**4550: Topics in autocratic politics (MA course)**

1. **Course summary:**

Historically, most political systems have been some form of autocracy, and even today a large (and increasing) share of the world’s population live in autocratic systems. Despite the importance of understanding how autocracies such as China or Russia work, political scientists have overwhelmingly focused on politics in democratic systems. Yet, over the last two decades, research on autocratic politics has developed rapidly, providing us with a wealth of data, empirical studies, and fascinating theories of the behavior of dictators and their supporters and opponents. This course will address key topics in this burgeoning area of research.

More specifically, the course is structured around six topics in autocratic politics, spanning different subfields of political science. The first three topics introduce you to the core building blocks of autocratic politics research. We will discuss I) how to conceptualize and measure different types of autocracies and who the key players are in these systems; II) how autocracies emerge and break down; III) practical and ethical considerations concerning how to do research on and in autocracies. The three final topics are more focused, with active researchers focusing on topics on which they have particular expertise. Examples of such topics are bureaucracies and violence; autocratic elections; information control and autocracies in the digital age.

1. **Learning outcomes:**

**Knowledge**

After having completed the course, students will:

* Know of different ways to define, categorize, and measure various types of autocracies, and how to obtain data that measure these autocracy types.
* Be familiar with several core theories of how autocratic politics work and different empirical studies that assess these theories.
* Be familiar with theories and empirical studies of different causes and processes through which autocracies emerge or break down, and know of different types of data that can be used to study these phenomena.
* Grasp different practical challenges and constraints to doing research in autocratic contexts.
* Understand ethical considerations and dilemmas in doing research in autocratic contexts
* Have in-depth knowledge about the state of art in three more focused topics within the autocratic politics literature.

**Skills**

Having completed the course, students will:

* have practical skills in reviewing and synthesizing studies and writing literature summaries
* be able to understand and assess theoretical arguments and different types of evidence
* have practical skills in conducting systematic searches for literature and data, and in handling different types of data
* have practical skills in designing and implementing independent empirical studies
* have skills in analyzing how different research conclusions depend on different data sources and measurement, design, and other methodological choices

**General competences**

The students will be able to:

* be able to develop coherent theoretical arguments
* analyze and critically evaluate arguments empirically and theoretically
* investigate complex social science question using scientific methods

1. **Structure and organization**:

*Format:* 10 lectures, a 2 hours: These hours contain a mix of more lecture-like teaching (especially for Topics I-II) and more seminar-like teaching (especially for Topics III-VI).

*Course organizers for Spring 2022*: Carl Henrik Knutsen and Philipp Lutscher

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

*A note on topics and rotation for coming semesters:*

Topics I—III are fixed and will be part of each run of the course (though with possible modification to contents and curriculum). Topics IV-VI are selected for each semester from a wider list**.** The choice of these topics will depend, e.g., on the competencies of the involved lecturers**.** These topics are typically more focused than the more general Topics I—III.

Example of topics to be selected as Topics IV (2 lectures), V (1 Lecture), and VI (2 lectures) – topics chosen for Spring 2022 are marked in bold:

* + Coup-proofing and military coups
  + **Autocratic elections**
  + Mass/regime parties
  + Organizing opposition in autocracies
  + **The bureaucracy and violence**
  + Ideologies
  + Repression
  + The autocratic welfare state
  + Fiscal policy
  + Security policy
  + The consequences of leader change
  + War-making
  + **Information Control/Autocracies in the digital age**

1. **Compulsory activities:**

3 short response papers (1-2 pages); all are pass/fail.

* + RP 1: Compare and contrast 2 articles from Topics I or II
  + RP 2: Review report of selected paper from Topic IV
  + RP 3 Review report of selected paper from Topic VI

1. **Examination:**

Students must have passed the compulsory activities in the same semester in order to be eligible for the exam.

