

Authoritarian Politics
Winter 2022
PPHA 38765, PBPL 28765
updated 1/3/2022

Instructor: Professor Alexei Zakharov

Class Time and Location: Monday/Wednesday 1:20pm-2:50pm, Keller 0023

Office Hours: Thursday, Friday 10:00am-12:00pm

Certificate Program: Global Conflict Studies

Course Description

The goal of this course is to provide an understanding of undemocratic regimes — something that more than one half of the world’s population is forced to content with. We will start by looking at how authoritarian regimes differ from democracy and also from each other, proceeding to examine the threats that autocrats face, and the measures they take to maintain their rule, such as building or dismantling institutions, distributing patronage, hiring the right subordinates, manipulating public opinion, rigging elections, and suppressing dissent. Other actors, including opposition, face their own problems when contending with, or challenging, autocratic rule. We proceed to look at the ways in and out of the autocracies — how democratic rule becomes subverted, and how it is reestablished. We examine the impact of authoritarianism on economy and foreign policy, as well as on values, cooperation, and the fabric of the society, and whether and how these effects persist and reinforce authoritarian rule. Finally, we will look at the effect of technological change on the evolution of autocracies, as it can both empower citizens of autocracies, and strengthen autocratic control over them.

Grading

The final grade will be based on the following formula:

10% Course attendance and participation in class discussion

25% Individual paper memo

25% Group paper memo and presentation

40% Final exam

The task of the paper memo is to report on one or several papers from the required and recommended list. The memo should summarize and appraise the results, reflect on the contribution to the scientific debate and legacy (a good idea is to search for the most important academic papers published in the aftermath), and try to formulate one’s own research problem — think of the following question: “If I had an unlimited research budget, what would I do, and why?”. The first memo assignment is individual, can focus on one paper, and be 4-5 double-spaced pages long. The second assignment, 7-8 pages, is to be done in groups of two or three, and should reflect on 2-3 papers, chosen by the students and subject to my approval. The second assignment must be presented to the class.

The final exam will consist of problems and essay questions and must be taken on the scheduled date.

Important deadlines

- January 18. Groups and themes for group paper memos and presentations should be selected.
- February 14. Individual paper memos are due.

All assignments are due at 23:59pm of the due date. Late assignments can be turned in with a 30% penalty before 23:59pm of the following date. Group essay is due the day before the scheduled presentation. Students are also encouraged to send slides in advance of group presentations; I will provide feedback on the slides if they are sent at least 3 days in advance.

Prerequisites

For BA students, one quarter of statistics (Stats 220 or equivalent) and concurrent or prior training in game theory (PBPL 222, Social Science Inquiry core, or equivalent) is recommended

Academic integrity

University of Chicago takes great pride in upholding the highest scholarly standards; as students, you are required to comply. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Dean of Students; the instructor reserves the right to impose a zero grade on the assignment on question.

Student conduct, diversity, and inclusion

Learning is fun but requires an atmosphere of tolerance and mutual respect, recognizing and celebrating the diversity of our students along a broad range of factors. Please consult the University's statement on [civil behavior](#) and the Harris School's statement on diversity and inclusion [here](#).

Classroom attendance

Students are expected to attend the course in person. Students who cannot attend the class in person due to extraordinary reasons (quarantine requirements, sickness, COVID symptoms or childcare disruptions) must contact the instructor to arrange recording of lectures.

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.

Required readings and course schedule

There is no required textbook for this course. Required and recommended readings will be assigned prior to each lecture and will be available on Canvas. There are no assigned texts for this course. All readings will be

available on Canvas. *This plan may be subject to change depending on how fast we progress.*

January 4: Overview

No reading

January 9: Authoritarian regimes at a glance

Required

Wintrobe, R., 1990. The tinpot and the totalitarian: An economic theory of dictatorship. *American political science review*, 84(3), pp.849-872.

