

POLITICAL SCIENCE 210: Authoritarianism

Tues. 4:00-6:00pm, 791 Barrows Hall

Version 1/17/2025

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732 SSB

Office hours: Thurs 2-3:30pm

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Course Description: This seminar explores the characteristics and dynamics of non-democratic regimes: how and why they come about, what sustains them, why some people resist and others do not, and how and why they decline and fall. There are no formal methodological prerequisites for this course. However, during our journey through autocracy we will encounter a variety of approaches, including formal, large-N statistical, small-N qualitative, and narrative. Some of the readings may employ techniques with which you are not familiar. We will not spend lots of time on methods per se. What you need to know is what authors are arguing, not how they are arguing it. Try to do the best you can for whatever level of methodological training you have.

Requirements: Two-thirds of your grade will be based on a term paper, due in my mailbox by Friday, May 9, 2:00pm. You are free to choose any topic you wish, provided that it is relevant to the course. Be sure you discuss the topic with me in advance. A two-page synopsis of your proposed paper is due in class on XXXX. One-third of your grade will be based on seminar participation. Each of you will be responsible for leading at least two course discussions. Please come to class prepared to critically discuss issues raised in the readings even if you are not leading the discussion.

Course Readings

BOOK TO PURCHASE:

Milan W. Svobik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Evgeny Zamyatin, *We*. Any edition. (Electronic version also available.)

ELECTRONIC READINGS:

All other readings are in bCourses.

I reserve the right to add or subtract readings as needed.

1. (Jan 24): Introduction

2. (Jan 31): Origins of Authoritarianism

Why have most political regimes throughout history been non-democratic? Why are some (autocratic) regimes so much more brutal than others?

Mancur Olson, "Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development" *American Political Science Review* 87, 3 (1993), pp. 567-576.

Robert Sapolsky, *Behave: The Biology of Humans at our Best and Worst*. (Vintage, 2017), chapters 11 and 12.

Steven A. Peterson, "Human Ethology and Political Hierarchy: Is Democracy Feasible?," in Albert Somit and Rudolf Wildenmann, eds., *Hierarchy and Democracy*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), pp. 63-78.

Jean A. Laponce, "Democracy and Verticality: Are There Biophysical Obstacles to Democratic Thought?," in Albert Somit and Rudolf Wildenmann, eds., *Hierarchy and Democracy*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), pp. 103-114.

3. (Feb 7): Dilemmas of Dictatorship

Even seemingly all-powerful dictators and dictatorships are less powerful than we imagine. What limits do they face? What are the tradeoffs involved as dictators strive to maintain power?

Svolik, Chapter 1.

Stephen Haber, "Authoritarian Government," in Barry Weingast and Donald Wittman, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*. (Oxford University Press, 2008).

Peter Lorentzen, *China's Controlled Burn: Limited Liberalizations and the Authoritarian Information Problem*. August 2014 Draft. Introduction.

Anne Meng, "Accessing the state: Executive constraints and credible commitment in dictatorship," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 2019, Vol. 3(4), 568-599.

Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith, *The Dictator's Handbook: Why Bad Behavior is Almost Always Good Politics*. (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), Chapter 1.

Bruce Bueno de Mesquita et. al, *The Logic of Political Survival*. (MIT Press, 2003), Chapter 1.

Ronald Wintrobe, "How to understand and deal with dictatorship: an economist's view," *Economics of Governance* 2001, No. 2, pp. 35-58. (Read through the top of p. 41 only.)

José Antonio Cheibub, Jennifer Gandhi, and James Raymond Vreeland, "Democracy and dictatorship revisited," *Public Choice* (2010) 143: 67-101.

4. (Feb 14): Authoritarian Power-Sharing

Why do dictators voluntarily cede power to other actors in the system?

Svolik, chapter 3-4.

