

The Political Economy of Dictatorship and Regime Change

Spring 2024
Friday 10:10 AM - 12:00 PM

Instructor: Eric C.C. Chang (Professor, Dept. of Political Science, Michigan State University)
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Office Hours: Friday 1:00 – 3:00 PM (By Appointment)

Course Description

This course provides a comprehensive examination of authoritarian politics and regime change. Anchored in a political economy perspective, it emphasizes the interplay between politics and economics within and across regime types. The course aims to acquaint students with foundational concepts in this field and to develop further research ideas. It is structured into three distinct modules, outlined as follows. Please note that beginning in April, all classes and office hours will be conducted remotely.

Module 1 establishes the foundational concepts, focusing on how we conceptualize and measure autocratic and democratic regimes. This module also critically examines the political and economic impacts associated with each regime type, setting the stage for more detailed discussions in subsequent modules.

Module 2 examines the governance mechanisms within authoritarian regimes. It investigates how dictators leverage various institutional tools, including political parties and elections, to consolidate power among ruling elites. Additionally, this module explores the strategies of societal repression in authoritarian regimes, with a particular emphasis on information control in the digital era. The module concludes with an analysis of the factors contributing to the durability and resilience of authoritarian systems.

Module 3 shifts the focus to the complexities of regime change. It begins by outlining the primary drivers of democratic transitions, followed by a critical reassessment of the relationship between economic development and democratization. The module also examines the role of economic inequality and natural resources in facilitating or impeding democratic transitions. The final segment of this module addresses the phenomenon of democratic backsliding, offering insights into its causes and implications.

Course Structure

Beginning in Week 2, each class will commence with a brief lecture by me, introducing the weekly theme (in approximately 10-15 minutes). Following this, the majority of the class time will be dedicated to student presentations and discussions related to the weekly theme (details provided below). All of the readings for this course are available as PDF files for easy access.

Course Requirements and Evaluations

Grading will be based on weekly presentations, class participation, and a research proposal.

1. *Weekly Presentations* (25%): Starting from Week 2, each week's readings will be divided among students as evenly as possible. The student responsible for a given reading is required to submit a concise, 2-page essay critically assessing the reading and present their analysis to the class. Each presentation should last approximately 15-20 minutes. The essay must adhere to the following format:
 - a. **Summary:** Concisely summarize the reading in three sentences. Avoid lengthy summaries.

- b. **Analysis of Key Concepts:** Briefly describe the dependent variable (what the authors aim to explain) and the key independent variable (the authors' proposed explanation). Discuss the theoretical concepts these variables represent and how they are empirically operationalized.
- c. **Causal Mechanism:** Outline the basic intuition/logic behind the theory presented in the reading.
- d. **Discussion Questions:** Pose a few analytical (non-normative) questions to guide the class discussion. These questions should encourage participation and may also help in identifying significant topics for your research proposal. As an example, please consider the following aspects when formulating your questions:
 - i. Assess the basic assumptions of the article and their reasonableness.
 - ii. Identify any logical flaws in the arguments.
 - iii. Discuss scenarios where the theory might not apply.
 - iv. Suggest alternative mechanisms that could explain the observed empirical relationship.
 - v. Evaluate whether the relationship holds beyond the cases studied.
 - vi. Critique the methods used and in relation to the research questions.
 - vii. Analyze whether the evidence presented supports the conclusions.
 - viii. Explore other theoretical implications of the arguments.

Your essay should be distributed to all class members no later than 10 AM on the Thursday preceding each Friday class. Late submissions will not be accepted.

- 2. **Class Participation (25%):** Active and informed participation is crucial in this course. Students are required to complete all assigned readings prior to each class, not just the ones they are presenting. This ensures that every student is well-prepared to actively contribute to the discussions every week. A thorough and careful reading of the materials is essential for meaningful participation and engagement in class discussions.
- 3. **Research Proposal (50%):** This major component of the course requires students to write a research proposal of 12-15 pages (Times New Roman, size 12 font, double-spaced). The proposal should outline a promising research agenda that could be pursued beyond the scope of this class. In your research proposal, you are expected to:
 - a. **Question of Inquiry:** Clearly state the research question you intend to explore. What issue or problem are you aiming to address?
 - b. **Significance:** Establish the importance of your research question. Why is this question significant or interesting? What makes it worthy of investigation?
 - c. **Literature Review:** Provide a short review of the current literature and identify the gap your research aims to fill. What new perspectives or contributions does your work offer in comparison to existing literature?
 - d. **Theoretical Framework:** Present your theory, articulate the underlying logic, and formulate your hypothesis in a testable manner.
 - e. **Methodology and Preliminary Evidence:** Describe your research design to test your hypothesis, including your methodology and any preliminary evidence. What results do you anticipate?

