

IR 455: The Political Economy of Autocracy

Fall 2022

Instructor: Dr. Victoria Chonn-Ching

E-mail: chonnchi@usc.edu

Office location: Crow (previously CPA) 354

Class sessions: Mondays and Wednesdays, 3:30 – 4:50 p.m.

Class location: Crow (previously CPA) 255

Office hours: Tuesdays (2:30-4:00pm) and Wednesdays (12:00-1:30pm), or by appointment

Link for appointment: <https://victoriaccusc.youcanbook.me>



READ THIS FIRST

Welcome to International Relations 455: The Political Economy of Autocracy. This syllabus is long, it will serve as a **guide for this course**, as it contains information about the reading materials, instructions for assignments, the midterm, and the final paper, the grading scale and rubric, as well as the schedule we will follow unless indicated otherwise. It is your *Instruction Manual for IR 455*.

As a 400-level class, this course is reading intensive. Some readings may include statistical techniques, but students are not required to have previous statistical knowledge to enroll or do well in class. The goal is to be familiar with qualitative and quantitative approaches to social science and the study of autocracies. As such, students are expected to be familiar with the readings' main arguments for each respective day. All materials are posted on Blackboard unless indicated otherwise.

CHANGES TO THE SYLLABUS

This syllabus is subject to change based on the needs of the class and at the instructor's discretion. I will communicate any modifications and adjustments in a timely manner.

COURSE CONTENT

You can click on each link to go to a specific section:

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COURSE OVERVIEW

Despite the global expansion of democracy since the 1990s, many countries have maintained some variety of authoritarian rule. This seminar surveys major topics in the political economy of autocracy. It focuses on a central question: **How do autocratic governments retain power?** As such, the course examines the **social and economic origins of autocracy**, its implications for economic and international policy, and other topics. The course draws from a range of disciplines—primarily political science, economics, and history, but others too.

The course is *reading intensive*, and some of them use statistical techniques to test and analyze possible answers to substantively important questions. However, students are not required to have advanced statistical training to enroll or do well in this course. *One main goal is to learn about various forms of autocracies—their origin, how this type of regime is maintained, or in which instances democratic processes are possible.* As such, students are expected to read the material and come to class ready to examine and discuss the different frameworks that are presented to better understand autocratic regimes.

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

OBJECTIVES	ASSESSMENT
Identify, understand, and critically examine the main frameworks to study autocratic regimes and governments.	Weekly in-class participation, students' reading responses, and midterm.
Describe and contrast the characteristics of different autocratic regimes.	
Understand and evaluate the factors and processes associated with autocracy, its survival, and democratic backsliding.	

Examine the main issues and concerns associated with autocratic governments, including repression, political oppression, government legitimatization, and autocratic endurance.	Students' reading responses, midterm, and final paper.
Analyze how international structures can shape and affect autocratic institutions and their survival.	

CLASS REQUIREMENTS

This course requires one book, which is available online the USC Library. If you prefer a physical copy, you can also buy it online or at the USC Bookstore.

- Svobik, Milan. *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
****This is a book with many game-theory models (aka: algebraic operations and proofs). Do not feel intimidated by them. Focus on the logic and reasoning behind each argument. This means that, as you read the book, you can skim/skip the operations, but make sure to pay attention to what the author is arguing, what factors he is using and testing to explain his arguments, and what examples are used to complement the operations.*

All other materials are available online and/or via Blackboard in the folder "Readings."

Class components:

Class participation	15%
Critical reading responses (3)	15%
In-class group exercises (3)	15%
Midterm exam	25%
Final paper	30%

1. Class participation – 15%

Students are expected to read each week's assigned materials and contribute to class discussions. This is a small seminar, so it is essential for students to participate in class to make it as interactive as possible. As your instructor, I'm not seeking for perfection, but students' willingness to learn, listen, and grow as professionals and individuals. We all come from different backgrounds and embody many distinct stories, so be respectful at all instances.

Attendance is not mandatory, but if students miss class too often without prior and/or proper justification according to USC policies, their participation grade will be affected. If students miss more than 30% of classes throughout the semester, the maximum grade that can be obtained for this part of the class will be a C.

