

POU33201 — Authoritarianism

Module Information	
Module Code	POU33201
Module Title	Authoritarianism
Department	Political Science
Year Group	Junior Sophister
Module Personnel	Dr Noah Buckley (buckleno@tcd.ie)
Academic Year	2026–27
Credit Weighting	5 credits
Semester	Semester 1
Contact Hours	

Module Content	
Module Description	Why do some rulers govern without meaningful elections, free media, or the rule of law — and why are so many of them so durable? This module introduces students to the comparative politics of authoritarian regimes: how dictatorships are organised, how they survive, and how they fall. Much as democracies come in many forms, so too do non-democracies. We examine the major “varieties” of authoritarian rule — personalist, single-party, military, monarchical, and hybrid or “electoral authoritarian” regimes — and the core strategies autocrats use to stay in power, including co-optation, repression, propaganda and information control, elections without democracy, and the management of rival elites. We pair classic and cutting-edge political science research with contemporary cases from Russia, China, the Middle East, Latin America, Africa, and beyond, and ask what the global resurgence of authoritarianism means for the future of democracy.
Module Learning Aims	This module aims to build students’ understanding of how authoritarian regimes are structured, how authoritarian leaders acquire and hold power, and why some autocracies endure while others collapse or democratise. It introduces

Module Content

	students to the central concepts, debates, and empirical research in the comparative study of non-democratic politics and equips them to analyse contemporary authoritarian regimes critically.
Learning Outcomes	On successful completion of this module, students should be able to: • Distinguish between the major types of authoritarian regime and explain how they differ in their institutions and survival strategies • Explain the central dilemmas autocrats face — the problems of power-sharing and of control — and the tools they use to manage them • Evaluate competing theories of authoritarian durability, repression, co-optation, and regime breakdown • Assess how elections, parties, propaganda, and information operate under authoritarian conditions • Apply concepts and research from comparative politics to analyse contemporary authoritarian regimes and the global state of democracy
Indicative Reading / Resources	Indicative texts (full weekly readings provided via Blackboard): • Svobik, Milan. 2012. <i>The Politics of Authoritarian Rule</i>. Cambridge University Press. • Geddes, Barbara, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz. 2018. <i>How Dictatorships Work</i>. Cambridge University Press. • Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan Way. 2010. <i>Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War</i>. Cambridge University Press. • Gandhi, Jennifer. 2008. <i>Political Institutions under Dictatorship</i>. Cambridge University Press. • Guriev, Sergei, and Daniel Treisman. 2022. <i>Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century</i>. Princeton University Press.

Assessment

Assessment Components	Small written assignments 10%; mid-term essay 30%; final exam 60%.
Assessment Details	• Continuous assessment through short response papers (10%).

Assessment

- One mid-term essay (30%).
- One end-of-term examination (60%).
- Each essay responds to a set question and draws on the academic literature; full essay questions and guidance are provided in class and on Blackboard.

Additional Information

Prerequisites

None

Co-requisites

None

Any other information

New module for 2026–27. Module content, readings, and assessment details are indicative and subject to confirmation before the module begins.