
| 10 | FH | Future of autocracies and course summary |

1. **Examination:**

* Three-hour written exam
* Term paper
* You must have passed the compulsory activities in order to sit the exam

The term paper must

* have a maximum word limit of 3500 words, including notes and reference list.
* meet the formal requirements for submission of the course paper

1. **Grading:**

* You must pass the written exam and the term paper the same semester
* The two parts are evaluated together and given one, overall grade
* The written exam counts about 60 percent of the grade and the course paper about 40 percent
* If you appeal the grade, the appeal is of both the written exam and the term paper

1. **Lecture plan, detailed plus course readings:**

**1. Varieties of autocracy (Lecturer: CHK)**

* What is an autocracy? Common definitions, and autocracy defined as the “absence of democracy”
* Democracy-autocracy measures
* Different classification principles (institutions, motivations dictators, etc.) and typologies of autocracies
* Predominant categorizations of autocracies today and datasets

Readings:

* Chapters 1 & 5, Frantz (42 pp)
* Lührman, A., Tannenberg, M. & Lindberg, S.I. 2018. Regimes of the World (RoW): Opening New Avenues for the Comparative Study of Political Regimes. *Politics and Governance* 6(1): 1-18. (18 pp): <https://www.cogitatiopress.com/politicsandgovernance/article/view/1214/1214>
* Geddes, B., Wright, J. & Frantz, E. 2014. Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set. *Perspectives on Politics* 12(2): 313-331. (18 pp)

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/perspectives-on-politics/article/autocratic-breakdown-and-regime-transitions-a-new-data-set/EBDB9E5E64CF899AD50B9ACC630B593F>

* Wahmann, Michael, Axel Hadenius & Jan Teorell. 2013. Authoritarian regime types revisited: updated data in comparative perspective. Contemporary Politics 19(1): 19-34 (15 pp)

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13569775.2013.773200>

**2. Becoming an autocracy (Lecturer: CHK)**

* What is regime change? General concept of regime/regime change and more specific on particular regime changes such as democratization vs autocratization
* Becoming an autocracy: Democratic breakdown and democratic backsliding/gradual autocratization
* Processes of autocratization: military coups and self-coups
* Historical overview: Waves of regime change & autocratization?

Readings:

* Chapters 3 & 6, Frantz (30 pp)
* Djuve, V.L., Knutsen, C.H. & Wig, T. 2020. Patterns of Regime Change Since the French Revolution. *Comparative Political Studies* 53(6): 923-958. (26 pp)

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0010414019879953>

* Svolik, M.W. 2019. Polarization Versus Democracy. Journal of Democracy 30(3): 20-32. (13 pp)

<https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/polarization-versus-democracy/>

* Bermeo, N. 2016. On Democratic Backsliding. *Journal of Democracy* 27(1): 5-19. (14 pp)

<https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/on-democratic-backsliding/>

**3. Actors (Lecturer: FH)**

* The dictator
* The support coalition
* The opposition
* Who selects policies? Constraints on policy makers?
* What are the motivations behind selecting policies? Regime survival, maximizing consumption, ideology, other motivations.

Readings:

* Chapters 2 & 4, Frantz (30 pp)
* Wintrobe, R. 1998. *The Political Economy of Dictatorship.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  + The Dictator’s Dilemma: Chapter 2 (19pp)
* Svolik, M.W. 2012. *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  + On the dictator’s problems of rule: Chapter 1 (17 pp),
  + On dictator and elites: Chapter 3 (without formal model: 11pp)
  + On the dictator and public control/opposition: Chapter 5 (without formal model 16pp)

**4. Institutions (Lecturer: JS)**

* Why “democratic institutions” in autocracies? Institutions as window dressing? Institutions as constraints?
* Elections in autocracies
* Legislatures in autocracies
* Regime parties

Readings:

* Gandhi, J, Noble, B & Svolik, M. 2020. Legislatures and Legislative Politics Without Democracy (21pp) <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0010414020919930>
* Gandhi, J. & Lust-Okar, E. 2009. Elections under Authoritarianism. *Annual Review of Political Science* 12: 403-422. (19pp) <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.060106.095434>
* Magaloni, B. 2008. Credible Power-Sharing and the Longevity of Authoritarian Rule. *Comparative Political Studies* 41(4-5): 715-741. (27pp) <http://bmagaloni.com/storage/uploads/publications/crediblepowersharing.pdf.pdf>
* Meng, A. 2020. *Constraining Dictatorship.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  + Chapter 8. (12pp)
* Pepinsky, T. 2013. The Institutional Turn in Comparative Authoritarianism. *British Journal of Political Science* 44(3): 631-653. (22pp)
  + <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/british-journal-of-political-science/article/institutional-turn-in-comparative-authoritarianism/DF3E2FF1E79A8D41E3E60F1D45A1B5C5>