Term paper: Max 5000 word essay. A-F (ECTS) grade

1. **Overview curriculum:**

**Chapters from books:** 294 pp. (from 8 different books)

**Articles:** 750 pp.

**Total number pages:** 944 pp.

1. **Lecture plan, overview, Spring 2022:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Lecture nr. | Lecturer | Topic |
| 1 | CHK | I |
| 2 | JN | I |
| 3 | SD | II |
| 4 | JN | II |
| 5 | PL | III |
| 6 | FH | IV |
| 7 | FH | IV |
| 8 | JS | V |
| 9 | PL | VI |
| 10 | PL | VI |

**Topics and lectures for Spring 2022:**

Explanatory note: “Readings” are on the curriculum, whereas “Further readings” are not (but merely suggestions for those who are interested in learning even more about a topic).

**Topic I: Fundamentals of autocratic politics (2 lectures; CHK & JN)**

Lecture 1: What are autocracies? (CHK)

* Brief overview: What characterizes autocratic politics, and how does it differ/resemble democratic politics?
* What is an autocracy, and do autocracies come in degrees?
* Varieties of autocracy?
* Concepts, typologies and measurement

Readings:

* Geddes, Barbara. 1999. What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years? *Annual Review of Political Science* 2: 115-144. (30pp)
* 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)
* Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. 2002. Elections without democracy: The rise of competitive authoritarianism. *Journal of Democracy* 13(2): 51-65. (14pp)
* Skaaning, Svend-Erik, John Gerring & Henrikas Bartusevičius. 2015 A Lexical Index of Electoral Democracy. *Comparative Political Studies* 48(12): 1491-1525. (35 pp)

Total pages: 97

Further readings:

* Cheibub, José Antonio, Jennifer Gandhi & James Vreeland 2010. Democracy and Dictatorship Revisited. *Public Choice* 143(1-2): 67-101.
* Linz, Juan J. 2000. *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*. Lynne Rienner*.*
* 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)
* Wahmann, M, A Hadenius & J Teorell. 2013. Authoritarian regime types revisited: updated data in comparative perspective. *Contemporary Politics* 19(1): 19-34 (15 pp)

Lecture 2: Actors and institutions (JN)

* Institutions in autocracies
* Key actors in autocracies and their motivation
* Core strategies of autocracies: Repression, cooptation, and legitimation/ideology

Readings:

* Best of Machiavelli, Niccolò. *The Prince* (7 pages): <https://www.dropbox.com/s/kgm12ijr1htmi08/BestofthePrince.pdf?dl=0>
* Svolik, Milan W. 2012. *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Cambridge University Press. (Ch. 1, 1-17, Ch. 7, 196-202) (17p)
* Gandhi, J. 2008: Political Institutions under Dictatorship. Cambridge University Press, pp. xv-xxi, 34-41; 73-82 (23p)
* Gerschewski, J. 2013. "The three pillars of stability: legitimation, repression, and co-optation in autocratic regimes." Democratization 20.1 (2013): 13-38. (26p)
* Pepinsky, T. 2014. “The Institutional Turn in Comparative Authoritarianism.” British Journal of Political Science, 44 (3): 631–653. (23p)

Total pages: 102

Further readings

* Brownlee, Jason 2007. *Durable Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 10-15, 32-43
* Geddes, Barbara, et al. 2018. *How dictatorships work: Power, personalization, and collapse*. Cambridge University Press. (Part 3: Ruling Society: Implementation and Information Gathering)
* Magaloni, Beatriz, and Ruth Kricheli. 2010. "Political order and one-party rule." *Annual review of political science* 13: 123-143.
* Magaloni, Beatriz. 2006. *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-43.
* Paine, Jack. 2021. "The Dictator's Power‐Sharing Dilemma: Countering Dual Outsider Threats." American Journal of Political Science 65(2): 510-527
* “How to Become a Tyrant”, Netflix, 2021, Episode 3: “Reign through terror”
* “How to Become a Tyrant”, Netflix, 2021, Episode 5: “Create a new society”
* “How to Become a Tyrant”, Netflix, 2021, Episode 6: “Rule forever”

