

PBPL 28765, PLSC 28765/38765

The Politics of Authoritarian Regimes

Winter 2021

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Class time and location: Monday/Wednesday, 1:50–3:10, Zoom

Office hours: Gehlbach: Friday 9:00–11:00, sign-up [here](#); Luo: Monday 3:20–5:20, by email appointment; Jacovo: Thursday 9:00–10:00 and by email appointment (Zoom link [here](#))

Course description

This course provides an overview of topics related to politics in authoritarian regimes. We begin by introducing the concept of authoritarianism: how it differs from democracy and how authoritarian regimes differ from each other. We then investigate the tools authoritarian rulers employ to maintain power, including institutions, policies, and tactics, and we examine the effects and side effects of these tools. Finally, we study transitions of power and of institutions, both on the way out of authoritarianism (democratization) and on the way in (democratic backsliding). Students who take this course will acquire a broad understanding of authoritarian politics and how it is covered in the literature. Prior recommended coursework: one quarter of statistics (Stats 220 or equivalent) and concurrent or prior training in game theory (PBPL 222, Social Science Inquiry core, or equivalent).

Grading

Your grade in the course will be based on various assignments that depend on whether you are an undergraduate or graduate student. For undergraduates:

- (10 percent) Class participation
- (50 percent) Response papers
- (40 percent) Final exam

For graduate students:

- (10 percent) Class participation
- (40 percent) Response memos
- (50 percent) Paper

The participation grade will be based on attendance and contributions to the class discussion. If for some reason you are unable to attend class, please let us know in advance; we will provide a recording of the Zoom session. Unexplained absences from class will negatively affect your participation grade.

You will write two response memos, which are weighted equally in the final grade. Each response memo should discuss, in 4–5 pages, double-spaced, one day’s required (and perhaps recommended) readings. One of the two should additionally discuss a film, drawn from a list that we will provide, related to the course material. You will present one of the two memos to the class. We will assign memo and presentation dates early in the quarter.

For undergraduates, the final exam will combine multiple-choice, identification, and essay questions. For graduate students, the final paper should be 15–20 pages, double-spaced, on a topic related to the material of the course. We encourage you to discuss potential paper topics with us before the end of the quarter.

Response papers and (for graduate students) the final paper should be submitted through Canvas. Unless cleared with us in advance, late assignments will negatively affect your course grade. For undergraduates, the final exam is given only on the scheduled date; it is your responsibility to ensure that you are available on that date.

This course is not graded on a curve. If you feel that any assignment has been unfairly or improperly graded, then you may request that it be regraded. Your request should be accompanied by a cover letter indicating the source of your concern. We will regrade the *entire* assignment in question, meaning that your revised grade may be either higher or lower than what you originally received, depending on the nature of any errors in the original grading.

If you wish to take the course pass/fail rather than for a letter grade, you should submit the Harris [pass/fail request form](#) by the Harris deadline, which is 9:00 am on February 8 (the Monday of the fifth week of class), unless there is an earlier deadline for your degree program. Please simultaneously send an email to all three of us indicating that you have opted to take the course pass/fail. To receive a pass, you must attend class meetings and turn in all assignments, receiving marks on assignments that are commensurate with an overall course grade of at least a C-. It is your responsibility to determine if the pass/fail option satisfies requirements for your degree.

Special accommodations

The University of Chicago, and we personally, support the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The University’s policies regarding students with disabilities are available [here](#). If you have a disability accommodation awarded by the University Student Disability Services Office, you should inform the Harris Dean of Students Office by the end of the first week of class. The Harris Dean of Students Office will work with you and with us to coordinate your accommodations.

Diversity and inclusion

We learn from each other. A diverse classroom encourages us to see the world from new perspectives. To take full advantage of this resource, we must maintain an environment of

open inquiry in which all are able to participate. It is our commitment as instructors to foster this environment.

You can find the University’s statement on civil behavior in a university setting [here](#), and the Harris School’s statement on diversity and inclusion [here](#).

Support

The pandemic and move to online learning pose numerous challenges. If you are feeling overwhelmed and/or depressed, you are not alone. We urge you to attend to your mental health. All services of the Student Counseling Service (SCS) are fully covered by the Student Life Fee. If you are seeking new services or resources, please call 773-702-9800 during business hours (Monday—Friday, 8:30 am–5:00 pm) and ask to speak with a clinician. If you need urgent mental-health care, you can speak with a clinician 24/7 by calling the SCS at 773-702-3625. More information is available [here](#).