Submit a one-page “pre-proposal” of your project by May 31 to me. Upon approval, you will present your proposal in a 15-minute, conference-style presentation during the last two weeks of class. This will be an opportunity to receive feedback from both me and your peers. The final research proposal is due on June 21. Collaborative work is encouraged, with a maximum of one coauthor.

Clarity and coherence in the logical connections of your argument are crucial. The goal is for your research proposal to be developed into a paper suitable for presentation at a professional conference. For guidance on writing an effective research proposal, please refer to “How to Write a Publishable (Class) Paper” by Gary King and “General Advice on Social Science Writing” by Gerring et al.

Course Schedule (Subject to modification based on evolving interests)

Week 1 (2/23): Introduction and Course Overview

Module 1: Foundations

Week 2 (3/1): Conceptualizations and Measures of Autocracy

- Geddes, Barbara, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz. 2014. "Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set." *Perspectives on Politics* 12 (2): 313–31.
- Maerz, Seraphine F., Anna Lührmann, Sebastian Hellmeier, Sandra Grahn, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2020. "State of the World 2019: Autocratization Surges – Resistance Grows." *Democratization* 27 (6): 909–27.
- Svobik, Milan W. 2012. *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1 and 2.
- Wintrobe, Ronald. 1990. "The Tinpot and the Totalitarian: An Economic Theory of Dictatorship." *American Political Science Review* 84 (3): 849–72.

Recommended:

- Boix, Carles, Michael Miller, and Sebastian Rosato. 2013. "A Complete Data Set of Political Regimes, 1800–2007." *Comparative Political Studies* 46 (12): 1523–54.
- Geddes, Barbara, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz. 2018. *How Dictatorships Work: Power, Personalization, and Collapse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Week 3 (3/8): Conceptualizations and Measures of Democracy

- Elkins, Zachary. 2000. "Gradations of Democracy? Empirical Tests of Alternative Conceptualizations." *American Journal of Political Science* 44 (2): 293–300.
- Lindberg, Staffan I., Michael Coppedge, John Gerring, and Jan Teorell. 2014. "V-Dem: A New Way to Measure Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 25 (3): 159–69.
- Lueders, Hans, and Ellen Lust. 2018. "Multiple Measurements, Elusive Agreement, and Unstable Outcomes in the Study of Regime Change." *The Journal of Politics* 80 (2): 736–41.
- Munck, Gerardo L., and Jay Verkuilen. 2002. "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: Evaluating Alternative Indices." *Comparative Political Studies* 35 (1): 5–34.
- Przeworski, Adam, Michael E. Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi. 2000. *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950–1990*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.

Recommended:

- Dahl, Robert A. 1998. *On Democracy*. Yale University Press. Chapter 4.
- Przeworski, Adam. 1991. *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.

Week 4 (3/15): Regime Types and Their Political Economy Consequences

- Baum, Matthew A., and David A. Lake. 2003. "The Political Economy of Growth: Democracy and Human Capital." *American Journal of Political Science* 47 (2): 333–47.
- Besley, Timothy, and Marta Reynal-Querol. 2011. "Do Democracies Select More Educated Leaders?" *American Political Science Review* 105 (3): 552–66.
- Harding, Robin, and David Stasavage. 2013. "What Democracy Does (and Doesn't Do) for Basic Services: School Fees, School Inputs, and African Elections." *The Journal of Politics* 76 (1): 229–45.
- Mesquita, Bruce Bueno De, Alastair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson, and James D. Morrow. 2005. *The Logic of Political Survival*. MIT Press.
- Ross, Michael. 2006. "Is Democracy Good for the Poor?" *American Journal of Political Science* 50 (4): 860–74.

Recommended:

- Cheibub, José Antonio, Jennifer Gandhi, and James Raymond Vreeland. 2010. "Democracy and Dictatorship Revisited." *Public Choice* 143 (1/2): 67–101.
- Sen, Amartya Kumar. 1999. "Democracy as a Universal Value." *Journal of Democracy* 10 (3): 3–17.

Module 2: Autocratic Governance

Week 5 (3/22): Institutions and Power-Sharing in Autocracy

- Boix, Carles, and Milan W. Svobik. 2013. "The Foundations of Limited Authoritarian Government: Institutions, Commitment, and Power-Sharing in Dictatorships." *The Journal of Politics* 75 (2): 300–316.
- Gandhi, Jennifer, and Adam Przeworski. 2007. "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats." *Comparative Political Studies* 40 (11): 1279–1301.
- Magaloni, Beatriz. 2008. "Credible Power-Sharing and the Longevity of Authoritarian Rule." *Comparative Political Studies* 41 (4–5): 715–41.
- Myerson, Roger B. 2008. "The Autocrat's Credibility Problem and Foundations of the Constitutional State." *The American Political Science Review* 102 (1): 125–39.
- Pepinsky, Thomas. 2014. "The Institutional Turn in Comparative Authoritarianism." *British Journal of Political Science* 44 (3): 631–53.

