

ECURE

EXPANDING COURSE-BASED
UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH
EXPERIENCES PROJECT

Instructor Name: Jami Nunez

Department: Political Science

Course: POLS 2110, Introduction to Comparative Politics

ECURE Engagement Level: PREP

PREP Activity: In the course section on democratic decline and authoritarianism, I have students work in teams to explore what it's like to write political behavior survey questions. We explore the hypothesis that democracies fail or erode because of public attitudes and beliefs. I ask them to develop a question and response options that would help us to identify antidemocratic/authoritarian attitudes. Then, while they are watching a short film, I enter their group question into a survey (in which I have already added measures that have been used by scholars). Then I ask students to take the survey answering questions honestly. We then engage in discussion about 1) what makes a good survey question and 2) what are the challenges with measuring antidemocratic attitudes. Students then write a short paper on what they believe is the best survey measure and why.

PREP Activity: In discussing state violence, I have groups talk about ways they would code for instances of state violence. And then I talk about targeting groups for expulsion and have them try to write rules for coding such events. I then introduce them to a young scholar's work on this, showing how she made her decisions and the descriptive data she generated on it. I also show a slide where I include her questions to an email about why she wanted to be a political scientist, how she got there and what she likes about her work.

PREP Activity: To explore game theory and authoritarian regimes, I have students do a simulation of an authoritarian regime using a deck of cards. After sorting students into royalty/rulers, elites and common people, I have a giant bag of candy (1 for each student). Then they go through a set of decisions about distributing the candy. Rulers make the first decision on what to keep and what to give elites. Elites can reject the offer (a coup) or accept it. Then elites must decide what to keep and what to give common people. The common people can revolt or accept the offer. Any rejection causes candy loss. We then talk about whether decisions were "rational" and how well the activity might reflect real authoritarian regimes.

Additional Information: Students really liked getting to meet scholars or hearing about them. They loved activities, like simulations the best and always ask for more. If people are implementing preps, I would advise them that less is usually more.

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