Beyond SCS, the University provides numerous other forms of support for online learning. Please peruse the available options [here](#).

Academic integrity

You are a student at the University of Chicago. As such, you have assumed responsibility to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Among other things, this means that you will not represent another’s work as your own or otherwise gain unfair academic advantage. We will report any plagiarism, cheating, or other form of academic dishonesty to the dean of students. We reserve the right to impose sanctions beyond those imposed by the dean, including a grade of zero on the assignment in question; this could result in a failing grade for the course.

Use of online resources

Online resources are for course use only. More concretely, by enrolling in this course, you acknowledge that:

- You will not (i) record, share, or disseminate University of Chicago course sessions, videos, transcripts, audio, or chats; (ii) retain such materials after the end of the course; or (iii) use such materials for any purpose other than in connection with participation in the course.
- You will not share links to University of Chicago course sessions with any persons not authorized to be in the course session. Sharing course materials with persons authorized to be in the relevant course is permitted. Syllabi, handouts, slides, and other documents may be shared at the discretion of the instructor.

- Course recordings, content, and materials may be covered by copyrights held by the University, the instructor, or third parties. Any unauthorized use of such recordings or course materials may violate such copyrights.
- Any violation of this policy will be referred to your dean of students.

Readings and course schedule

There are no assigned texts for this course. All readings are available on Canvas. The following is subject to minor and ongoing revision, depending on how long specific topics take.

January 11: Overview

No readings.

January 13: Concepts, definitions, types

Required

Guriev, Sergei, and Daniel Treisman. “Informational Autocrats.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33, no. 4 (2019): 100–127.

Svolik, Milan. *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Cambridge University Press, 2012. [chapter 2]

Gehlbach, Scott, Konstantin Sonin, and Milan Svolik. “Formal Models of Non-democratic Politics.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 19 (2016): 565–584.

Recommended

Haber, Stephen. “Authoritarian Government.” *The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy* (2006): 693–707.

Wintrobe, Ronald. “The Tinpot and the Totalitarian: An Economic Theory of Dictatorship.” *American Political Science Review* (1990): 849–872.

Machiavelli, Niccolo. *The Prince*. 1532. [chapter 17]

January 18: No class (MLK Day)

January 20: Elections

Required

Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. “Elections Without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism.” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 51–65.

Magaloni, Beatriz. “The Game of Electoral Fraud and the Ousting of Authoritarian Rule.” *American Journal of Political Science* 54, no. 3 (2010): 751–765.

Recommended

Przeworski, Adam, Gonzalo Rivero, and Tianyang Xi. "Elections as a Conflict Processing Mechanism." *European Journal of Political Economy* 39 (2015): 235–248.

Egorov, Georgy, and Konstantin Sonin. Incumbency Advantage in Non-democracies. *National Bureau of Economic Research*, no. w20519 (2014).

January 25: Elections, cont.

Required

Luo, Zhaotian, and Arturas Rozenas. "Strategies of Election Rigging: Trade-offs, Determinants, and Consequences." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 13, no. 1 (2018): 1–28.

Rundlett, Ashlea, and Milan Svobik. "Deliver the Vote! Micromotives and Macrobehavior in Electoral Fraud." *American Political Science Review* 110, no. 1 (2016), 180–197.

Recommended

Little, Andrew. "Elections, Fraud, and Election Monitoring in the Shadow of Revolution." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 7, no. 3 (2012): 249–283.

Gehlbach, Scott, and Alberto Simpser. "Electoral Manipulation as Bureaucratic Control." *American Journal of Political Science* 59, no. 1 (2015): 212–224.

Frye, Timothy, Ora John Reuter, and David Szakonyi. "Political Machines at Work Voter Mobilization and Electoral Subversion in the Workplace." *World Politics* 66, no. 2 (2014), 195–228.

January 27: Cooptation and power sharing

Required

Gandhi, Jennifer, and Adam Przeworski. "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats." *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no. 11 (2007): 1279–1301.

Malesky, Edmund, and Paul Schuler. "Nodding or Needling: Analyzing Delegate Responsiveness in an Authoritarian Parliament." *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 3 (2010): 482–502.

