

POLS 5370: Authoritarian Politics

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Office Hours: By appointment

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Class Hours: Th 6-8:50pm

Classroom: Benedict 205

Course Description

What are authoritarian institutions? How do they differ from democratic ones? How do authoritarian leaders stay in power? Do authoritarian institutions have inherent advantages at governing? What causes transitions from, and slips into, authoritarianism? In this graduate seminar, you shall explore these questions through knowing the literature and writing book reviews.

Required Texts

- Daron Acemoglu and James A Robinson. *The Narrow Corridor: States, Societies, and the Fate of Liberty: Winners of the 2024 Nobel Prize in Economics*. Penguin Publishing Group, 2019
- Hannah Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Mariner Books Classics, 2024
- Ian Kershaw. *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2015
- Wenfang Tang. *Populist authoritarianism: Chinese political culture and regime sustainability*. Oxford University Press, 2016
- Adam Przeworski. *Crises of democracy*. Cambridge University Press, 2019

We will read the five books in their entirety, so you need to obtain their full texts. I will provide other readings on Blackboard.

Other readings are available through Blackboard.

Course Objectives

Successful students will be able to:

1. understand the nature of authoritarian institutions.
2. identify the features of different authoritarian institutions and analyze their different consequences.
3. get familiar with the major theories and methods of studying authoritarian institutions.

Course Requirements

1. Reading Assignments and Class Participation

Graduate seminars are different from undergraduate lectures. In a graduate seminar, you are expected to be more active both before and during class. This means that you should complete and comprehend the readings before class, and that during class, you should ask thoughtful questions, provide intelligent answers, and make informed comments. I will evaluate your participation by both its quantity and quality. Because participation is impossible if you miss a class, you will lose 25 percent of the participation grade for each unjustified absence.

2. Blackboard Discussion Questions

You are required to post **at least two** discussion questions on Blackboard by **every Wednesday**. Questions should focus on concepts, theories, methods, data, or other key questions in the literature. Questions comparing or connecting different readings are encouraged. The quality, quantity, and punctuality of your posts will be graded. You are encouraged to respond to posted questions prior to the class meeting. **You should review posted questions and comments before class.**

3. In-class discussion Leader

There will be at least one discussion leader for each class. You will choose when to be a discussion leader in the first class meeting. Your role as a discussion leader will be graded. Discussion leaders must send me their outlines at least one day before the class. You will sign up for being a discussion leader in the first class.

4. Book Reviews

You shall write four book reviews for the first four monographs assigned for this class. Each review is due on Blackboard at midnight of the class day when finish covering the

book. For example, we will finish discussing the Arendt book on March 6, 2025. Your book review for that book is due at 11:59 pm on March 6, 2025.

Your reviews should model after those published in academic journals, not those on Amazon or Good Reads. I will post sample reviews of this kind. Academic book reviews are scholars' critical evaluation of peer works. They focus on strength of the arguments, the novelty of theories, the quality of empirical support, and the overall advancement to the field. Such reviews demonstrate the reviewers' expert knowledge and intellectual rigor.

The reviews should be between **800 to 1,200** words, typed using Times New Roman 12 pt. font size, double-spaced, pagged with one inch margins in all four sides, and all references must be appropriately cited.

5. Final Exam

There will be a final exam consisting of several essay questions in the style of doctoral comprehensive exams. The exam will be online, open-book, and meant to test the width and depth of your grasp of class materials. Set apart a 3-hour time window for completing the exam. Because all the students will simultaneously take the exam, I will pick a time frame that works for everyone.

Grading Policy

Your final grades will be determined as follows:

- **10%**: Reading and in-class participation
- **10%**: Blackboard discussion questions
- **10%**: In-class discussion leader
- **40%**: Book reviews
- **30%**: Final exam

Your letter grade will be assigned as follows:

| Letter Grade | |
|--------------|---|
| [90, 100] | A |
| [80, 90) | B |
| [70, 80) | C |
| [60, 70) | D |
| [0, 70) | F |

Course Policies

Electronic Devices

Computers and tablets are allowed only for class-related activities such as taking notes or accessing readings. Phones are prohibited for the good of your mind and eye.

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty is prohibited and is considered a violation of the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures. It includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, and collusion. Cheating may involve copying from or providing information to another student, possessing unauthorized materials during a test, or falsifying research data on laboratory reports. Plagiarism occurs when someone intentionally or knowingly represents the words or ideas of another person's as one's own. And, collusion involves collaborating with another person to commit any academically dishonest act. Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a UTEP student is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Violations will be taken seriously and will be referred to the Office of Community Standards for possible disciplinary action. Students may be suspended or expelled from UTEP for such actions. Refer to <https://www.utep.edu/hoop/section-2/student-conduct-and-discipline.html> for further information.

Accommodations for Disabilities

Accommodations will be made for students with disabilities. Please discuss with me in person as soon as possible about any needs you might have. Or you may contact the Center for Accommodations and Support Services (phone: 5148, Email: cass@utep.edu) at 302 Union East within the first two weeks of classes.

Course Schedule

Week 1, 1/23: Course overview

Week 2, 1/30: Varieties of Autocracy

- Jennifer Gandhi. Political institutions under dictatorship. 2008, Ch 1.
- Barbara Geddes. What do we know about democratization after twenty years? *Annual review of political science*, 2(1):115–144, 1999

Week 3, 2/6: Nature of Authoritarian Politics

- Bruce Bueno De Mesquita, Alastair Smith, Randolph M Siverson, and James D Morrow. *The logic of political survival*. MIT press, 2005, Ch 1.
- Milan W. Svobik. *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012, Chs 1 and 2.

Week 4, 2/13: Origins of Autocracy I

- Acemoglu and Robinson 2019, Chs. 1-8.

Week 5, 2/20: Origins of Autocracy II

- Acemoglu and Robinson 2019, Chs. 9-15.

Week 6, 2/27: Totalitarianism I

- Arendt 2024, Chs. 1-9.

Week 7, 3/6: Totalitarianism II

- Arendt 2024, Chs. 10-13.

Week 8, 3/13: Spring break, no class

Week 9: 3/20. Case study: Nazi Germany I

- Kershaw 2015, Chs. 1-5.

Week 10, 3/27: Case study: Nazi Germany II

- Kershaw 2015, Chs. 6-10.

Week 11, 4/3: MPSA, no class

Week 12, 4/10: Case study: China I

- Tang 2016, Chs. 1-5.

Week 13, 4/17: Case study: China II

- Tang 2016, Chs. 6-9.

Week 14, 4/24: Democratic Backsliding I

- Przeworski 2019, Chs 1-6.

Week 15, 5/1: Democratic Backsliding II

- Przeworski 2019, Chs 7-11.

Week 16, 5/8: Final Exam

- On Blackboard, time to be announced