Geddes, B., Wright, J. and Frantz, E., 2014. Autocratic breakdown and regime transitions: A new data set. *Perspectives on politics*, 12(2), pp.313-331.

Recommended

Svolik, M.W., 2012. *The politics of authoritarian rule*. Cambridge University Press. [Chapter 2]

Geddes, B., Wright, J.G., Wright, J. and Frantz, E., 2018. *How dictatorships work: Power, personalization, and collapse*. Cambridge University Press.

Maerz, S.F., Lührmann, A., Hellmeier, S., Grahn, S. and Lindberg, S.I., 2020. State of the world 2019: autocratization surges—resistance grows. *Democratization*, 27(6), pp.909-927.

January 11: Power sharing

Required

Myerson, R.B., 2008. The autocrat's credibility problem and foundations of the constitutional state. *American Political Science Review*, 102(1), pp.125-139.

Gandhi, J. and Przeworski, A., 2007. Authoritarian institutions and the survival of autocrats. *Comparative political studies*, 40(11), pp.1279-1301.

Recommended

Boix, C. and Svolik, M.W., 2013. The foundations of limited authoritarian government: Institutions, commitment, and power-sharing in dictatorships. *The Journal of Politics*, 75(2), pp.300-316.

Wright, J., Frantz, E. and Geddes, B., 2015. Oil and autocratic regime survival. *British Journal of Political Science*, 45(2), pp.287-306.

Gehlbach, S. and Keefer, P., 2011. Investment without democracy: Ruling-party institutionalization and credible commitment in autocracies. *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 39(2), pp.123-139.

Gorlizki, Y., Khlevniuk, O. and Suny, R.G., 2006. Stalin and his circle. In *The Cambridge History of Russia: Vol. 3. The Twentieth Century* (pp. 243-267). Cambridge University Press.

January 13 (*makeup for January 2*): Elections under autocracy

Required

Luo, Z. and Rozenas, A., 2018. Strategies of election rigging: trade-offs, determinants, and consequences. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 13(1), pp.1-28.

Levitsky, S. and Way, L.A., 2002. Elections without democracy: The rise of competitive authoritarianism. *Journal of democracy*, 13(2), pp.51-65.

Recommended

Schedler, A., 2002. Elections without democracy: The menu of manipulation. *Journal of democracy*, 13(2), pp.36-50.

Gehlbach, S. and Simpson, A., 2015. Electoral manipulation as bureaucratic control. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(1), pp.212-224.

Little, A.T., 2012. Elections, fraud, and election monitoring in the shadow of revolution. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 7(3), pp.249-283.

Frye, T., Reuter, O.J. and Szakonyi, D., 2019. Hitting them with carrots: Voter intimidation and vote buying in Russia. *British Journal of Political Science*, 49(3), pp.857-881.

Enikolopov, R., Korovkin, V., Petrova, M., Sonin, K. and Zakharov, A., 2013. Field experiment estimate of electoral fraud in Russian parliamentary elections. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110(2), pp.448-452.

January 18: Autocratic governance and leadership succession

Required

Egorov, G. and Sonin, K., 2011. Dictators and their viziers: Endogenizing the loyalty–competence trade-off. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 9(5), pp.903-930.

Recommended

Zakharov, A.V., 2016. The loyalty-competence trade-off in dictatorships and outside options for subordinates. *The Journal of Politics*, 78(2), pp.457-466.

Jones, B.F. and Olken, B.A., 2005. Do leaders matter? National leadership and growth since World War II. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 120(3), pp.835-864.

Jones, B.F. and Olken, B.A., 2009. Hit or miss? The effect of assassinations on institutions and war. *American Economic Journal: Macroeconomics*, 1(2), pp.55-87.

Escribà-Folch, A., 2013. Accountable for what? Regime types, performance, and the fate of outgoing dictators, 1946–2004. *Democratization*, 20(1), pp.160-185.

