

## POLS 404: Authoritarian Regimes

CLASS LOCATION: ADMIN BUILDING 227

CLASS TIME: TR 08:00 am – 09:15 am

INSTRUCTOR: Chen Wang

OFFICE: Admin Building 205J

OFFICE HOURS: Tuesday 9:30 am – 11:30 am or by appointment

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### COURSE DESCRIPTION

How do autocratic leaders stay in power? Why do some authoritarian governments enjoy the highest domestic popular support in the world? Do dictators and democratic leaders behave differently in international crises? Motivated by these questions, this course seeks to provide an understanding of undemocratic regimes — something that more than one half of the world's population is forced to content with. Students will learn the features that distinguish authoritarian regimes from democracies and the strategies authoritarian leaders use to retain power (Part I); the impact of authoritarianism on foreign policy and international security (Part II); and the ways in and out of the autocracies — how democratic rule becomes (re)established and subverted (Part III).

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### REQUIRED READINGS

- Svolik, Milan W . 2012. *The politics of authoritarian rule*. Cambridge University Press (E-book available through UI library).
  - All other readings will be available on Canvas
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### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your grade in this course will be derived from your performance on the following components:

- **Attendance and Participation: 10%**

Attendance and participation are important. Each student is permitted *three unexcused absences*. Every other absence will lower your participation grade by 5 percent unless you have a valid excuse (medical, academic, family, etc.) backed by proper documentation. We will take advantage of the small class size to organize the meetings as a mix of lectures and discussion seminars. The course will succeed only if students have completed all the required readings, and arrive prepared and ready to share thoughts and questions about the subject matter.

- **Reaction Essay: 10%**

Each student will write **one** essay in response to one reading of your own choosing. Readings that are available for this assignment are marked with **Reaction Essay** in the schedule below. The essay should be 2-3 pages, double-spaced, one-inch margin on all sides, with 12-point Times New Roman font. No specific styles are required, but you must have citations that can be traced back to the original sources (see course policy on academic integrity below). **The essay is due on the Tuesday (at 8:00 A.M.) of the week in which the reading is scheduled to be covered.** Late submission will be penalized 5 percent for each day late except in the event of a documented medical or family emergency.

The essay should be roughly organized into two parts. The first part should be a succinct summary of the key points of the article (**less than one page**):

- What is the question or puzzle the author(s) are trying to address?
- What is the author(s)' answer/argument?
- What kind of evidence have the author(s) provided to support the argument (or to reject other explanations)?

The second part of the essay should be focused on discussing your own opinions/critiques about the article. Things that could be discussed include:

- What surprised you most about the discussion in the article? What did you find most interesting and why?
- To what extent do you agree or disagree with the author(s)' argument, analysis, and/or evidence? Why?

- **Reading Presentation: 15%**

Each student is also expected to sign up for one reading to present. Readings that are available for this assignment are marked with **Presentation** in the schedule below. **The paper you plan to present should be different from the Reaction Essay one.** The presentations are scheduled for the last 30 minutes of every Thursday's meeting. Detailed instructions about the presentation will be discussed in class later. But the general expectation is that you will present the content as if you are the author(s) of the paper and be prepared to handle Q&A.

- **Take-home Midterm Exam: 15%**

There will be a take-home midterm exam scheduled on **Thursday, March 7<sup>th</sup>**. It will be a timed open-book exam (75-mins) that contains multiple choice, true-or-false, short answer, and essay questions. The exam will be conducted on Canvas during the class time on the exam day.

- **Research Proposal: 50%**

- Introduction and Literature Review (10%): due March 21
- Theory and Hypothesis (15%): due April 4
- Research Design (15%): due April 18
- Proposal Presentation (5%): April 30 & May 2

- Final Polished Proposal (5%): May 9

The field of authoritarian politics (both domestic and international politics) is an active research area with a number of open questions remaining. The main assignment of this class is to produce a **15-page research proposal** that addresses a question you find interesting.<sup>1</sup> The research proposal should include the following components: introduction, literature review, theory and hypotheses, research design, and conclusion. The instruction and grading rubric for each of these sections will be consistent with those adopted in POLS 235 (Research Method), and will be distributed later in class. But the ultimate goal of a research proposal is to convince your audience that: Your research question is worth exploring (Introduction and Literature Review); You have a plausible answer to the question that is both logically coherent and empirically testable (Theory and Hypothesis); Your empirical strategy is executable (Research Design). We will organize our last two meetings (April 30 & May 2) as seminars that mimic graduate students' prospectus defense sessions, where each student will present their research proposal and others will ask questions and provide feedback.

