GOVT 631 002: Comparative Authoritarianism (November 6, 2019 Draft)
George Mason University

Spring 2020 Semester
Wednesdays, 4:30 – 7:10 pm, Robinson Hall B228

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Phone: 703.993.2960

Office Hours: TBA

Course Description:
There was a time when graduate students would be hard-pressed to find a seminar on comparative authoritarianism. We were living in the “end of history.” The Cold War was over. The West was triumphant. All that was left was for countries—post-communist states as well as co-travelers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America—to transition to democracy. Many states have not transitioned, however, to democracy. And in the West illiberal ideologies are gaining support. In this seminar we study the resurgence of authoritarianism, the regime type which defines the daily lives of the majority of the world’s population.

Course Objectives:
By the close of this course you will be able to:

• Summarize and evaluate the research questions and causalities of 20+ seminal articles and books in the comparative authoritarian field
• Identify and differentiate different forms of authoritarian rule
• Assess the roles parties, militaries, elections, political communication, identity politics, economic resources, and generational change play in perpetuating autocratic rule
• Contrast qualitative, quantitative, and game theoretic approaches to the study of authoritarianism
• Apply the authoritarianism literature to conduct of original research on contemporary case(s) of authoritarianism
• Present research findings in a 15-minute conference-style research presentation

Course Readings:
1. Articles are available through George Mason University library’s e-journals.
2. Students are encouraged to secure copies—electronic or printed—the following books:
   • Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War. Cambridge University Press, 2010. (Electronic version available through GMU library)
Course Requirements:
1. This is a participant-driven, discussion-based seminar. Students should arrive to class prepared to address weekly discussion questions.
2. Students are expected to have completed the assigned readings prior to class. Students will be well served to arrive for class with printed or written notes and prepared questions for the week’s readings.
3. Students will complete one mid-term exam.
4. Students are required to write a final research paper. Please note the paper requirements vary according to degree program:
   - Masters students are required to complete a 15-page research paper. Masters students may structure their paper around syntheses of existing scholarly research.
   - PhD students are required to complete a 20-page research paper. PhD students must include qualitative analyses of primary sources and/or statistical analyses of quantitative data in their research papers. We will discuss this paper in greater detail in class. Students should note the following deadlines for research and writing:
4. All students are required to write 2 précis of a minimum of 1,500 words each.
   - Précis should critically analyze and synthesize the week’s readings.
   - Précis should contextualize the week’s readings within the broader comparative politics literature.
   - Précis should pay particular attention to:
     i. The authors’ central arguments—what are the questions, outcomes or puzzles the authors are directly or indirectly addressing?
     ii. What variables do the authors cite as the cause behind the outcome(s) under investigation?
     iii. What empirical evidence do the authors provide to support their arguments?
     iv. How do the articles/books relate to the literature more broadly?
     v. What are some of the potential shortcomings of the authors’ arguments?
   - Précis are to be submitted through the Blackboard by 11:59pm, the day before seminar.
   - Students are required to submit one précis before the midterm and one following the midterm
   - Students are strongly encouraged to attend office hours to discuss individual précis.
6. Students will co-lead—with the instructor—two seminars, one for each week in which a précis is written. Co-leaders will post 5 discussion questions to Blackboard 24 hours prior to the seminar they are assigned to lead. These questions should complement, not replicate the précis questions outlined above.
7. Students will record and upload to Blackboard a 15-minute conference-style research presentation that summarizes the central finding of their final research paper. Research presentations will be reviewed in small groups during the Week 15 session of the class.

**Make-up exams and paper extensions will be given only if students have proper documentation. In place of email, please see me during office hours to discuss missed/late work.

**This syllabus may change as the semester progresses.

Mason EMAIL
- Mason requires that Mason email be used for all courses. I will be sending messages to your Mason email and you are responsible for making sure you have access to these messages.
- You are required to check your Mason email account regularly and to keep your mailbox maintained so that messages are not rejected for being over quota.
- When you email me, be sure to include GOVT 731 at the beginning of the subject heading.
Course Logistics
This course will meet in seminar as well as use Blackboard to facilitate discussions outside of our weekly meetings. In a typical week:

- you will read about 200 pages and discuss the material with your classmates
- work on assignments to be submitted to Blackboard

To Access Blackboard
2. Login using your NETID and password.
3. Click on the ‘Courses’ tab.
4. Double-click on GOVT-731 (Fall 2016) under the course listings.

Technical Help
- If you have difficulty with accessing Blackboard, please contact the ITU Support Center at 703.993.8870 or support@gmu.edu.
- If you have trouble with using the features in Blackboard, email courses@gmu.edu.

Student Responsibilities

Honor Code: Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code. The George Mason University Honor Code states: “Cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing of academic work and related materials constitute Honor Code violations. To maintain an academic community according to these standards, students and faculty members must report all alleged violations to the Honor Committee.” Students are encouraged to read the full Honor Code: http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/ and to remain vigilant against any violation of the Code in their own work. Any cases of academic dishonesty in this course will be pursued according to the guidelines detailed in the University Catalog.

Time Conflict: George Mason University is committed to creating a welcoming, respectful and inclusive educational environment that values diversity. Students should review the syllabus at the beginning of the term to determine if there are any conflicts between class time and religious observance. It is the student’s responsibility to inform the instructor of these conflicts within the first week of the semester. [See: http://ulife.gmu.edu/calendar/religious-holiday-calendar/].

Student Services

Writing Center
The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides resources and services—tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks—to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing. [See http://writingcenter.gmu.edu].

Counseling and Psychological Services
The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services—individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs—to enhance students’ personal experience and academic performance [See http://caps.gmu.edu].
**Special Needs:**
Please address any special needs or special accommodations with me at the beginning of the semester or as soon as you become aware of your needs. Those seeking accommodations based on disabilities should contact the Disability Resource Center (703) 993-2474, or the Equity Office (703) 993-8730.

**Enrollment:**
Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Registrar calendar: [http://registrar.gmu.edu/calendars/index.html](http://registrar.gmu.edu/calendars/index.html)

**Grading**

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<td>Seminar Discussion</td>
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<td>Mid-term</td>
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<td>Written Précis</td>
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**Grading Scale:**

- **A+:** 490-500
- **A:** 460-489
- **A-:** 450-459
- **B+:** 440-449
- **B:** 410-439
- **B-:** 400-409
- **C+:** 390-399
- **C:** 360-389
- **C-:** 350-359
- **D+:** 340-349
- **D:** 310-339
- **D-:** 300-309
- **F:** 299 and below

**Seminar Schedule**

**Week 1—Introductions and Conceptualizations**

**Week 2—Foundational Readings**

**Week 3—Modeling Authoritarianism Rule**

**Week 4—Militaries**

**Week 5—Warlords**

**Week 6—International Dimensions of Authoritarian Rule**

**Week 7—Parties**
• Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge University Press, 2010. Select one of the three case studies from Part III and Conclusion.

**Week 8—Midterm**

**Week 9—Elections and Social Mobilization**

**Week 10—Identity Politics**

**Week 11—The Resource Curse**

**Week 12—Generational Change**

**Week 13—Information Communication (Technologies)**
**Week 14—Regime Cycles**


**Week 15—Research Presentations**