2. Critical reading responses – 15%

Students are expected to write three (3) critical reading responses due on **9/14, 10/26, and 11/9 by 12:00 p.m. (noon)** via Blackboard. Each response should be 1.5-2 pages (max) in length, 12-point font, and 1.5-spaced. They should examine two themes that were covered in class and provide a critical analysis and discussion of a minimum of one reading for each theme. If students provide only summaries of the readings, they will receive no more than 50% of the grade. Responses will be graded based on the following rubric:

Points	Description
0-1	No response provided or it is clear student did not fully read the texts.
2-2.5	Response mostly offers summaries of the texts.
3-3.5	Response provides some analysis but it's mostly descriptive.
4-4.5	Response provides some analysis of the texts but mostly relies on material mentioned during lectures and class discussions.
5	Response provides a critical assessment of the texts, compares arguments, and offer their own input regarding the strengths and weaknesses, validity ¹ and applicability of the content discussed.

3. In-class group exercises – 15%

Students will work in groups to discuss and respond a list of questions about that will be presented at the end of class. These group exercises will take place on **9/7, 10/19, and 11/16**.

4. Midterm – 25%

The midterm will be a take-home test in which students will be given show-answer and long-answer (essay) questions. The midterm will be take-home and **due on 10/5 by 11:59 p.m. via Blackboard**.

5. Final paper – 30%

The final paper must be related to at least one of the themes discussed during class, and it will be **due on 12/2 by 11:59 p.m.**

To help students develop this research paper, the following pieces must be submitted:

- A 1-1.5 pages outline describing the paper's main question/topic and main arguments (which should also respond to the main question asked), **due on 10/31** via Blackboard by 11:59 p.m.
- A detailed outline mentioning at least two (2) academic sources they will be using for their papers. This detailed outline will be **due on 11/14** via Blackboard by 11:59 p.m.

¹ This will be furthered discussed in class, but when referring to validity in social science research, it refers to how accurately a concept/topic is measured and/or researched. For example, when an author talks about autocracy, does the concept and measurements they use really measure autocracy or something else? Are there arguments about autocracy or some related theme?

Each of these parts will not be graded, but I will provide feedback. In addition, each submission will count toward the final grade of the paper. Failure to submit them will cause a 10% deduction of the final paper's grade.

Final paper format:

- 8-10 pages, excluding bibliography
- 12-point font (i.e., Times New Roman, Calibri, or Cambria)
- 1-inch margins
- Double-spaced
- APA or MLA style citations. No footnote citations.

GRADING SCALE

The grading scale for this class is as follow:

A	95-100	C	73-76
A-	90-94	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	83-86	D	63-66
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	77-79	F	59 and below

CLASS POLICIES

MAKE-UP REQUIREMENTS

There will be no make-up assignments and tests for unexcused absences. Acceptable excuses, which include medical, family, or other emergencies and official university-related business, must be provided to me in writing in advance to be considered. Students who are unable to complete a requirement for legitimate reasons that do not qualify as excused under university guidelines, and who provide notification may, at my discretion, complete a requirement belatedly. Any requirement turned in on after the deadline will incur a 10% penalty. Each additional late day will mean an additional 5% deduction.

GRADE DISPUTES

You may contest the grade on an exam and/or assignment due to clerical error up to one week after it is returned. Students will need to submit a written description of the error they believe occurred along with the exam to me. Clerical mistakes will be corrected, and the corresponding partial credit will be provided. Please keep in mind that re-grading the exam does not guarantee the grade to go up.

E-MAIL POLICY

When writing emails, students are expected to send respectful and complete messages. I will address you with courtesy and respect, so students should write back in a similar fashion. I will try to reply to students' messages in a timely manner. Please allow a **wait-period of 48 hours**

after you send a message for me to email back. I will try my best to respond as soon as I see your messages.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

ACADEMIC CONDUCT

Plagiarism or presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words, is a serious academic offense with consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* (<https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions>). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information about university policies on scientific misconduct on <https://policy.usc.edu/research-and-scholarship-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* (<http://equity.usc.edu>) or to the *Department of Public Safety* (<https://dps.usc.edu/>). This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community—such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member—can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (<https://sites.google.com/usc.edu/rsvpclientservices/home>) provides confidential support and other resources.

COVID-19 POLICY

Students are expected to comply with all aspects of USC's COVID-19 policy. Failure to do so may result in removal from the class and referral to Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards. This means that students must follow the university's mandates at all times, regardless of vaccination status.

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Every student in this course, regardless of background, sex, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, political affiliation, physical or mental ability or any identity category, is a valued and equal member of the class. We all bring different experiences and perspectives to USC, and it is those experiences and perspectives that will enrich the course content. My intent as an instructor is to provide an inclusive learning environment where individual differences are respected, appreciated, and recognized as a source of strength.

For additional information and resources, I encourage you to visit Dornsife's Office of Diversity (<https://dornsife.usc.edu/dei/>) and/or USC's Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (<https://diversity.usc.edu/resources/>).