- **Grade Scale**

There will be no curving in this class. Final letter grades will be calculated as follows:

[90, 100]	A
[80, 90)	B
[70, 80)	C
[60, 70)	D
[0, 60)	F

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## COURSE POLICIES

- **Academic Integrity**

Cheating and plagiarism are taken very seriously in this course. All assignments must be solely original work of the student. Violations include quoting or paraphrasing another author without attribution on written assignments. Avoid plagiarism by using footnotes (with page numbers) whenever you quote, paraphrase, or otherwise borrow someone else's ideas. If you are unsure whether you are committing plagiarism, do not hesitate to ask me for guidance (before you submit your work). Note that forming a group to study for homework assignments or offering feedback on a draft of another student's paper are not considered violations of academic integrity. On the other hand, writing portions of a classmate's paper or copying a paragraph from a book or website without attribution are very serious violations. It is the policy of our department to refer instances of suspected academic dishonesty to the Student Judicial Council. For the Dean of Students' Academic Integrity site, see <https://www.uidaho.edu/student-affairs/dean-of-students/student-conduct/academic-integrity>.

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<sup>1</sup>While there is no formal prerequisites, POLS 235 is highly recommended.

- **Learning Environment Civility**

In any environment (including online) in which people gather to learn, it is essential that all members feel as free and safe as possible in their participation. To this end, it is expected that everyone in this course will be treated with mutual respect and civility, with an understanding that all of us (students, instructors, and guests) will be respectful and civil to one another in discussion, in action, in teaching, and in learning. Should you feel our classroom interactions do not reflect an environment of civility and respect, you are encouraged to meet with your instructor during office hours to discuss your concern. Additional resources for expression of concern or requesting support include the Dean of Students office and staff (5-6757), the UI Counseling & Testing Center's confidential services (5-6716), or the UI Office of Human Rights, Access, & Inclusion (5- 4285).

- **Grade Appeals**

Hopefully there will be no reason to contest a grade. However, a student who believes strongly that a homework assignment or the paper has been graded incorrectly may appeal by writing a one-page, typed memo explaining why the grade was inappropriate. No sooner than 72 hours and no later than 10 days after the original grade was issued, the memo must be submitted along with the original graded assignment to me for re-grading.

- **Religious Holidays**

Although students are expected to meet every due/deadline, exceptions will of course be made for religious holidays. Students who know they will miss any deadline owing to observance of a religious holiday need to notify the instructor during the first week of the semester.

- **Accommodations**

University of Idaho is committed to ensuring an accessible learning environment where course or instructional content are usable by all students and faculty. If you believe that you require disability-related academic adjustments for this class (including pregnancy-related disabilities), please contact Center for Disability Access and Resources (CDAR) to discuss eligibility. A current accommodation letter from CDAR is required before any modifications, above and beyond what is otherwise available for all other students in this class will be provided. Please be advised that disability-related academic adjustments are not retroactive. CDAR is located at the Bruce Pitman Building, Suite 127. Phone is 208-885-6307 and e-mail is [cdar@uidaho.edu](mailto:cdar@uidaho.edu). For a complete listing of services and current business hours visit <https://www.uidaho.edu/cdar>.

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## COURSE SCHEDULE

**The subsequent weekly schedule in this course are tentative and subject to change.**

**Week 1 (Jan 11): No Class**

**Instructor will be traveling for conferences**

**Week 2 (Jan 16 & Jan 18)–Introduction**

- Read this syllabus
- Geddes, Barbara. 1999. “What do we know about democratization after twenty years?”. *Annual review of political science* 2, no. 1: 115-144.
- Svobik, Milan W. 2012. *The politics of authoritarian rule*. Cambridge University Press. **Chapter 1**
- Guriev, Sergei, and Daniel Treisman. 2020. “The popularity of authoritarian leaders: A cross-national investigation.” *World Politics* 72, no. 4: 601-638.

