PBPL 28765, PLSC 28765/38765
The Politics of Authoritarian Regimes
Winter 2022

Instructors: Professor Scott Gehlbach, gehlbach@uchicago.edu; Professor Zhaotian Luo, luozhaotian@uchicago.edu
Class time and location: Monday/Wednesday, 1:30–2:50, Keller 0023
Office hours: Gehlbach: Reserve at https://calendly.com/gehlbach/office-hours; Luo: Monday 3:10–5:10

Course description

This course provides an overview of topics related to politics in authoritarian regimes. We begin by introducing the concept of authoritarianism: how it differs from democracy and how authoritarian regimes differ from each other. We then investigate the tools authoritarian rulers employ to maintain power, including institutions, policies, and tactics, and we examine the effects and side effects of these tools. Finally, we study transitions of power and of institutions, both on the way out of authoritarianism (democratization) and on the way in (democratic backsliding). Students who take this course will acquire a broad understanding of authoritarian politics and how it is covered in the literature. Prior recommended coursework: one quarter of statistics (Stats 220 or equivalent) and concurrent or prior training in game theory (PBPL 222, Social Science Inquiry core, or equivalent).

Grading

The final grade will be based on the following weighting of course requirements:

- (10 percent) Class participation
- (50 percent) Response papers
- (40 percent) Final exam

The participation grade will be based on attendance and contributions to the class discussion. If for some reason you are unable to attend class, please let us know in advance. Unexplained absences from class will negatively affect your participation grade.

You will write two response memos, which are weighted equally in the final grade. Each response memo should discuss, in 4–5 pages, double-spaced, one day's required (and perhaps recommended) readings. One of the two should additionally discuss a film, drawn from a list that we will provide, related to the course material. You will present one of the two memos to the class. We will assign memo and presentation dates early in the quarter. Response papers should be submitted through Canvas. Unless cleared with us in advance, late assignments will negatively affect your course grade.