Recommended

Myerson, Roger. "The Autocrat's Credibility Problem and Foundations of the Constitutional State." *American Political Science Review* 102, no. 1 (2008): 125–139. [textbook version]

- Reuter, Ora John, and Graeme Robertson. “Legislatures, Cooptation, and Social Protest in Contemporary Authoritarian Regimes.” *Journal of Politics* 77, no. 1 (2015): 235–248.
- Boix, Carles, and Milan Svobik. “The Foundations of Limited Authoritarian Government: Institutions, Commitment, and Power-sharing in Dictatorships.” *Journal of Politics* 75, no. 2 (2013): 300–316.
- Gehlbach, Scott, and Philip Keefer. “Investment without Democracy: Ruling-party Institutionalization and Credible Commitment in Autocracies.” *Journal of Comparative Economics* 39, no. 2 (2011): 123–139.
- Manion, Melanie. *Information for Autocrats: Representation in Chinese Local Congresses*. Cambridge University Press, 2015. [chapters 2 and 3]
- Malesky, Edmund, and Paul Schuler. “The Single-party Dictator’s Dilemma: Information in Elections without Opposition.” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (2011): 491–530.

February 1: Media, propaganda, and censorship

Required

- Gehlbach, Scott, and Konstantin Sonin. “Government Control of the Media.” *Journal of Public Economics* 118 (2014): 163–171. [also the textbook version]
- Adena, Maja, Ruben Enikolopov, Maria Petrova, Veronica Santarosa, and Ekaterina Zhuravskaya. “Radio and the Rise of the Nazis in Prewar Germany.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 130, no. 4 (2015): 1885–1939.

Recommended

- Lorentzen, Peter. “China’s Strategic Censorship.” *American Journal of Political Science* 58, no. 2 (2014): 402–414.
- Little, Andrew. “Propaganda and credulity.” *Games and Economic Behavior* 102 (2017): 224–232.
- Shadmehr, Mehdi, and Dan Bernhardt. “State Censorship.” *American Economic Journal: Microeconomics* 7, no. 2 (2015): 280–307.
- Rozenas, Arturas, and Denis Stukal. “How Autocrats Manipulate Economic News: Evidence from Russia’s State-Controlled Television.” *Journal of Politics* 81, no. 3 (2019): 982–996.

February 3: Media, propaganda, and censorship, cont.

Required

- Wedeen, Lisa. *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*. University of Chicago Press, 2015. [chapter 1]

King, Gary, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret Roberts. “How Censorship in China Allows Government criticism but Silences Collective Expression.” *American Political Science Review* 103, no. 4 (2013): 326–343.

Recommended

Egorov, Georgy, Sergei Guriev, and Konstantin Sonin. “Why Resource-poor Dictators Allow Freer Media: A Theory and Evidence from Panel Data.” *American Political Science Review* (2009): 645–668.

McMillan, John, and Pablo Zoido. “How to Subvert Democracy: Montesinos in Peru.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 18, no. 4 (2004): 69–92.

Gehlbach, Scott. “Reflections on Putin and the Media.” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 26, no. 1 (2010): 77–87.

Nalepa, Monika, and Grigore Pop-Eleches. 2020. “Authoritarian Infiltration of Organizations: Causes and Consequences.” *Journal of Politics* (forthcoming).

February 8: Repression and military rule

Required

Tyson, Scott. “The Agency Problem Underlying Repression.” *Journal of Politics* 80, no. 4 (2018): 1297–1310.

Hassan, Mai. “The Strategic Shuffle: Ethnic Geography, the Internal Security Apparatus, and Elections in Kenya.” *American Journal of Political Science* 61, no. 2 (2017): 382–395.

Recommended

Davenport, Christian. “State Repression and Political Order.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 10 (2007): 1–23.

Egorov, Georgy, and Konstantin Sonin. “Dictators and their Viziers: Endogenizing the Loyalty–Competence Trade-off.” *Journal of the European Economic Association* 9, no. 5 (2011): 903–930.

Blaydes, Lisa. *State of Repression: Iraq under Saddam Hussein*. Princeton University Press, 2018. [chapter 2]

Svolik, Milan. *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Cambridge University Press, 2012. [chapter 5]

Little, Andrew. “Coordination, Learning, and Coups.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61, no. 1 (2017): 204–234.

