

# PSC/IR 251: Contemporary Authoritarian Regimes

University of Rochester

Fall 2020

TR, 11:05am-12:20pm

Classroom: Wegmans Room 1400 (and Zoom!)

Professor: Jack Paine

Office: Harkness 326

Zoom OHs: Tuesdays 12:30-2:30

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**Course overview.** This course will teach students about politics in contemporary authoritarian regimes. The first set of lectures are on coercion: the types of coercive threats that dictators face, how they organize their militaries, and how their coercive agencies can either uphold or end their reigns. We will then focus on institutions common in contemporary authoritarian regimes, including parties, elections, succession procedures, term limits, and media control. In the lead-up to the U.S. election, we will discuss how the U.S. Electoral College works. Finally, we will compare historical and contemporary monarchies, and study other constraints on authoritarian executives. The country coverage is broad, although most examples are from Africa, China, and the Middle East.

## Grading

- There will be six essays assigned throughout the semester, five during various periods marked below, and one during the final class.
- For non-W students, the grade for the course will be the average of your five highest essay grades. That is, five-highest grades will be weighted at 20% each, and the lowest-scoring essay will not count at all. There is nothing special about the final exam, it simply constitutes the last of the six essays.
- For W students, the W component is 30% of the grade, and the five-highest essays are 14% each (as for the non-W students, the lowest-scoring essay does not count toward the grade). The final W paper is approximately 20 pages, with instructions provided at the end of the syllabus. The due dates for a draft of about 10 pages (10% of final grade) and for the final draft (20% of final grade) are listed below.
- Each of the six essays are a maximum of 1,000 words. The questions will be closely related to topics discussed in class and in the readings. Essays must demonstrate substantial use of the assigned readings to earn better than a C. You are encouraged to use your notes and to consult the readings when writing your essays, but you CANNOT discuss the essays with any classmates until you have handed them in.
- Students in the W section that do not complete the W paper will fail the course. Hopefully this is an irrelevant stipulation.

### Coronavirus-related notes

- This is semester is, needless to say, unusual. The grading scheme attempts to accommodate this situation as best as possible. Given the higher-than-usual possibility of a week where it is simply not possible to write an essay, each student can miss one essay *without penalty*. Additionally, each essay is spaced out by several weeks, which hopefully means that if a student has to miss one essay, the illness or other extenuating circumstance will have passed by the time the next essay is due.
- The goal of this grading scheme is to minimize the number of exceptions and extensions for individual students, which will make the grades fairer for everyone. Of course, in our brave new world, even with these safeguards, it is obviously still possible that a student will need an extension. However, before asking for extensions, please understand that the format of assignments is specifically geared to minimize the number of exceptions granted.
- There's a lot of stuff on the technical side of things (recording the lectures, participating via Zoom, etc.) that we will have to deal with during the semester, and I will provide details as I learn them.
- This is obvious, but it is MANDATORY TO WEAR A MASK COVERING YOUR MOUTH AND FACE at all times while in the lecture hall. Students that fail to comply with this rule will be asked to leave.
- I have assigned a group to each student that plans to take the course in person: A, B, C, or D. Based on the covid-adjusted size of our classroom, only three groups can attend each lecture. I have indicated next to each lecture which group cannot attend in person. This is frustrating, obviously, but it is very important that students comply with these guidelines. I will not be able to begin the lecture if we are above the maximum size allowed in the room.

**Role of the TA.** The role of the TA is somewhat unique in this course because they will not teach a separate section. However, with a course of this size, they will be an invaluable resource. Think of them as the administrator for this course—your first line of defense for most email inquiries and other questions about the course. That does not mean you should never contact me, but for most questions, it is best to contact the TA first. They will also grade all the essays, albeit with input from me. I will, however, grade the draft and the final version of the W papers.

**Reading.** There is a sizable chunk of reading each week, as is standard in upper-level political science courses. The lecture material is based off the readings for that week. Students are expected to spend several hours with the readings prior to the first lecture for which it is assigned, and then to spend several more hours after lecture to review and complete the reading. Although this is a lecture course, I encourage students to ask questions throughout and, if possible, we will have broader class discussions. Being acquainted with the material prior to lecture will facilitate better questions and discussions during class. For students participating on Zoom or even watching the lecture videos after the fact, we will do our best to address any questions you have about the material.

Required reading accompanies each group of lectures. There are two required books available through the bookstore. All other readings will be posted to the Blackboard page or have an Internet link.

- Meng, Anne. 2020. *Constraining Dictatorship: From Personalized Rule to Institutionalized Regimes*.
- Roessler, Philip. 2016. *Ethnic Politics and State Power in Africa: The Logic of the Coup-Civil War Trap*.

