Government 6434: Comparative Authoritarianism

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Course Overview: Since the global wave of democratization began in the mid-1970s in Spain and Portugal, the primary “regime” focus in comparative politics has been on the rise and consolidation of democracy, rather than the origins, structure and practices of dictatorship. In recent years, however, there has been renewed interest in authoritarianism. This return to authoritarian politics as an important area of study reflects the influence of three developments—declining intellectual returns on the study of democracy and democratic transitions; the proliferation over the course of the third wave of democratization of mixed regimes that combine democratic and authoritarian features, with the latter often becoming more important over time; and resistance to the democratic “virus” by important authoritarian regimes, including China, along with virtually all of the regimes that are located in the Middle East. Also influential has been recognition of a core bias built into many studies of democratization; that is, the assumption that the future of all regimes is democracy, not dictatorship.

The purpose of this course is to discuss both the recent and (to a lesser extent) the older literature on authoritarianism and to analyze in the process the origins, structure, and practices of contemporary authoritarian regimes throughout the world, along with some earlier examples of authoritarian polities, such as communist regimes, that have largely passed from the political scene. In selecting the readings for this course, we have been guided by three goals. One was selecting readings that highlight different methodological approaches in political science. Another was maximizing the range of regimes analyzed. Finally, we wanted to focus on core issues that are central to the analysis of all regimes, whether democratic or authoritarian—for example, institutional design; competing arguments about regime origins; the relationship between the state and the economy, the state and the international system, and the regime and the society; the management of both competition for power and leadership succession; and issues of both regime legitimacy and accountability.
Course Format: This is a seminar, which means that our goal is to use each session to integrate and critique the assigned readings, as well as identify areas ripe for new research. Each week two students will circulate to their colleagues before the class meets (Sunday morning at the latest) a short and critical assessment of the readings (approximately three to four pages in length), with the assessment highlighting key methodological and substantive issues posed by the readings (rather than, say, a simple summary of each reading). The assumption in this exercise is that the two discussion leaders will collaborate on producing a single written document that will also serve as the foundation for our in-class discussion. Patel and Bunce will open the class with some comments and then turn to the two discussants of the week to lead us through the issues posed by the readings. While “knowing” the literature is an important component of this process, so is identifying the limits of that literature and neglected areas of study.

Evaluation: In addition to taking turns writing and circulating summaries, as well as running the discussion, members of the seminar are expected to write either a research paper (approximately 20 to 25 pages in length) or a research design (15 pages). We urge you to begin discussing your ideas with us as soon as possible and to avoid taking an incomplete.

Readings: Most of the readings are available on Blackboard. However, you will also be expected to read several books for this course. They are available for purchase in the Cornell Bookstore and on-line. They are also on reserve in Olin Library Room 405.

January 19 – Introduction


January 26 – Origins of authoritarianism


February 2 – Kinds of authoritarianism


**Recommended:** Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Alastair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson and James D. Morrow, *The Logic of Political Survival*

**February 9 – Institutions and Authoritarianism**


Barbara Geddes, “Party Creation as an Autocratic Survival Strategy.”
http://www.princeton.edu/~piirs/Dictatorships042508/


February 16 – Building Authoritarianism


February 23 – The Politics of Maintaining and Transferring Power


March 2: Authoritarianism, Culture and Societal Organization


March 9 – Opposition Politics and Civil Society


Jason Brownlee, “Credible Commitments and the Perils of Moderation: Why the Egyptian Opposition is met by Repression.”

Jennifer Gandhi, “Coordination among Opposition Parties in Authoritarian Elections.”


March 16 – Spring Break
March 23 – Protests and Policing


March 30 – Voting for authoritarians

Beatriz Magaloni, Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico, Cambridge University Press,


Amber Seligson and Joshua Tucker, “Feeding the Hand that Bit You: Voting for Ex-Authoritarian Rulers in Bolivia and Russia.”

April 6 – Elections in authoritarian regimes


Ellen Lust-Okar. TBD


April 13 – Domestic and International Political Economy of Authoritarianism


Michael Ross, “Oil, Islam and Women,” American Political Science Review, 102, no. 1 (February 2008). (and review the Fish article assigned earlier)


**April 20 – Breakdown**


April 27 – International Politics of Authoritarianism

Chapter 2, pp. 24-42

Chapter 2, pp. 19-52