**Week 3 (Jan 23 & Jan 25)–Measurement**

- Svobik, Milan W. 2012. *The politics of authoritarian rule*. Cambridge University Press. **Chapter 2**
- Geddes, Barbara, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz. 2014. “Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set.” *Perspectives on Politics* 12 (2): 313-311.
- Seva Gunitsky. June 23, 2015. “How do you measure democracy?” *The Washington Post*: [available online](#)

**Week 4 (Jan 30 & Feb 1)–Power Sharing**

- Gandhi, J. and Przeworski, A., 2007. “Authoritarian institutions and the survival of autocrats.” *Comparative political studies*, 40(11), pp.1279-1301. [**Presentation**]
- Svobik, Milan W. 2012. *The politics of authoritarian rule*. Cambridge University Press. **Chapter 3, 4** [**Reaction Essay**]

**Week 5 (Feb 6 & Feb 8)–Coups**

- Powell, Jonathan M., and Clayton L. Thyne. 2011. “Global instances of coups from 1950 to 2010: A new dataset.” *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 2: 249-259.
- De Bruin, Erica. "Preventing coups d'état: How counterbalancing works." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 7 (2018): 1433-1458. [**Reaction Essay**] [**Presentation**]
- Mattingly, Daniel C. 2022. “How the Party Commands the Gun: The Foreign–Domestic Threat Dilemma in China.” *American Journal of Political Science*. [**Reaction Essay**] [**Presentation**]
- Zach Beauchamp. 2016. “Why Turkey’s coup failed, according to an expert.” *Vox*. July 16, 2016: [available online](#)

**Week 6 (Feb 13 & Feb 15)–Repression and Co-optation**

- Greitens, Sheena Chestnut. 2016. *Dictators and their secret police: Coercive institutions and state violence*. Cambridge University Press. **Chapter 2**
- Rozenas, Arturas, and Yuri M. Zhukov. 2019. “Mass repression and political loyalty: Evidence from Stalin’s ‘terror by hunger.’” *American Political Science Review* 113, no. 2: 569-583. [[Presentation](#)]
- Svoboda, Milan W. 2012. *The politics of authoritarian rule*. Cambridge University Press. **Chapter 6** [[Reaction Essay](#)]
- Kim, Wonik, and Jennifer Gandhi. 2010. “Co-opting workers under dictatorship.” *The Journal of Politics* 72, no. 3: 646-658. [[Reaction Essay](#)] [[Presentation](#)]

**Week 7 (Feb 20 & Feb 22)–Information and Propaganda**

- Gunitsky, Seva. 2015. “Corrupting the cyber-commons: Social media as a tool of autocratic stability.” *Perspectives on Politics* 13, no. 1: 42-54.
- Huang, Haifeng. 2015. “Propaganda as signaling.” *Comparative Politics* 47, no. 4 (2015): 419-444. [[Reaction Essay](#)] [[Presentation](#)]
- King, Gary, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts. 2017. “How the Chinese government fabricates social media posts for strategic distraction, not engaged argument.” *American political science review* 111, no. 3: 484-501. [[Reaction Essay](#)] [[Presentation](#)]
- Gehlbach, Scott. 2010. “Reflections on Putin and the Media.” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 26, no. 1: 77-87.

**Week 8 (Feb 27 & Feb 29)–Digital Authoritarianism**

- Xu, Xu. 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. [[Reaction Essay](#)] [[Presentation](#)]
- Frantz, Erica, Kendall-Taylor, Andrea, and Wright, Joseph. 2020. “Digital repression in autocracies.” *V-Dem Institute at the University of Gothenburg*.
- Greitens, Sheena Chestnut. 2020. “Surveillance, security, and liberal democracy in the post-COVID world.” *International Organization* 74, no. S1: E169-E190. [[Reaction Essay](#)]

**Week 9 (Mar 5 & Mar 7)–Authoritarian Elections****Take-home Midterm Exam on March 7 (No Class)**

- Knutsen, Carl Henrik, Håvard Moksleiv Nygård, and Tore Wig. 2017. “Autocratic elections: Stabilizing tool or force for change?.” *World Politics* 69, no. 1: 98-143.
- Miller, Michael K. 2020. “The strategic origins of electoral authoritarianism.” *British Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 1: 17-44.