**Topic II: Regime change (2 lectures)**

Lecture 3: Autocratization (SD)

* How and why autocracies appear. Democratic breakdown/backsliding.
* Typical processes of democratic backsliding/breakdown
* Prominent causal explanations (selection)

Readings:

* Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How democracies die*. Broadway Books. («Introduction», Ch.1 and Ch.7) (53 pages)
* Graham, M. H., & Svolik, M. W. 2020. Democracy in America? Partisanship, polarization, and the robustness of support for democracy in the United States. *American Political Science Review*, *114*(2), 392-409. (17 pages)
* Lührmann, A., & Lindberg, S. I. 2019. A third wave of autocratization is here: what is new about it?. *Democratization*, *26*(7), 1095-1113. (18 pages)

Total pages: 88

Further reading:

* Bermeo, N. 2016. On democratic backsliding. *Journal of Democracy*, *27*(1), 5-19.
* Carey, J. M., Helmke, G., Nyhan, B., Sanders, M., & Stokes, S. 2019. Searching for bright lines in the Trump presidency. *Perspectives on Politics*, *17*(3), 699-718.
* Waldner, D., & Lust, E. 2018. Unwelcome change: Coming to terms with democratic backsliding. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *21*, 93-113.
* Przeworski, A. 2019. *Crises of democracy*. Cambridge University Press.
* “How to Become a Tyrant”, Netflix, 2021, Episode 1: “Seize power”

Lecture 4: Autocratic breakdown (JN)

* How and why autocracies break down/transform into other regimes. Both autocracy-to-autocracy transitions and democratization
* Typical processes of autocratic breakdown.
* Prominent causal explanations (selection)

Readings:

* Geddes, Barbara, et al. 2018. *How dictatorships work: Power, personalization, and collapse*. Cambridge University Press. (Chapter 8: Why Dictatorships Fall, p. 177-217) (40 pages)
* Kuran, T. 1991: “The East European Revolutions: Is It Surprising that We Were Not Surprised?” AER-P&P, pp. 121-125. (5 pages).
* O’Donnell, G. & P. Schmitter 1986. *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, pp. 15-48. (33 pages)

Total pages: 78

Further readings

* Ansell, Ben W. and David J. Samuel. 2014. *Inequality and Democratization: An Elite Competition Approach*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1, 3-5.
* Bunce, Valerie J., and Sharon L. Wolchik. "Defeating dictators: Electoral change and stability in competitive authoritarian regimes." *World politics* 62.1 (2010): 43-86.
* Djuve, Vilde Lunnan, Carl Henrik Knutsen, and Tore Wig. "Patterns of regime breakdown since the French revolution." *Comparative Political Studies* 53.6 (2020): 923-958.
* Geddes, Barbara, 2007. “What Causes Democratization?” In eds. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes. *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. 317-339.
* Kuran, Timur. 1991. “Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989.” *World Politics*, 44(1): 7-48. (41 pages)
* Mainwaring, S. & A. Pérez-Liñan 2014. *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America. Emergence, Survival and Fall*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-28; 76-91.

**Topic III: Doing Research on Autocratic Politics (1 lecture; PL)**

Lecture 5: Doing research on autocratic politics (PL)

* Data sources
* Potential measurement issues (preference falsification, falsifying of official stats, unavailability of sources, etc.)
* Ethical considerations

Readings:

* Carlitz, R. & McLellan Rachael 2020. Open Data from Authoritarian Regimes: New Opportunities, New Challenges. *Perspectives on Politics* 19(1):160-170. (11 pp).
* Martinez, Luis. 2021. How Much Should We Trust the Dictator's GDP Growth Estimates? Working paper: <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3093296> (35pp)
* Robinson, D., & Tannenberg, M. 2019) Self-censorship of regime support in authoritarian states: Evidence from list experiments in China. *Research & Politics*, 6(3), 1–9. (9 pp).
* Cantoni, D., Yang, D. Y, Yuchtman N. & Zhang, Y J. 2019. Protests as Strategic Games: Experimental Evidence from Hong Kong's Antiauthoritarian Movement. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Volume 134, Issue 2, May 2019, Pages 1021–1077. (56 pp).