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

Many USC schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Some helpful centers and institutes are:

- The American Language Institute (<https://ali.usc.edu/>), which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for students whose native language is not English and may need support.
- The Office of Disability Services and Programs (<https://osas.usc.edu/>), which provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. The student is responsible for submitting the necessary certification forms to the professor during the first two weeks of class.
- If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information (<http://emergency.usc.edu>) will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Introduction and Defining Autocracy and Autocratic Institutions

During this week, we will learn different frameworks to understand dictatorships and authoritarian regimes, as well as the institutional structures that can influence the survival of autocratic leaders. Students are expected to examine these frameworks and structures and formulate their conclusions about how we can define autocratic regimes and governments.

Aug 22: Introduction

- No readings. We will go over the syllabus, class requirements, and some material on how to read and examine academic journals and manuscripts.

Aug 24: What is autocracy?

- Svoboda, chapters 1 and 2
- Munck, Gerardo (2006). "Drawing Boundaries: How to Craft Intermediate Regime Categories," in *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, pp. 27-40.

Aug 29: Autocratic institutions

- Svoboda, chapter 4
- Brancati, Dawn (2014). "Democratic Authoritarianism," *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 17, pp. 313-326.
- Gandhi, Jennifer and Adam Przeworski (2007). "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats." *Comparative Political Studies* 40(11), pp. 1279-1301.

Types of Autocratic Rule, Single Parties, Hybrid Regimes, and Electoral Authoritarianism

Autocratic regimes come in many ways and forms. Some of them may have and implement institutions and processes usually associated with democracies. This portion of class will explore different types of autocratic rule, including personal dictatorships, single party regimes, hybrid

regimes, and what some scholars have considered as democratic (and/or electoral) authoritarianism.

Aug 31: The Path to Personal Dictatorships

- Svoboda, chapter 3
- Hale, Henry. 2010. "Eurasian Polities as Hybrid Regimes: The Case of Putin's Russia," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 1(1), pp. 33-41.
- Shirk, Susan. "China in Xi's New Era": The Return to Personalistic Rule," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2018, pp. 22-36.

Sep 5: Labor Day – No class

Sep 7: Single-Party and Military Rule (In-class group exercise)

- Svoboda, chapter 5.
- Greene K. (2010). "The Political Economy of Authoritarian Single-Party Dominance," *Comparative Political Studies*, 43(7), pp. 807-834.

Sep 12: Unfree Competition

- Schedler, Andreas (2006). "The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism," in *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, pp. 1-23.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way (2002). "Elections Without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2), pp. 51-65.

Sep 14: Electoral Manipulation (Reading response due by 12:00pm via Blackboard)

- Magaloni, Beatriz (2010.) "The Game of Electoral Fraud and the Ousting of Authoritarian Rule." *American Journal of Political Science*, 54 (3), pp. 751–765.
- Hartlyn, Jonathan and Jennifer McCoy (2006). "Observer Paradoxes: How to Assess Electoral Manipulation," in *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, pp. 41-56.

Sep 19: No class—I'll be at the American Political Science Association (APSA) annual conference

Co-optation and Authoritarian Power Sharing, Leadership and Regime Succession

Autocrats need support to stay in power. We will examine some of the mechanisms autocratic leaders use to gain and stay in power, and we will discuss authoritarian resilience and succession. How do autocrats choose (if at all) their successors?

Sep 21: Sharing Power in Autocracies

- Svoboda, chapter 6
- Jones, Calvert (2019). "Adviser to The King: Experts, Rationalization, and Legitimacy," *World Politics* 71(1), pp. 1-43.

Optional:

- Way, Lucan (2006). "Authoritarian Failure: How Does State Weakness Strengthen Electoral Competition?" in *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, pp. 167-180.

Sep 26: Leader Succession in Autocracies

- Meng, Anne (2020). "Winning the Game of Thrones: Leadership Succession in Modern Autocracies." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, pp. 950-981.
- Nathan A.J. (2003). "Authoritarian Resilience: China's Changing of the Guard," *Journal of Democracy*, 14(1), pp. 6-17.

Protests, Revolutions, and Democratization

We will explore the dynamics of resistance: How citizens defeat repressive governments? What tactics are used and how have they changed over time? How do frustrated citizens choose between violent and nonviolent resistance?

Sep 28: Protesting for Democracy

- Gause, F. G. (2011), "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, pp. 81-90.
- Kuran, T. (1991), "Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989," *World Politics* 44(1), pp. 7-48.