January 20 (makeup for January 16): Repression

Required

Dragu, T. and Przeworski, A., 2019. Preventive repression: Two types of moral hazard. *American Political Science Review*, 113(1), pp.77-87.

Recommended

Tyson, S.A., 2018. The agency problem underlying repression. *The Journal of Politics*, 80(4), pp.1297-1310.

Montagnes, B.P. and Wolton, S., 2019. Mass purges: Top-down accountability in autocracy. *American Political Science Review*, 113(4), pp.1045-1059.

Hsieh, C.T., Miguel, E., Ortega, D. and Rodriguez, F., 2011. The price of political opposition: Evidence from Venezuela's Maisanta. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 3(2), pp.196-214.

Zhu, J. and Zhang, D., 2017. Weapons of the powerful: Authoritarian elite competition and politicized anticorruption in China. *Comparative political studies*, 50(9), pp.1186-1220.

Esteban, J., Morelli, M. and Rohner, D., 2015. Strategic mass killings. *Journal of Political Economy*, 123(5), pp.1087-1132.

Landa, D. and Tyson, S.A., 2017. Coercive leadership. *American Journal of Political Science*, 61(3), pp.559-574.

January 23: Autocracy and the military Required

Sudduth, J.K., 2017. Strategic logic of elite purges in dictatorships. *Comparative Political Studies*, 50(13), pp.1768-1801.

Bueno de Mesquita, B. and Smith, A., 2017. Political succession: A model of coups, revolution, purges, and everyday politics. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 61(4), pp.707-743.

Recommended

Escribà-Folch, A., Böhmelt, T. and Pilster, U., 2020. Authoritarian regimes and civil–military relations: Explaining counterbalancing in autocracies. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 37(5), pp.559-579.

Arbatli, C.E. and Arbatli, E., 2016. External threats and political survival: Can dispute involvement deter coup attempts?. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 33(2), pp.115-152.

Albrecht, H. and Eibl, F., 2018. How to keep officers in the barracks: Causes, agents, and types of military coups. *International Studies Quarterly*, 62(2), pp.315-328.

Hassan, M., 2017. The strategic shuffle: Ethnic geography, the internal security apparatus, and elections in Kenya. *American Journal of Political Science*, 61(2), pp.382-395.

January 25: Information and propaganda Required

Guriev, S. and Treisman, D., 2019. Informational autocrats. *Journal of economic perspectives*, 33(4), pp.100-127.

Egorov, G., Guriev, S. and Sonin, K., 2009. Why resource-poor dictators allow freer media: A theory and evidence from panel data. *American political science Review*, 103(4), pp.645-668.

Recommended

Chen, J. and Xu, Y., 2017. Why do authoritarian regimes allow citizens to voice opinions publicly?. *The Journal of Politics*, 79(3), pp.792-803.

King, G., Pan, J. and Roberts, M.E., 2017. How the Chinese government fabricates social media posts for strategic distraction, not engaged argument. *American political science review*, 111(3), pp.484-501.

Gehlbach, S. and Sonin, K., 2014. Government control of the media. *Journal of public Economics*, 118, pp.163-171.

Rozenas, A. and Stukal, D., 2019. How autocrats manipulate economic news: Evidence from Russia's state-controlled television. *The Journal of Politics*, 81(3), pp.982-996.

January 30: Information and propaganda (cont)

Required

Adena, M., Enikolopov, R., Petrova, M., Santarosa, V. and Zhuravskaya, E., 2015. Radio and the Rise of the Nazis in Prewar Germany. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 130(4), pp.1885-1939.

Recommended

King, G., Pan, J. and Roberts, M.E., 2013. How censorship in China allows government criticism but silences collective expression. *American political science Review*, 107(2), pp.326-343.

Yanagizawa-Drott, D., 2014. Propaganda and conflict: Evidence from the Rwandan genocide. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 129(4), pp.1947-1994.

Edmond, C., 2013. Information manipulation, coordination, and regime change. *Review of Economic studies*, 80(4), pp.1422-1458.