Boleslavsky, Raphael, Mehdi Shadmehr, and Konstantin Sonin. “Media Freedom in the Shadow of a Coup.” *University of Chicago, Becker Friedman Institute for Economics Working Paper*, 81 (2019).

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

February 10: Leadership succession

Required

Meng, Anne. “Winning the Game of Thrones: Leadership Succession in Modern Autocracies.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2020).

Acemoglu, Daron, Georgy Egorov, and Konstantin Sonin. “Do Juntas Lead to Personal Rule?” *American Economic Review* 99, no. 2 (2009): 298–303. [also the textbook version]

Recommended

Acemoglu, Daron, Georgy Egorov, and Konstantin Sonin. “Dynamics and Stability of Constitutions, Coalitions, and Clubs.” *American Economic Review* 102, no. 4 (2012): 1446–76.

Zhou, Congyi. “The Last step to the Throne: The Conflict Between Monarchs and Crown Princes.” *Working paper* (2019).

Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, and Alastair Smith. “Political Succession: A Model of Coups, Revolution, Purges, and Everyday Politics.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61, no. 4 (2017): 707–743.

Konrad, Kai, and Vai-Lam Mui. “The Prince—or Better No Prince? The Strategic Value of Appointing a Successor.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61, no. 10 (2017): 2158–2182.

Kurrild-Klitgaard, Peter. “The Constitutional Economics of Autocratic Succession.” *Public Choice* 103, no. 1–2 (2000): 63–84.

Cox, Gary. “Authoritarian Elections and Leadership Succession, 1975–2004.” *Working paper* (2009).

February 15: Economic growth

Required

Jones, Benjamin, and Benjamin Olken. “Do Leaders Matter? National Leadership and Growth since World War II.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 120, no. 3 (2005): 835–864.

Olson, Mancur. “Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development.” *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (1993): 567–576.

Recommended

- Easterly, William. “Benevolent Autocrats.” *Working paper* (2011).
- Przeworski, Adam, and Fernando Limongi. “Political Regimes and Economic Growth.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 7, no. 3 (1993): 51–69.
- Luo, Zhaotian, and Adam Przeworski. “Why are the Fastest Growing Countries Autocracies?” *Journal of Politics* 81, no. 2 (2019): 663–669.
- Mobarak, Ahmed Mushfiq. “Democracy, Volatility, and Economic Development.” *Review of Economics and Statistics* 87, no. 2 (2005): 348–361.

February 17: Governance

Required

- Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, Alastair Smith, Randolph Siverson, and James Morrow. *The Logic of Political Survival*. MIT Press, 2005. [chapters 2 and 3, textbook version]
- Voigtländer, Nico, and Hans-Joachim Voth. “Highway to Hitler.” *National Bureau of Economic Research*, no. w20150 (2014).

Recommended

- Tsai, Lily. “Solidary Groups, Informal Accountability, and Local Public Goods Provision in Rural China.” *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 2 (2007): 355–372.
- Meng, Xin, Nancy Qian, and Pierre Yared. “The Institutional Causes of China’s Great Famine, 1959–1961.” *Review of Economic Studies* 82, no. 4 (2015): 1568–1611.
- Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, James Morrow, Randolph Siverson, and Alastair Smith. “Political Institutions, Policy Choice and the Survival of Leaders.” *British Journal of Political Science* 32, no. 4 (2002): 559–590.
- Besley, Timothy, and Masayuki Kudamatsu. “Making Autocracy Work.” *Working paper* (2007).

February 22: Gender

Required

- Dube, Oeindrila, and S. P. Harish. “Queens.” *Journal of Political Economy* 128, no. 7 (2020): 2579–2652.
- Ross, Michael L. “Oil, Islam, and Women.” *American Political Science Review* 102, no. 1 (2008): 107–123.

Recommended

- Cherif, Feryal. “Culture, Rights, and Norms: Women’s Rights Reform in Muslim Countries.” *Journal of Politics* 72, no. 4 (2010): 1144–1160.
- Schuler, Paul. “Female Autocrats as Role Models? The Effect of Female Leaders on Political Knowledge and Engagement in Vietnam.” *Journal of Politics* 81, no. 4 (2019): 1546–1550.
- Qian, Nancy. “Missing Women and the Price of Tea in China: The Effect of Sex-specific Earnings on Sex Imbalance.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123, no. 3 (2008): 1251–1285.