Total pages: 111

**Topic IV: The bureaucracy and violence in autocracies (FH; 2 Lectures)**

Lecture 6 (FH): The Loyalty/Competence Trade-Off in Dictatorships

Readings:

* Hassan, Mai. 2020. *Regime Threats and State Solutions: Bureaucratic Loyalty and Embeddedness in Kenya*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Introduction) (27p.)
* Svolik, Milan W. 2012. *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Cambridge University Press. (Ch. 3, 53-63;78-81) (13p)
* Egorov, Georgy, and Konstantin Sonin. 2011. “Dictators and Their Viziers: Endogenizing the Loyalty–Competence Trade-Off.” *Journal of the European Economic Association* 9(5): 903–30. (27p)
* Zakharov, Alexei V. 2016. “The Loyalty-Competence Trade-Off in Dictatorships and Outside Options for Subordinates.” *The Journal of Politics* 78(2): 457–66. (19p)

Total pages: 86

Further readings

* “How to Become a Tyrant”, Netflix, 2021, Episode 2: “Crush Your Rivals”

Lecture 7 (FH): Repressive bureaucracies

Readings:

* Greitens, Sheena Chestnut. 2016. *Dictators and Their Secret Police: Coercive Institutions and State Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Ch. 2) (56 p)
* Scharpf, Adam, and Christian Gläßel. 2020. “Why Underachievers Dominate Secret Police Organizations: Evidence from Autocratic Argentina.” *American Journal of Political Science* 64(4): 791–806. (15p)
* Gregory, Paul R. 2009. *Terror by Quota: State Security from Lenin to Stalin*. New Haven: Yale University Press. (Introduction) (32p)

Total pages: 103

Further readings

* Breton, Albert, and Ronald Wintrobe. 1986. “The Bureaucracy of Murder Revisited.” *Journal of Political Economy* 94(5): 905–26. (21p)

**Topic V: Autocratic Elections (JS; 1 Lecture)**

Lecture 8 (JS)

Readings:

* Cassani, Andrea. 2017. “Do All Bad Things Go Together? Electoral Authoritarianism and the Consequences of Political Change Short of Democratisation.” *Politikon* 44(3): 351–69. (18p)
* Kim, Nam Kyu. 2020. “Reassessing the Relationship between Elections and Democratization.” *International Political Science Review* 41(3): 305–20. (15p)
* Schedler, Andreas. 2002. “Elections Without Democracy. The Menu of Manipulation.” *Journal of Democracy* 13(2): 36–50. (14p)
* Gandhi, Jennifer, and Ellen Lust-Okar. 2009. “Elections Under Authoritarianism.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 12(1): 403–22. (19p)
* Knutsen, Carl Henrik, Håvard Mokleiv Nygård, and Tore Wig. 2017. “Autocratic Elections: Stabilizing Tool or Force for Change?” *World Politics* 69(1): 98–143. (45p)

Total pages: 111

Further Readings:

* Bunce, V.J. & S.L. Wolchik. 2010. “Defeating Dictators: Electoral Change and Stability in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes.” *World Politics* 62(1): 43–86.
* van Ham, Carolien, and Brigitte Seim. 2018. “Strong States, Weak Elections? How State Capacity in Authoritarian Regimes Conditions the Democratizing Power of Elections.” *International Political Science Review* 39(1): 49–66.
* Seeberg, Merete Bech. 2018. “Electoral Authoritarianism and Economic Control.” *International Political Science Review* 39(1): 33–48.
* Morgenbesser, Lee, and Thomas B. Pepinsky. 2019. “Elections as Causes of Democratization: Southeast Asia in Comparative Perspective.” *Comparative Political Studies* 52(1): 3–35.
* Tanaka, Seiki. 2018. “Aging Gracefully? Why Old Autocrats Hold Competitive Elections.” *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 3(1): 81–102.
* Miller, Michael K. 2020. “The Strategic Origins of Electoral Authoritarianism.” *British Journal of Political Science* 50(1): 17–44.
* Howard, Marc Morjé, and Philip G. Roessler. 2006. “Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes.” *American Journal of Political Science* 50(2): 365–81.
* Donno, Daniela. 2013. “Elections and Democratization in Authoritarian Regimes.” *American Journal of Political Science* 57(3): 703–16.
* https://twitter.com/sheenagreitens/status/1416922739336749061

**Topic VI: Information Control/Autocracies in the digital age (PL; 2 Lectures)**

Lecture 9 (PL): Information Control in Autocracies

Readings:

* Guriev, S., & Treisman, D. 2019. Informational autocrats. *Journal of Economic Perspectives,* 33(4): 100–127. (28 pp)
* Rozenas, A., & Stukal, D. 2019. How autocrats manipulate economic news: Evidence from Russia’s state controlled television. *The Journal of Politics* 81: 982–996. (14 pp)
* Bush, S. S., Erlich, A., Prather, L., & Zeira, Y. 2016. The effects of authoritarian iconography: An experimental test. Comparative Political Studies, 49(13): 1704–1738 (34 pp)
* Gläßel, C., & Paula, K. 2020. Sometimes less is more: Censorship, news falsification, and disapproval in 1989 East Germany. *American Journal of Political Science*, 64(3): 682–698 (16 pp)

Total pages: 92

Further readings:

* “How to Become a Tyrant”, Netflix, 2021, Episode 4: “Control the Truth”
* Huang, H. 2015. Propaganda as signaling. *Comparative Politics* 47(4): 419–444
* Geddes, B., & Zaller, J. 1989. Sources of popular support for authoritarian regimes. *American Journal of Political Science* 33(2): 319–347

Lecture 10 (PL): Autocracies in the Digital Age

Readings:

* Roberts, Margaret E. 2020. "Resilience to online censorship." *Annual Review of Political Science* 23: 401-419. (18 pp)
* King, G., Pan, J., & Roberts, M. E. 2013. How censorship in China allows government criticism but silences collective expression. *American Political Science Review* 107(2): 326–343. (17 pp).
* Gohdes. Anita R. 2020. Repression Technology: Internet Accessibility and State Violence. *American Journal of Political Science* 64(3): 488–503 (25 pp).
* Xu, X. 2021. To repress or to co-opt? Authoritarian control in the age of digital surveillance. *American Journal of Political Science*, 65(2): 309–325. (16 pp).

Total pages: 76

Further readings:

* Stukal, Denis, Sergey Sanovich, Richard Bonneau and Joshua A Tucker. 2021. “Bots forAutocrats: How Pro-Government Bots Fight Opposition in Russia.”Working Paper
* Pan, Jennifer and Alexandra A Siegel. 2020. “How Saudi crackdowns fail to silence online dissent.”*American Political Science Review* 114(1): 109–125.
* Lutscher, Philipp M, Nils B Weidmann, Margaret E Roberts, Mattijs Jonker, Alistair King and Alberto Dainotti. 2020. At home and abroad: The use of denial-of-service attacks during elections in nondemocratic regimes. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64(2-3): 373–401.
* Golovchenko, Y., Buntain, C., Eady, G., Brown, M. A., & Tucker, J. A. 2020. Cross-platform state propaganda: Russian trolls on Twitter and YouTube during the 2016 US presidential election. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, Online First, 1–33