Little, A.T., 2017. Propaganda and credulity. *Games and Economic Behavior*, 102, pp.224-232.

February 1: Economic outcomes of autocracy

Required

Acemoglu, D., Naidu, S., Restrepo, P. and Robinson, J.A., 2019. Democracy does cause growth. *Journal of political economy*, 127(1), pp.47-100.

Besley, T.J. and Kudamatsu, M., 2007. Making autocracy work. *LSE STICERD Research Paper No. DEDPS48*.

Recommended

Gehlbach, S. and Keefer, P., 2012. Private investment and the institutionalization of collective action in autocracies: ruling parties and legislatures. *The Journal of Politics*, 74(2), pp.621-635.

Burgess, R., Jedwab, R., Miguel, E., Morjaria, A. and Padró i Miquel, G., 2015. The value of democracy: evidence from road building in Kenya. *American Economic Review*, 105(6), pp.1817-51.

Acemoglu, D., Naidu, S., Restrepo, P. and Robinson, J.A., 2015. Democracy, redistribution, and inequality. In *Handbook of income distribution* (Vol. 2, pp. 1885-1966). Elsevier.

Knutsen, C.H. and Rasmussen, M., 2018. The autocratic welfare state: Old-age pensions, credible commitments, and regime survival. *Comparative Political Studies*, 51(5), pp.659-695.

February 6: Foreign policy under authoritarianism

Required

B. de Mesquita, B., Morrow, J.D., Siverson, R.M. and Smith, A., 1999. An institutional explanation of the democratic peace. *American Political Science Review*, 93(4), pp.791-807.

Fearon, J.D., 1994. Domestic political audiences and the escalation of international disputes. *American political science review*, 88(3), pp.577-592.

Recommended

Dafoe, A., 2011. Statistical critiques of the democratic peace: Caveat emptor. *American Journal of Political Science*, 55(2), pp.247-262.

Hegre, H., Bernhard, M. and Teorell, J., 2020. Civil society and the democratic peace. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 64(1), pp.32-62.

Clarke, K.A. and Stone, R.W., 2008. Democracy and the logic of political survival. *American Political Science Review*, 102(3), pp.387-392.

Di Lonardo, L., Sun, J.S. and Tyson, S.A., 2020. Autocratic stability in the shadow of foreign threats. *American Political Science Review*, 114(4), pp.1247-1265.

February 8: Democratic backsliding

Required

Graham, M.H. and Svobik, M.W., 2020. Democracy in America? Partisanship, polarization, and the robustness of support for democracy in the United States. *American Political Science Review*, 114(2), pp.392-409.

Recommended

Amat, F., Arenas, A., Falcó-Gimeno, A. and Muñoz, J., 2020. Pandemics meet democracy. Experimental evidence from the COVID-19 crisis in Spain.

Levitsky, S. and Ziblatt, D., 2018. *How democracies die*. Broadway Books.

Kotschy, R. and Sunde, U., 2021. Income shocks, inequality, and democracy. *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 123(1), pp.295-326.

Gandhi, J., 2019. The institutional roots of democratic backsliding.

Dimant, E., 2022. Hate trumps love: The impact of political polarization on social preferences. Available at SSRN 3680871.

Satyanath, S., Voigtländer, N. and Voth, H.J., 2017. Bowling for fascism: Social capital and the rise of the Nazi Party. *Journal of Political Economy*, 125(2), pp.478-526.

February 13: Protests

Required

Cantoni, D., Yang, D.Y., Yuchtman, N. and Zhang, Y.J., 2019. Protests as strategic games: experimental evidence from Hong Kong's antiauthoritarian movement. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 134(2), pp.1021-1077.

Kuran, T., 1991. The East European revolution of 1989: is it surprising that we were surprised?. *The American Economic Review*, 81(2), pp.121-125.

