THE PROBLEM:
Contemporary authoritarian regimes cloak their power in constitutions promising democracy and the rule of law, while seeking the ability to exercise arbitrary power and marginalize their internal enemies (while not necessarily eliminating them). How do potential autocrats emerge and remain in “liberal” political systems? Are authoritarianism and democracy at odd with each other? And what relevance do these questions have for contemporary US democracy?

THE FINDINGS
1. By stitching individually democratic constitutional components together, modern day authoritarian regimes create “frankenstates,” which are “democratic dictatorships” that allow autocrats to consolidate power.
2. Authoritarianism and democracy are not mutually exclusive, and a shift towards “democracy” can be used to justify a concurrent shift towards authoritarianism based on the rejection of supposedly less democratic, “liberal” forms of government that prioritize pluralism and parliamentarianism.
3. In framing the opposition as archaic and conservative, modern authoritarian brazenly institute and justify anti-democratic reforms under the façade of modernization (secularism, market economies, greater efficiency). They claim that only their ideology can deliver the people to this future, thereby justifying repression and legal/constitutional change.
4. The modern US has seen devolution towards a “frankenstate” fueled by abuse of electoral institutions. Politically, this trend is driven by populism, which has elements of economic, racial and historical nostalgia.

REFERENCES