There are several incentives for actually doing the reading, despite the absence of a discussion section. First, as mentioned above, essays must demonstrate substantial use of the assigned readings to earn better than a C. Second, students who consistently do not attempt to complete the readings forgo the right to use office hours for either myself or for the TA. (By contrast, students who attempt the readings and have questions about parts they do not understand are very much encouraged to ask about them in class or office hours.)

As a piece of advice for how to most productively spend time on the readings, it is important not to lose the forest for the trees when reading academic pieces. Every week contains questions to help guide the readings and to gain key takeaway points, and students should think about those actively when completing the readings. What is the main argument? What are the main pieces of supporting evidence? Reading notes that summarize the main takeaway points will prove useful for the essays.

**Submitting assignments and late policy.** Students will email their essays\* directly to the TA as a Microsoft Word document by the day and time indicated on the syllabus. Please save each file as “LAST NAME-ASSIGNMENT TITLE” to make them easy to catalog. We will make comments on the papers, and this is easiest to do in Word. Given the long amount of time allocated for each essay, *we will not accept late assignments*. The late policy is that assignments handed in between 1 and 24 hours late will receive a full grade off, assignments handed in between 24 and 48 hours late will receive two full grades off, and assignments handed in more than 48 hours late will not be accepted.

\*By contrast, W students should email their draft and final paper directly to me.

**Academic honesty.** Tempted to cheat? Don't do it. Fortunately, there are few possible opportunities for cheating in this course. Students are encouraged to communicate to each other about the readings outside of class (to the extent possible given social distancing limitations), and are encouraged to use their notes when writing the essays. The only exception is that students are NOT ALLOWED to discuss their answers to essay questions with each other or with anyone else prior to handing them in. If I learn that students collaborated or otherwise received help on an essay, then they will receive no credit for that essay and there may be further repercussions. The university's academic honesty policy can be found at: <http://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty>.

**Academic disabilities.** If you have a disability for which you may request an academic accommodation, you are encouraged to contact either of us and the access coordinator for your school to establish eligibility for academic accommodations (please see <https://www.rochester.edu/disability/students.html>).

If any of these policies are unclear or if there are other relevant details for your situation, please contact us sooner rather than later. I hope that this course will be an enjoyable experience for everyone and provides a pleasant distraction from, well, everything else.

## ***Summary of due dates***

- September 18: Essay 1
- October 2: Essay 2
- October 16: Essay 3
- October 23: Draft of W papers (W students only)
- October 30: Essay 4
- November 3: Election day!
- November 13: Essay 5
- November 20: Final W paper (W students only)
- December 8: In-class final (Essay 6)

## ***Schedule of classes***

**August 27 (no A). Overview of the course and embarrassing myself on Zoom**  
**Reading:** Please read the syllabus before class.

### **Part I. Coercion**

**September 1 (no B) and 3 (no C). Organizing the military**

**Key questions:** What factors affect how dictators strategically organize their militaries? How do these choices affect prospects for insider removal (coups)?

**Reading:**

- Chapters 1 and 5 of Greitens, Sheena Chestnut. 2016. *Dictators and Their Secret Police*.
- Chapters 1 and 3 of Harkness, Kristen A. 2018. *When Soldiers Rebel: Ethnic Armies and Political Instability in Africa*.

**September 8 (no D) and 10 (no A). Ethnic powersharing and civil war**

**Key questions:** Why do some rulers systematically exclude members of other ethnic groups from power even if this raises the risk of civil war? Why does ethnopolitical exclusion raise civil war risk? Under what circumstances has peaceful powersharing prevailed in Africa?

- Chapters 1 (only pgs. 1-21), 3, 4, 7, 8, and 10 in Roessler, Philip. 2016. *Ethnic Politics and State Power in Africa: The Logic of the Coup-Civil War Trap*.
  - Chapters 8 and 10 contain statistical analysis. Don't worry about the technical details, just focus on the main takeaways from each chapter.

Essay 1 released after office hours on September 15 (although the essay will not incorporate material from the lecture on Sep. 15). Due 5pm EST on Friday, Sep. 18.

**September 15 (no B) and 17 (no C). Personalist regimes and social revolutions**

**Key questions:** How can rulers sideline other elites to create personalist regimes? What risks does this strategy mitigate, and what risks does it create?

- Chapter 4 of Geddes, Barbara, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz. 2018. *How Dictatorships Work*.
- Goodwin, Jeff and Theda Skocpol. 1989. "Explaining Revolutions in the Contemporary Third World." *Politics & Society*.
- Chapters 3 and 5 of Chehabi, H.E. and Juan J. Linz. 1998. *Sultanistic Regimes*.

**September 22 (no D) and 24 (no A). Protests and repression**

**Key questions:** How do rulers and their militaries respond to popular protests? Under what conditions can popular protests topple dictatorships?