February 24: International relations

Required

- Fearon, James. “Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes.” *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 3 (1994): 577–592.
- Weeks, Jessica. “Autocratic Audience Costs: Regime Type and Signaling Resolve.” *International Organization* 62, no. 1 (2008): 35–64.

Recommended

- Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, James Morrow, Randolph Siverson, and Alastair Smith. “An Institutional Explanation of the Democratic Peace.” *American Political Science Review* 93, no. 4 (1999): 791–807.
- Clarke, Kevin, and Randall Stone. “Democracy and the Logic of Political Survival.” *American Political Science Review* 102, no. 3 (2008): 387–392.

March 1: Ethnicity

Required

- Hou, Yue, and Rory Truex. “Ethnic Discrimination and Authoritarian Rule: An Analysis of Criminal Sentencing in China.” *Working paper* (2020).
- Finkel, Evgeny, and David Szakonyi. “Flying with the Stars: Performance, Loyalty, and Awards in the Soviet Air Force during WWII.” *Working paper* (2020).

Recommended

- Rozenas, Arturas. “A Theory of Demographically Targeted Repression.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64, no. 7–8 (2020): 1254–1278..
- Markevich, Andrei, Natalya Naumenko, and Nancy Qian. “The Soviet Great Famine, 1932–33.” *Working paper* (2020).

March 3: Mass publics

Required

Casper, Brett Allen, and Scott Tyson. “Popular Protest and Elite Coordination in a Coup d’État.” *Journal of Politics* 76, no. 2 (2014): 548–564.

Rosenfeld, Bryn. “Reevaluating the Middle-class Protest Paradigm: A Case-control Study of Democratic Protest Coalitions in Russia.” *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 4 (2017): 637–652.

Recommended

Satyanath, Shanker, Nico Voigtländer, and Hans-Joachim Voth. “Bowling for Fascism: Social Capital and the Rise of the Nazi Party.” *Journal of Political Economy* 125, no. 2 (2017): 478–526.

Lorentzen, Peter. “Regularizing Rioting: Permitting Public Protest in an Authoritarian Regime.” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 8, no. 2 (2013): 127–158.

March 8: Transitions to democracy

Required

Acemoglu, Daron, and James Robinson. *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Cambridge University Press, 2006. [chapter 6, textbook version]

Geddes, Barbara, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz. “Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set.” *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 2 (2014): 313–331.

Recommended

Boix, Carles. *Democracy and Redistribution*. Cambridge University Press, 2003. [chapter 1]

Havel, Vaclav. “The Power of the Powerless.” *East European Politics and Societies* 32, no. 2 (2018): 353–408.

Kuran, Timur. “The East European Revolution of 1989: Is It Surprising that We Were Surprised?” *American economic review* 81, no. 2 (1991): 121–125.

Albertus, Michael, and Victor Gay. “Unlikely Democrats: Economic Elite Uncertainty under Dictatorship and Support for Democratization.” *American Journal of Political Science* 61, no. 3 (2017): 624–641.

Svolik, Milan. “Democracy as an Equilibrium: Rational Choice and Formal Political Theory in Democratization Research.” *Democratization* 26, no. 1 (2019): 40–60.

Geddes, Barbara. “What Do We Know about Democratization after Twenty Years?” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2, no. 1 (1999): 115–144.

March 10: Democratic backsliding

Required

Luo, Zhaotian, and Adam Przeworski (2020), “Democracy by Detand its Vulnerabilities: Dynamics of Democratic Backsliding.” *Working paper* (2019).

Graham, Matthew, and Milan Svolik. “Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States.” *American Political Science Review* 114, no. 2 (2020): 392–409.

Recommended

Ginsburg, Tom, and Aziz Huq. “Democracy’s Near Misses.” *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 4 (2018): 16–30.

Gandhi, Jennifer. “The Institutional Roots of Democratic Backsliding.” *Journal of Politics* 81, no.1 (2019): e11–e16.

Svolik, Milan. “Polarization Versus Democracy.” *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 3 (2019): 20–32.

Helmke, Gretchen, Mary Kroeger, and Jack Paine. “Democracy by Deterrence: Strategic Self-Entrenchment in U.S. Elections.” *Working paper* (2020).

Howell, William, Kenneth Shepsle, and Stephane Wolton. “Executive Absolutism: A Model.” *Working paper* (2019).

Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. *How Democracies Die*. Crown New York, 2018.