Oct 3: The Path to Democracy?

- Christensen, Darin and Francisco Garfias (2018). "Can You Hear Me Now? How Communication Technology Affects Protest and Repression," *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 13, pp. 89-117.
- Munck, Gerardo and Juan Pablo Luna (2022). *Latin American Politics and Society: A Comparative and Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), chapter 3. The book can be accessed via the USC Library.

Oct 5: Midterm. Due by 11:59 p.m. via Blackboard.

Economic Origins of Democracy (and Autocracy)

How is economic growth and income inequality related to the creation and consolidation of democratic regimes? Students will be expected to critique the empirical evidence presented in the book, both for the quality of the data collection and for the credibility of the analyses.

Oct 10: Economic Origins of Democracy I

- Acemoglu, Daron and James Robinson (2005). *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.), chapters 1, 2, and 3.
- Olson, Mancur (1993), "Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development", *American Political Science Review* 87(3), pp. 567-576.

Oct 12: Economic Origins of Democracy II

- Acemoglu and Robinson, *Economic Origins*, chapters 6, 8, 9.

Repression and Oppression

This time, our reading material will consist of a memoir about reconnection, oppression, and restoration as a country falls apart. In what ways does repression travel?

Oct 17: Mobilizing the Masses

- Malek, Alia (2017). *The Home That Was Our Country: A Memoir of Syria*. Nation Books, parts 1 and 2.

Optional:

- Shadmehr, Mehdi (2014). "Mobilization, Repression, and Revolution: Grievances and Opportunities in Contentious Politics." *Journal of Politics* 76, no. 3, pp. 621-635.

Oct 19: Victims and Perpetrators (In-class group exercise)

- Malek, part 3 and Epilogue.
- Tyson, Scott (2018). "The Agency Problem Underlying Repression." *Journal of Politics* 80, no. 4, pp. 1297-1310.

State Propaganda and Media Control

The media (digital and other traditional forms) is an important tool for information dissemination, misinformation, as well as censorship. We will discuss how autocratic governments—in particular China—can make use of such powerful resource to garner and maintain power.

Oct 24: Fabricated Truth?

- Huang, Haifeng. 2015. "Propaganda as Signaling," *Comparative Politics*, 47(4), pp. 419-437.
- King, G., J. Pan, and M. E. Roberts (2017), "How the Chinese government fabricates social media posts for strategic distraction, not engaged argument," *American Political Science Review* 111, pp. 484-501.

Optional:

- Howard, Philip, and Muzammil Hussain (2011). "The Role of Digital Media," *Journal of Democracy* 22(3), pp. 35-48.

Oct 26: "Autocratic" Technology (Reading response due by 12:00pm via Blackboard)

- Chapman, Hannah (2021). "Shoring Up Autocracy: Participatory Technologies and Regime Support in Putin's Russia," in *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 54, Issue 8, pp. 1459-1489.
- Lynch, Marc (2011). "After Egypt: The Limits and Promise of Online Challenges to the Authoritarian Arab State," *Perspectives on Politics* 9(2), pp. 301-310.

Optional:

- Kawerau, Lukas, Nils Weidmann, and Alberto Dainotti (2022). "Attack or Block? Repertoires of Digital Censorship in Autocracies" in *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* (online print).

Economic Governance and Performance under Authoritarianism

More and more we see authoritarian leaders using their economic performance as a mean for legitimacy. In this class we will examine the relationship between economic governance and performance and regime type.

Oct 31: Growth in Autocracies (Final paper outline with main question(s) and arguments due)

- Luo, Zhaotian, and Adam Przeworski (2019). "Why are the Fastest Growing Countries Autocracies?" *Journal of Politics* 81, no. 2, pp. 663-669.
- Tsai, Lily (2007). "Solidary Groups, Informal Accountability, and Local Public Goods Provision in Rural China." *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 2, pp. 355-372.
- Wu, Chin-en (2012). "When Is Democracy Better for Economic Performance and When Is It Not: The Interaction Between Polity and Structural Factors." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 47, pp. 365-388.

Nov 2: The Middle Class in Autocracies I

- Rosenfeld, Brynn (2021). *The Autocratic Middle Class: How State Dependency Reduces the Demand for Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), chapters 1 and 2.

Optional:

- Podcast: Easterly on "Dictatorship, Democracy, and Economic Performance": http://www.econtalk.org/archives/2011/05/easterly_on_ben.html

Nov 7: The Middle Class in Autocracies II

- Rosenfeld, *The Autocratic Middle Class*, chapters 4 and 5.

