

# PBPL 28765, PLSC 28765/38765

## The Politics of Authoritarian Regimes

### Winter 2022

**Instructors:** Professor Scott Gehlbach, [gehlbach@uchicago.edu](mailto:gehlbach@uchicago.edu); Professor Zhaotian Luo, [luozhaotian@uchicago.edu](mailto:luozhaotian@uchicago.edu)

**Class time and location:** Monday/Wednesday, 1:30–2:50, Keller 0023

**Office hours:** Gehlbach: Reserve at <https://calendly.com/gehlbach/office-hours>;  
Luo: Monday 3:10–5:10

## 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

The final grade will be based on the following weighting of course requirements:

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

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. 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. Response papers should be submitted through Canvas. Unless cleared with us in advance, late assignments will negatively affect your course grade.

The final exam will combine multiple-choice, identification, and essay questions. 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 January 31 (the Monday of the fifth week of class), unless there is an earlier deadline for your degree program. Please simultaneously send an email to both 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

University life poses numerous challenges; the pandemic has only added to these. 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 10: Overview

No readings.

## January 12: Concepts, definitions, types

### Required

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

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

Geddes, Barbara, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz. *How Dictatorships Work*. Cambridge University Press, 2018.

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

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

## January 17: No class (MLK Day)

## January 19: 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.

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.

### 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. *Economic Journal* Forthcoming.

## January 24: Elections, cont.

### Required

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

Frye, Timothy, Ora John Reuter, and David Szakonyi. “Hitting Them With Carrots: Voter Intimidation and Vote Buying in Russia.” *British Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 3 (2018), 857–881.

### Recommended

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.

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

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.

## January 26: 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

Paine, Jack. “Strategic Power Sharing: Commitment, Capability, and Authoritarian Survival.” *Journal of Politics* Forthcoming.

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 Svolik. “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.

## **January 31: Media, propaganda, and censorship**

### **Required**

- Gehlbach, Scott, Zhaotian Luo, Anton Shirikov, and Dmitriy Vorobyev. “A Model of Censorship, Propaganda, and Repression.” Unpublished manuscript.
- 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**

- Gehlbach, Scott, and Konstantin Sonin. “Government Control of the Media.” *Journal of Public Economics* 118 (2014): 163–171. [also the textbook version]
- 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 2: Media, propaganda, and censorship, cont.**

### **Required**

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

- 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 7: Repression and military rule

### Required

- Dragu, Tiberiu, and Adam Przeworski. “Preventive Repression: Two Types of Moral Hazard.” *American Political Science Review*. 113, no. 1 (2019), 77–87.
- Blaydes, Lisa. *State of Repression: Iraq under Saddam Hussein*. Princeton University Press, 2018. [chapter 2]

### Recommended

- 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.
- 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.
- 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 9: Leadership succession

### Required

Meng, Anne, and Jack Paine. “Power Sharing and Authoritarian Stability: How Rebel Regimes Solve the Guardianship Dilemma.” Unpublished manuscript.

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

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

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.” Unpublished manuscript.

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.” Unpublished manuscript.

## February 14: Economic growth

### Required

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



Besley, Timothy, and Masayuki Kudamatsu. “Making Autocracy Work.” In Elhanan Helpman, *Institutions and Economic Performance*, Harvard University Press, 2008.

## Recommended

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.

Easterly, William. “Benevolent Autocrats.” Unpublished manuscript.

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 16: 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.” *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* Forthcoming.

### 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.

## February 21: 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 23: 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.

## **February 28: Ethnicity**

### **Required**

Hou, Yue, and Rory Truex. “Ethnic Discrimination and Authoritarian Rule: An Analysis of Criminal Sentencing in China.” *Journal of Politics* Forthcoming.

Rozenas, Arturas, and Yuri Zhukov. “Mass Repression and Political Loyalty: Evidence from Stalin’s ‘Terror by Hunger’.” *American Political Science Review* 113, no. 2 (2019), 569–583.

## Recommended

- Finkel, Evgeny, and David Szakonyi. “Flying with the Stars: Performance, Loyalty, and Awards in the Soviet Air Force during WWII.” *Working paper* (2020).
- 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.” Unpublished manuscript.

## March 2: Mass publics

### Required

- Smith, Alastair, and Scott Tyson. “Dual-Layered Coordination and Political Instability.” *Journal of Politics* 80, no. 1 (2018), 44–58.
- 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

- 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.
- 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 7: Transitions to democracy

### Required

- Acemoglu, Daron, and James Robinson. *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Cambridge University Press, 2006. [chapter 6, textbook version]
- Havel, Vaclav. “The Power of the Powerless.” *East European Politics and Societies* 32, no. 2 (2018): 353–408. [read before Kuran]
- Kuran, Timur. “The East European Revolution of 1989: Is It Surprising that We Were Surprised?” *American Economic Review* 81, no. 2 (1991): 121–125.

## Recommended

- 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.
- Boix, Carles. *Democracy and Redistribution*. Cambridge University Press, 2003. [chapter 1]
- 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 9: Democratic backsliding

### Required

- Luo, Zhaotian, and Adam Przeworski (2020), "Democracy and its Vulnerabilities: Dynamics of Democratic Backsliding." Unpublished manuscript.
- 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." Unpublished manuscript.
- Howell, William, Kenneth Shepsle, and Stephane Wolton. "Executive Absolutism: A Model." Unpublished manuscript.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. *How Democracies Die*. Crown New York, 2018.