Anne Meng, Jack Paine, and Robert Powell, "Authoritarian Power Sharing: Concepts, Mechanisms, and Strategies." *Annual Review of Political Science* 2023, 26:61.-6.21.

Carles Boix and Milan W. Svolik, "The Foundations of Limited Authoritarian Government: Institutions, Commitment, and Power-Sharing in Dictatorships," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 75, No. 2, April 2013, pp. 300-316.

James H. Rosberg, "The Development of the Rule of Law in Highly Bureaucratized Repressive States," Chapter 1 of *Roads to the Rule of Law: The Emergence of an Independent Judiciary in Contemporary Egypt*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1995.

Yuhua Wang, *Tying the Autocrat's Hands: The Rise of the Rule of Law in China*. (Cambridge University Press, 2015), Introduction and Chapter 1.

5. (Feb 21): Authoritarian Power-Sharing: Parties and Elections

Dictatorships routinely feature ruling parties and at least a simulacrum of elections. What are the advantages and disadvantages of these institutions from the ruling group's perspective? From the mass perspective?

Svolik, chapter 6.

Andrew T. Little, "Are Non-Competitive Elections Good for Citizens?" *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, Vol. 29, No. 2, pp. 214-242.

Bahar Leventoğlu, Edmu d J. Malesky, and Tusi (Ündes) Wen, "Synthesizing Theories of Authoritarian Elections: A Game-Free Analysis," *Comparative Political Studies* 2024, online, pp. 1-42.

Andrew Koss, *Where the Party Rules: The Rank and File of China's Communist State*. (Cambridge University Press, 2018), Chapter 2.

Beatriz Magaloni, "Credible Power-Sharing and the Longevity of Authoritarian Rule," *Comparative Political Studies*, Volume 41, Number 4/5, April/May 2008, pp. 715-741.

6. (Feb 28): Authoritarian Control: Repression

How does the organization of repressive institutions affect the amount and types of repression? What costs do dictators pay for employing repression rather than other strategies?

Svolik, chapter 5.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens, *Dictators and their Secret Police: Coercive Institutions and State Violence*. (Cambridge University Press, 2016), chapters 1 and 2.

Jack Paine, "Reframing the Guardianship Dilemma: How the Military's Dual Disloyalty Options Imperil Dictators," *American Political Science Review* 2022, Vol. 116 (4), 1425-1442.

Branislav L. Slantchev and Kelly S. Matush, "The Authoritarian Wager: Political Action and the Sudden Collapse of Repression," *Comparative Political Studies*, published online May 14, 2019.

Peter L. Lorentzen, "Regularized Rioting: Permitting Public Protest in an Authoritarian Regime," *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 2013, 8: pp. 127-158.

Fiona Shen-Bayh, "Strategies of Repression" Judicial and Extrajudicial Methods of Autocratic Survival." *World Politics*, 70, no. 3, July 2018, 321-357.

7. (Mar 7): Totalitarianism (Paper synopsis due)

Evgeny Zamyatin, *We*. Any edition.

Ferenc Fehér, Agnes Heller, and György Márkus, *Dictatorship Over Needs*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), Chapters 4,5, 7.

Isaiah Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Idea" in Henry Hardy, ed, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*. Second Edition. (Princeton University Press, 2013), pp. 1-20.

J.L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*. (W.W. Norton, 1970), pp. 1-49.

David D. Roberts, "Why Should We Care About Totalitarianism?" in *Totalitarianism*. (Polity, 2000), pp. 1-13.

8. (Mar 14): Review of Participants' Paper Ideas

Students will present their paper ideas to the class for discussion.

9. (Mar 21): Why Do People Obey? Fear and Love?

For most, dictatorship involves diminished freedom and opportunity if not repression. Yet some seem nonetheless willing and perhaps eager to comply. Why?

Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*. (Avon Books, 1964 [1941]), pp. xii-38.

Mark Lilla, "The Lure of Syracuse," *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 48, Issue 14, Sept. 2001.