Recommended

Lorentzen, P.L., 2013. Regularizing rioting: Permitting public protest in an authoritarian regime. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 8(2), pp.127-158.

Huang, H., Boranbay-Akan, S. and Huang, L., 2019. Media, protest diffusion, and authoritarian resilience. *Political Science Research and Methods*, 7(1), pp.23-42.

Frye, T. and Borisova, E., 2019. Elections, protest, and trust in government: A natural experiment from Russia. *The Journal of Politics*, 81(3), pp.820-832.

Enikolopov, R., Makarin, A. and Petrova, M., 2020. Social media and protest participation: Evidence from Russia. *Econometrica*, 88(4), pp.1479-1514.

Little, A.T., Tucker, J.A., & LaGatta, T. 2015. Elections, protest, and alternation of power. *The Journal of Politics*, 77(4), 1142-1156.

Little, A.T., 2016. Communication technology and protest. *The Journal of Politics*, 78(1), pp.152-166.

February 15: Transitions to democracy

Required

Acemoglu, D. and Robinson, J.A., 2006. *Economic origins of dictatorship and democracy*. Cambridge University Press. [Chapter 6]

Recommended

Brückner, M. and Ciccone, A., 2011. Rain and the democratic window of opportunity. *Econometrica*, 79(3), pp.923-947.

Campante, F.R. and Chor, D., 2012. Why was the Arab world poised for revolution? Schooling, economic opportunities, and the Arab Spring. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 26(2), pp.167-88.

Docquier, F., Lodigiani, E., Rapoport, H. and Schiff, M., 2016. Emigration and democracy. *Journal of Development Economics*, 120, pp.209-223.

Geddes, B., 1999. What do we know about democratization after twenty years?. *Annual review of political science*, 2(1), pp.115-144.

February 20: Civic society under authoritarianism

Required

Borisova, E., Smyth, R., and Zakharov, A. 2022. Autocratic Policy and the Accumulation of Pro-social Norms: The Moscow Housing Renovation Program. *Working paper*

Xue, M.M., 2021. Autocratic rule and social capital: evidence from imperial China. *Available at SSRN 2856803*.

Recommended

Zhukov, Y.M. and Talibova, R., 2018. Stalin's terror and the long-term political effects of mass repression. *Journal of Peace Research*, 55(2), pp.267-283.

Rosenfeld, B., 2020. *The autocratic middle class: how state dependency reduces the demand for democracy*. Princeton University Press. Chapter 1.

Lankina, T.V. and Libman, A., 2021. The Two-Pronged Middle Class: The Old Bourgeoisie, New State-Engineered Middle Class, and Democratic Development. *American Political Science Review*, 115(3), pp.948-966.

February 22: The political psychology of authoritarianism

Required

Young, L.E., 2019. The psychology of state repression: Fear and dissent decisions in Zimbabwe. *American Political Science Review*, 113(1), pp.140-155.

Guiso, L., Sapienza, P. and Zingales, L., 2016. Long-term persistence. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 14(6), pp.1401-1436.

Recommended

Rozenas, A. and Zhukov, Y.M., 2019. Mass repression and political loyalty: Evidence from Stalin's 'terror by hunger'. *American Political Science Review*, 113(2), pp.569-583.

February 27: Autocracy in the information age

Required

Xu, X., 2021. To repress or to co-opt? Authoritarian control in the age of digital surveillance. *American Journal of Political Science*, 65(2), pp.309-325.

Qin, B., Strömberg, D. and Wu, Y., 2017. Why does China allow freer social media? Protests versus surveillance and propaganda. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(1), pp.117-40.

Recommended

Frantz, E., Kendall-Taylor, A. and Wright, J., 2020. Digital repression in autocracies. *V-Dem Institute at the University of Gothenburg*.

Keremoglu, E. and Weidmann, N.B., 2020. How dictators control the internet: a review essay. *Comparative Political Studies*, 53(10-11), pp.1690-1703.

March 1: Group presentations