**Week 10: Spring Break**

**Week 11 (Mar 19 & Mar 21)–Dictators at War I (Crisis/War Initiation)**

- Jessica Weeks. 2012. “Strongmen and Straw Men: Authoritarian Regimes and the Initiation of International Conflict.” *American Political Science Review*. 106(2): 326-347. [[Reaction Essay](#)]
- Colgan, Jeff D., and Jessica LP Weeks. 2015. “Revolution, personalist dictatorships, and international conflict.” *International Organization* 69, no. 1: 163-194. [[Reaction Essay](#)] [[Presentation](#)]
- Lai, Brian, and Dan Slater. 2006. “Institutions of the offensive: Domestic sources of dispute initiation in authoritarian regimes, 1950–1992.” *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 1: 113-126. [[Reaction Essay](#)] [[Presentation](#)]

**Week 12 (Mar 26 & Mar 28)–Dictators at War II (Audience Cost & Signaling)**

- Weeks, Jessica L. 2008. “Autocratic audience costs: Regime type and signaling resolve.” *International Organization* 62, no. 1: 35-64. [[Reaction Essay](#)]
- Weiss, Jessica Chen, and Allan Dafoe. 2019. “Authoritarian audiences, rhetoric, and propaganda in international crises: Evidence from China.” *International Studies Quarterly* 63, no. 4: 963-973. [[Reaction Essay](#)] [[Presentation](#)]
- Weiss, Jessica Chen. 2013. “Authoritarian signaling, mass audiences, and nationalist protest in China.” *International Organization* 67, no. 1: 1-35. [[Reaction Essay](#)] [[Presentation](#)]

**Week 13 (Apr 2 & Apr 4)–Dictators at War III (War/Competition Performance)**

- Reiter, Dan, and Allan C. Stam. 1998. “Democracy, war initiation, and victory.” *American Political Science Review* 92, no. 2: 377-389. [[Reaction Essay](#)] [[Presentation](#)]
- Desch, Michael C. 2002. “Democracy and victory: Why regime type hardly matters.” *International Security* 27, no. 2: 5-47. [[Reaction Essay](#)] [[Presentation](#)]
- Schultz, Kenneth A., and Barry R. Weingast. 2003. “The democratic advantage: institutional foundations of financial power in international competition.” *International Organization* 57, no. 1: 3-42. [[Reaction Essay](#)]

**Week 14 (Apr 9 & Apr 11)–Leadership Turnover**

- Meng, Anne. 2021. “Winning the game of thrones: Leadership succession in modern autocracies.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65, no. 5: 950-981. [[Reaction Essay](#)]
- Bak, Daehee. 2020. “Autocratic political cycle and international conflict.” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 37, no. 3: 259-279. [[Reaction Essay](#)] [[Presentation](#)]
- McGillivray, Fiona, and Alastair Smith. 2004. “The impact of leadership turnover on trading relations between states.” *International Organization* 58, no. 3: 567-600. [[Reaction Essay](#)] [[Presentation](#)]
- Wang, Chen. 2023. “Move First to Avoid the Worst: Leadership Turnover and the Targeting of New Leaders.” *International Studies Quarterly* 67, no. 4: sqad072. [[Reaction Essay](#)]

**Week 15 (Apr 16 & Apr 18)–Democratic Transition**

- Haggard, Stephan, and Robert R. Kaufman. 2012. “Inequality and regime change: Democratic transitions and the stability of democratic rule.” *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 3: 495-516. [[Reaction Essay](#)] [[Presentation](#)]
- Michael L. Ross. 2001. “Does Oil Hinder Democracy.” *World Politics* 53(3): 325-361. [[Reaction Essay](#)]
- Kuran, Timur. 1991. “Now out of never: The element of surprise in the East European revolution of 1989.” *World Politics* 44, no. 1: 7-48. [[Reaction Essay](#)] [[Presentation](#)]

**Week 16 (Apr 23 & Apr 25)–Democratic Backsliding**

- Waldner, David, and Ellen Lust. 2018. “Unwelcome change: Coming to terms with democratic backsliding.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 21: 93-113.
- Graham, Matthew H., and Milan W. Svobik. 2020. “Democracy in America? Partisanship, polarization, and the robustness of support for democracy in the United States.” *American Political Science Review* 114, no. 2: 392-409. [[Reaction Essay](#)] [[Presentation](#)]

**Week 17 (Apr 30 & May 2)–Research Presentation**