**5. Co-optation (Lecturer: JN)**

* Co-optation
* Redistribution, social policies, education
* Economic outcomes tied to policy discussions/topics (growth, inequality)
* The variation “puzzle”: Why do autocracies produce such different outcomes

Readings:

* Chapter 7, 104-110, Frantz (7 pp)
* Gerschewski, J. 2013. The three pillars of stability: legitimation, repression, and co-optation in autocratic regimes. *Democratization:* 20(1): 13-38. (25 pp)

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13510347.2013.738860>

* Knutsen, C.H. & Rasmussen, M.B. 2018. The Autocratic Welfare State: Old-Age Pensions, Credible Commitments, and Regime Survival. *Comparative Political Studies* 51(5): 659-695. (36 pp)

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0010414017710265>

* Gandhi, J. 2008. Dictatorial Institutions and their Impact on Economic Growth. *European Journal of Sociology* 49(3): 3-30. (28 pp)

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23999106>

* Knutsen, C.H. 2021. A business case for democracy: Regime type, growth, and growth volatility. *Democratization* OnlineFirst. (20pp)

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13510347.2021.1940965>

**6. Repression (Lecturer: PL)**

* Repression
* Physical integrity rights, torture, killings
* Censorship and use of the information technology

Readings:

* Chapter 7, 111-121, Frantz (11 pp)
* Davenport, C. 2007. State Repression and the Tyrannical Peace. *Journal of Peace Research* 44(4): 485-504. (19pp)

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0022343307078940?casa_token=yIZcPOjkyTgAAAAA:7AQ5gZiLUqlLh2Faqb2MN5DSXllc0ze3kuixf29XTS1kFZvnu7L5996GSvPRQrFa0_1DpaQRlQdd>

* Shen-Bayh, F. 2018. Strategies of Repression: Judicial and Extrajudicial Methods of Autocratic Survival. *World Politics* 70(3): 321-357. (36pp)

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/699124/pdf?casa_token=2irX66HcO-wAAAAA:rjmeCmdDFpJsQBdh0fubUKYTVPPwm3Ev3MbZ4fPV6aiTcRIRy5fClvWwPiWgTgSWwplXtsnsvg>

* Roberts, M. 2018 *Censored*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
  + Chapter 2, “A Theory of Censorship” (70 pp)

**7. Foreign policy (Lecturer: TW)**

* Dictators and international cooperation
* Interstate wars
* Security policies, e.g. nuclear weapons
* Propaganda in other countries

Readings:

* Weeks, J.L. 2012. Strongmen and straw men: Authoritarian regimes and the initiation of international conflict. *American Political Science Review* 106(2): 326-347. (22 pp)
* Way, C. & Weeks, J.L.P. 2014. Making it personal: regime type and nuclear proliferation. *American Journal of Political Science* 58(3): 705-719. (15 pp)
* Weeks, J.L.P & Crunkilton, C. 2017. Domestic constraints on foreign policy in authoritarian systems. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. (22 pp)

**8. How autocracies die (Lecturer: TW)**

* Autocratic regime stability/instability, historical overview/descriptive?
* Autocratic regime breakdown, causes
* Autocratic regime breakdown, processes

Readings:

* Chapter 8, 122-134, Frantz (13 pp)
* Knutsen, C.H., Nygård, H.M. & Wig, T. 2017. Autocratic elections: Stabilizing tool or force for change?. *World Politics* 69(1): 98-143. (46 pp)
* Frantz, E. & Kendall-Taylor, A. 2017. The evolution of autocracy: why authoritarianism is becoming more formidable. *Survival* 59(5): 57-68. (12 pp)

**9. Democratization (Lecturer: SD)**

* Democratization: When autocratic regimes turn into democracy
* Historical overview
* Causes of democratization

Readings:

* Chapter 8, 134-147, Frantz (14 pp)
* Dahlum, S., et al. 2018. Should Modernization Theory Survive? Symposium in *Annals of Comparative Democratization* 16(3) (48 pp)

<https://connect.apsanet.org/s35/wp-content/uploads/sites/26/2018/10/2018_16_3-Annals_of_CD_September.pdf#page=4>

* Treisman, D. 2020. Democracy by mistake: how the errors of autocrats trigger transitions to freer government. *American Political Science Review*, *114*(3), 792-810. (19 pp)
* Dahlum, S., Knutsen, C. H., & Wig, T. 2019. Who revolts? Empirically revisiting the social origins of democracy. *The Journal of Politics*, *81*(4), 1494-1499. (6 pp)

**10. Future of autocracies and course summary (Lecturer: FH)**

* Digitalization and autocratic rule
* The future of autocracies
* Summary of the course and Q&A (hour 2)

Readings:

* Chapter 9, Frantz (7 pp)
* Kendall-Taylor, A., Frantz, E. & Wright, J. 2020. The Digital Dictators: How Technology Strengthens Autocracy. *Foreign Affairs* (13 pp)

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