- Chapter 7 (pgs. 154-165 only) of Geddes, Barbara, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz. 2018. *How Dictatorships Work*.
- Bellin, Eva R. 2012. "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring." *Comparative Politics*.
- Chapter 4 of Barany, Zoltan. 2016. *How Armies Respond to Revolutions and Why*.
- Tucker, Joshua A. 2007. "Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Color Revolutions." *Perspectives on Politics*.
- Recent events in Venezuela and Sudan:
  - <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/9/19/16189742/venezuela-maduro-dictator-chavez-collapse>
  - <https://www.vox.com/world/2019/4/11/18306002/sudan-news-bashir-coup-protests-khartoum-auf>

Essay 2 released after office hours on September 29 (although the essay will not incorporate material from the lecture on Sep. 29). Due 5pm EST on Friday, October 2.

### **September 29 (no B) and October 1 (no C). Revolutionary regimes**

**Key questions:** What are the sources of stability in revolutionary regimes? Is the relationship among elites or control of society more important? How do counterrevolutionary movements affect authoritarian durability?

- Levitsky, Steven and Lucan Way. 2013. "The Durability of Revolutionary Regimes." *Journal of Democracy*.
- Meng, Anne and Jack Paine. 2020. "Rebel Regimes and Military Powersharing: Consequences of Conflict for Authoritarian Durability."
  - Don't get wrapped up in the statistical details of my paper. What are the big takeaways? How does it relate to the article by Levitsky and Way?
- Read the theory section and sections on Malaysia (pgs. 44-52, 74-93, 116-124, 146-163, 211-225) in Slater, Dan. 2010. *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia*.
  - The following provides a condensed summary of more recent events in Malaysia that may prove helpful: Pgs. 318-328 of Levitsky, Steven and Lucan A. Way. 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*.

## **Part II. Institutions**

### **October 6 (no D) and 8 (no A). Authoritarian parties**

**Key questions:** In what ways do parties provide effective organizations for helping authoritarian regimes remain in power? What are sources of vulnerability in party regimes? How can parties promote economic growth?

#### **Reading:**

- Chapter 5 of Geddes, Barbara, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz. 2018. *How Dictatorships Work*.
- Miller, Michael K. 2020. "The Autocratic Ruling Parties Dataset: Origins, Durability, and Death." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 64(4): 756-82.
- Chapters 1 and 2 of Shirk, Susan. 1993. *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China*.

Essay 3 released after office hours on October 13 (although the essay will not incorporate material from the lecture on October 13). Due 5pm EST on Friday, Oct. 16.

**October 13 (no B) and 15 (no C). Electoral authoritarianism**

**Key questions:** It is very common for contemporary authoritarian regimes to hold semi-competitive elections, in contrast to 30 years ago. Why have so many dictators agreed to hold elections? How can rulers firmly hold power even when they compete in elections?

**Reading:**

- Selections from Levitsky, Steven and Lucan A. Way. 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*.
  - Chapter 1
  - Post Soviet Union: pgs. 183-213
  - Africa: pgs. 236-265
- Miller, Michael K. 2020. "The Strategic Origins of Electoral Authoritarianism." *British Journal of Political Science*.
- Chapter 3 on the United States from Gibson, Edward L. 2013. *Boundary Control: Subnational Authoritarianism in Federal Democracies*.

**October 20 (no D) and 22 (no A). Succession in office and term limits**

**Key questions:** How do succession rules help to manage leadership transitions in autocracies? Why do leaders create these constraints? In what circumstances do rulers eliminate these constraints?

- Pgs. 1-45 of Versteeg, Mila et al. 2020. "The Law and Politics of Presidential Term Limit Evasion." *Columbia Law Review*.
- Frantz, Erica and Elizabeth A. Stein. 2017. "Countering Coups: Leadership Succession Rules in Dictatorships." *Comparative Political Studies*.
- Nathan, Andrew J. 2003. "Authoritarian Resilience: China's Changing of the Guard." *Journal of Democracy*.
- Shirk, Susan L. 2018. "China in Xi's "New Era": The Return to Personalistic Rule." *Journal of Democracy*.

For W students: Draft of W paper due 5pm EST on Friday, October 23.

Essay 4 released after office hours on October 27 (although the essay will not incorporate material from the lecture on October 27). Due 5pm EST on Friday, Oct. 30.

November 3 is election day in the U.S. For everyone eligible, voting is very important! States try to disenfranchise people, especially students, in lots of arcane ways, so make sure to register ahead of time and learn about your states' requirements for in-person, early, mail-in, etc. forms of voting. If you're voting absentee, make sure to mail in your ballot as early as you can because, well, you know . . . Exercise your right to influence your future!

**October 27 (no B), 29 (no C), November 3 (no D). The U.S. Electoral College**

**Key questions:** Why does the United States choose its executive via indirect elections? How does the Electoral College distort democratic values? What other problems does it cause? Does it serve any worthwhile purposes?