Nov 9: The Middle Class in Autocracies III (Reading response due by 12:00pm via Blackboard)

- Rosenfeld, *The Autocratic Middle Class*, chapters 6 and 7.

Democratic Backsliding

Do democracies fall apart? During this week we will analyze the evidence on democratic erosion, including a discussion on the United States—Is democracy weakening in the U.S.?

Nov 14: Democratic Vulnerabilities (Final paper detailed outline due)

- Ginsburg, Tom, and Aziz Huq (2018). "Democracy's Near Misses." *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 4, pp. 16-30.
- Luo, Zhaotian, and Adam Przeworski (2019). "Democracy and its Vulnerabilities: Dynamics of Democratic Backsliding." Working paper, pp. 1-52 (Focus on the argument(s) and the main assumptions. Do not worry if you do not fully understand the model).

Nov 16: Democracy in the US I (In-class group exercise)

- Graham, Matthew, and Milan Svoblik (2020). "Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States." *American Political Science Review* 114, no. 2, pp. 392-409.

- Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt (2018). *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown), Introduction and chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Nov 21: Democracy in the US II

- Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9.

Nov 23: No class (Thanksgiving)

Creating a World for Autocracies?

The current pandemic, ongoing economic crises, increasing inequality, as well as social discontent over the last decade have led to political and regime shifts worldwide—sometimes to governments with strong autocratic leanings. Is the current international system facilitating the emergence of autocratic governments?

Nov 28: Democracy and Its Problems

- Schuler, Paul (2019). “Female Autocrats as Role Models? The Effect of Female Leaders on Political Knowledge and Engagement in Vietnam.” *Journal of Politics* 81, no. 4, pp. 1546-1550.
- Munck, Gerardo and Juan Pablo Luna (2022). *Latin American Politics and Society: A Comparative and Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), chapters 5 and 6. The book can be accessed via the USC Library.

Nov 30: What Can We Learn from Autocracies?

- Besley, Tim and Masayuki Kudamatsu (2007). “What Can We Learn from Successful Autocracies?” <https://voxeu.org/article/what-can-we-learn-successful-autocracies>
- Podcast: Chen Weiss discussing “Making the world safe for autocracy”: <https://supchina.com/podcast/making-the-world-safe-for-autocracy-jessica-chen-weiss-on-what-beijing-wants/>

FINAL PAPER DUE 12/2 BY 11:59 P.M. VIA BLACKBOARD

RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

1. Some guiding questions to read critically:

- What is the article's/book's main argument?
- Why is it important? (e.g., why should we care about what the author or authors are writing about?)
- What kind of evidence or how do the authors support their argument(s)?
 - o Is it good or valid evidence? Is it strong or weak?
 - o Are there any inconsistencies or issues that are not properly addressed?
- How does the article or book contribute to the study of what we're interested in?
- How does it compare with other scholarship about the topic we're interested in and what we have learned about thus far in class?
- What are some weaknesses you can identify? Can those weaknesses be resolved or addressed by other authors or scholarship we have learned in class?
- What is the article's/book's conclusion? What can we learn from it?

2. "10 Things to Know About Reading a Regression Table"

- Evidence in Governance and Politics: <http://egap.org/methods-guides/10-things-know-about-reading-regression-table>

3. Final Paper Tips

To aid students in developing a topic of interest for their final papers, the following is a list of questions and guiding sections students could find helpful:

- A title
- A thesis and/or argument(s):
 - o Include assumptions you're basing your argument on.
- A literature review: the paper must discuss at least three (3) sources related to your topic of choice (and/or argument) in the literature review. Some guiding questions include:
 - o What has been written about your topic and/or thesis?
 - o What is the argument presented by each of the authors you chose?
 - o Do your authors contradict or complement each other?
 - o What are the strengths and weaknesses of their arguments?
 - o How do each of these arguments support/help or contradict your argument?
 - o How is your work contributing to the understanding of the topic when compared to these authors?
- Evidence (e.g., data, cases, etc.) and its corresponding analysis to support your argument.
 - o How does your evidence work with/support your arguments and assumptions?
 - o Are there any contradictions, and if so, in what ways do they weaken your thesis? (Make sure that, if this is the case, it does not invalidate your thesis entirely).
- A clear conclusion
- A bibliography/list of references/citations

4. More resources on how to write a (research) paper:

- Purdue Online Writing Lab:
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/common_writing_assignments/research_papers/index.html (there are also resources on how to cite in this website).
- USC Libraries Research Guides: <https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide> (I'd recommend talking to the librarian as well. He can be a great resource in finding sources).