Arthur Koestler, "Arthur Koestler," in Richard Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed*. (Harper & Brothers, 1949), pp. 15-75.

Ian Buruma, "The Indiscreet Charm of Tyranny," *New York Review of Books*, Vol. LII, No. 8, May 12, 1995, pp. 35-37.

Lisa Blaydes, *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein*. (Princeton University Press, 2018), chapters 1 and 2.

10. (Apr 4): Why Do People Obey? Propaganda and Brainwashing?

Voluntary choice implies the absence of coercion and roughly complete information. How do dictators manipulate information and other factors to induce people to obey?

- Haifeng Huang, "Propaganda and Signalling," *Comparative Politics* July 2015, pp. 419-445.
- Ruben Enikolopov et al., "Media and Political Persuasion: Evidence from Russia," *American Economic Review* 101, December 2011, pp. 3253-3285. OR
- Frank Dikötter, *How to be a Dictator: The Cult of Personality in the Twentieth Century*. (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), preface and chapter 1.
- Barbara Geddes and John Zaller, "Sources of Popular Support for Authoritarian Regimes," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 33, No. 2, May 1989, pp. 319-347.
- Gary King et al., "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 107, No. 2, May 2013, pp. 326-343.

11. (Apr 11): Why Do People Obey? Is it Habituated?

To what extent are our preferences for dictatorship themselves shaped by forces over which we have little control?

- Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*. (Secker & Warburg, 1957), pp. 1-32.
- Karl Marx, "Political Consciousness and the Means of Production," in Neil J. Kressel, *Political Psychology: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. (Random House, 1993), pp. 103-107.
- Michel Foucault, "Docile Bodies," in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader*. (Pantheon, 1984), pp. 179-187.
- Michel Foucault, "The Formation of Objects," in Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. (Pantheon, 1972), pp. 40-49.
- Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8 (Summer 1982), pp. 777-795.
- Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents," in Neil J. Kressel, *Political Psychology: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. (Random House, 1993), pp. 64-67.

12. (Apr 18): Authoritarian Survival

Is there a formula for long-lasting authoritarianism? What are the tradeoffs between the survival of a dictator and the longevity of a dictatorial regime?

- Samuel P. Huntington, "Social and Institutional Dynamics of One-Party Systems," in Samuel P. Huntington and Clement H. Moore, eds., *Authoritarian Politics in Modern Society*. (Basic Books, 1970), pp. 3-47.
- Jason Brownlee, "Hereditary Succession in Modern Autocracies," *World Politics*, Vol. 59, July 2007, pp. 595-628.
- Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski, "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 11, November 2007, pp. 1279-1301.
- John H. Herz, "The Problem of Successorship in Dictatorial Régimes: A Study in Comparative Law and Institutions," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 1, February 1952, pp. 19-40.

Sergei Guriev and Daniel Treisman, "How Modern Dictators Survive: An Informational Theory of the New Authoritarianism." Version March 2016.

13. (Apr 25): Popular Resistance to Autocracy

Open and violent opposition is rare under repressive regimes. What other modes of resistance are there, and what good are they for?

James C. Scott, "Everyday Forms of Resistance," *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 4, 1989, pp. 33-62.

Kevin O'Brien, "Rightful Resistance," *World Politics*, Vol. 49, October 1996, pp. 31-55.

Jason Wittenberg, *Crucibles of Political Loyalty: Church Institutions and Electoral Continuity in Hungary*. (Cambridge University Press, 2006), chapter 4.

Timur Kuran, "Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989," *World Politics* 44, October 1991, pp. 7-48.

Hank Johnston, "Speech Acts and Resistance in Authoritarian Regimes," in Christian Davenport, Hank Johnston, and Carol Mueller, eds., *Repression and Mobilization*. (University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

14. (May 2): TBD

15. (Dec 10): Reading Period. Papers due by 2pm!