**Reading:**

- Chapters 1-5 of Edwards, George C. 2011. *Why the Electoral College is Bad for America*.
- Chapter 1 of Hasen, Richard. 2012. *The Voting Wars*.
- Short pieces from U.S. News 2012 debate: "Should the United States Get Rid of the Electoral College?"

**November 5 (no A) and 10 (no B). Controlling the media**

**Key questions:** What are authoritarian rulers' goals when imposing media controls? Under what conditions can rulers achieve these goals? When might authoritarian regimes benefit from loosening media controls? How has the advent of the Internet and social media affected prospects for authoritarian regime survival?

**Reading:**

- King, Gary, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts. 2013. "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression." *American Political Science Review*.
- Gunitsky, Seva. 2015. "Corrupting the Cyber-Commons: Social Media as a Tool of Autocratic Stability." *Perspectives on Politics*.
- Pgs. 1885-1903 of Adena et al. 2015. "Radio and the Rise of the Nazis in Prewar Germany." *Quarterly Journal of Economics*.
- Andersen, Ross. 2020. "The Panopticon Is Already Here." *The Atlantic*.

Essay 5 released on November 10. Due 5pm EST on Friday, November 13.

**Part III. Connecting the past to the present**

**November 12 (no C) and 17 (no D). Historical monarchies**

**Key questions:** Why did historical monarchies evolve in different ways with regard to parliaments and the composition of their militaries? What are some important similarities and differences between historical and contemporary dictatorships?

**Reading:**

- Chapters 5 and 6 on Western Europe and China from Stasavage, David. 2020. *The Decline and Rise of Democracy: A Global History from Antiquity to Today*.
- Pgs. 728-737 ("A Note on Mamluk Egypt") of Finer, S.E. 1997. *The History of Government*.
- Pgs. 1-10 (plus the conclusion) of Blaydes, Lisa and Eric Chaney. 2013. "The Feudal Revolution and Europe's Rise: Political Divergence of the Christian West and the Muslim World before 1500 CE." *American Political Science Review*.
- Pgs. 438-443 (plus the conclusion) of Kokkonen, Andrej and Ders Sundall. 2014. "Delivering Stability—Primogeniture and Autocratic Survival in European Monarchies 1000–1800." *American Political Science Review*.

**November 19 and 24.\*\*\* Contemporary monarchies**

**Key questions:** Why do some countries still have ruling monarchies? What “institutions” within ruling families can facilitate survival?

**Reading:**

- Gerring, John et al. 2020. “Why Monarchy? The Rise and Demise of a Regime Type.” *Comparative Political Studies*.
- Huntington, Samuel P. 1966. “The Political Modernization of Traditional Monarchies.” *Daedalus*.
- Chapters 1 and 2 of Herb, Michael. 1999. *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*.
- Gause, F. Gregory. 2013. “Kings for All Seasons: How the Middle East’s Monarchies Survived the Arab Spring.”

\*\*\*To make it fair so that none of the four groups of in-person students are excluded more often than others, I will do a random draw for November 19 to determine who can attend. For the 24<sup>th</sup>, my anticipation is that enough students will have already returned home that everyone should be able to attend in person that wants to, although I’ll check in on this sometime in early November.

**For W students: Final W paper due Friday, November 20 at 5pm EST.**

**November 26. No class – Happy Thanksgiving!**

**December 1 and 3. Constitutional constraints on the executive**

**Key questions:** What are common types of executive constraints in authoritarian regimes? Why do some rulers adopt executive constraints and others create personalist regimes?

**Reading:**

- Chapters 1 (skip the last three subsections), 3, 4, and 8 from Meng, Anne. 2020. *Constraining Dictatorship: From Personalized Rule to Institutionalized Regimes*.

**December 8.** In-class final exam (really, Essay 6). I expect any student in the United States (whether in Rochester or elsewhere) to complete Essay 6 during the normal class period. If this time is infeasible for students currently living abroad, we will coordinate on a second time period as we get closer to the date.

### **Assignment for W students**

The first part of the course covers coercion in authoritarian regimes. A key idea we will discuss is that the nature of the threats that a ruler faces upon attaining power (in particular, the “insider” threat from their military and “outsider” threats from groups not included in the government) greatly influences how they subsequently organize their regime. For the W paper, you will explore this idea in greater depth through two case studies. Each student will choose two authoritarian rulers, subject to my approval. The two rulers can be from either the same or different countries. For the assignment, each student will pick a thesis based on the research we cover in class. They will then apply that thesis to their two cases to test its applicability.

Be mindful of the due dates for the draft and the final paper. Within the first two weeks of class, each W student should propose cases to me. I can help you find sources on the cases. The sooner you start, the position you will be in to write a strong draft (~10 pages) and final paper (~20 pages).