Recommended:

- Svobik, Milan W. 2012. *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 4 and 6.

Week 6 (3/29): Elections in Autocracy

- Guriev, Sergei, and Daniel Treisman. 2020. "The Popularity of Authoritarian Leaders: A Cross-National Investigation." *World Politics* 72 (4): 601–38.
- Knutsen, Carl Henrik, Håvard Mokleiv Nygård, and Tore Wig. 2017. "Autocratic Elections: Stabilizing Tool or Force for Change?" *World Politics* 69 (1): 98–143.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan Way. 2002. "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 13 (2): 51–65.
- Miller, Michael K. 2015. "Democratic Pieces: Autocratic Elections and Democratic Development since 1815." *British Journal of Political Science* 45 (3): 501–30.
- Schedler, Andreas. 2002. "Elections Without Democracy: The Menu of Manipulation." *Journal of Democracy* 13 (2): 36–50.

Recommended:

- Gandhi, Jennifer, and Ellen Lust-Okar. 2009. "Elections Under Authoritarianism." *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (1): 403–22.
- Morse, Yonatan L. 2012. "The Era of Electoral Authoritarianism." *World Politics* 64 (1): 161–98.

Week 7 (4/5): Holiday-Children's Day (No Class)

[From April onwards, all classes and office hours will be conducted remotely.]

Week 8 (4/12): Information Control in Autocracy

- Chen, Jidong, and Yiqing Xu. 2017. "Why Do Authoritarian Regimes Allow Citizens to Voice Opinions Publicly?" *The Journal of Politics* 79 (3): 792–803.
- Egorov, Georgy, Sergei Guriev, and Konstantin Sonin. 2009. "Why Resource-Poor Dictators Allow Freer Media: A Theory and Evidence from Panel Data." *American Political Science Review* 103 (4): 645–68.
- Gehlbach, Scott, and Konstantin Sonin. 2014. "Government Control of the Media." *Journal of Public Economics* 118 (October): 163–71.
- Guriev, Sergei, and Daniel Treisman. 2019. "Informational Autocrats." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33 (4): 100–127.
- King, Gary, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret Roberts. 2013. "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression." *American Political Science Review* 107 (2 (May)): 1–18.

Recommended:

- Edmond, Chris. 2013. "Information Manipulation, Coordination, and Regime Change." *The Review of Economic Studies* 80 (4): 1422–58.
- Rozenas, Arturas, and Denis Stukal. 2019. "How Autocrats Manipulate Economic News: Evidence from Russia's State-Controlled Television." *The Journal of Politics* 81 (3): 982–96.

Week 9 (4/19): Digital Authoritarianism

- Frantz, Erica, Andrea Kendall-Taylor, and Joseph Wright. 2020. "Digital Repression in Autocracies." *V-Dem Institute Working Paper* 2020:27.
- 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 (3): 484–501.
- Pan, Jennifer, and Alexandra A. Siegel. 2020. "How Saudi Crackdowns Fail to Silence Online Dissent." *American Political Science Review* 114 (1): 109–25.
- Xu, Xu. 2021. "To Repress or to Co-Opt? Authoritarian Control in the Age of Digital Surveillance." *American Journal of Political Science* 65 (2): 309–25.
- Zhuravskaya, Ekaterina, Maria Petrova, and Ruben Enikolopov. 2020. "Political Effects of the Internet and Social Media." *Annual Review of Economics* 12 (1): 415–38.

Recommended:

- Keremoglu, Eda, and Nils B. Weidmann. 2020. "How Dictators Control the Internet: A Review Essay." *Comparative Political Studies* 53 (10–11): 1690–1703.
- Roberts, Margaret E. 2020. "Resilience to Online Censorship." *Annual Review of Political Science* 23 (1): 401–19.

Week 10 (4/26): Authoritarian Durability and Resilience

- Bunce, Valerie J., and Sharon L. Wolchik. 2010. "Defeating Dictators: Electoral Change and Stability in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes." *World Politics* 62 (1): 43–86.
- Egorov, Georgy, and Konstantin Sonin. 2011. "Dictators and Their Viziers: Endogenizing the Loyalty-Competence Trade-Off." *Journal of the European Economic Association* 9 (5): 903–30.
- Lachapelle, Jean, Steven Levitsky, Lucan A. Way, and Adam E. Casey. 2020. "Social Revolution and Authoritarian Durability." *World Politics* 72 (4): 557–600.
- Lonardo, Livio Di, Jessica S. Sun, and Scott A. Tyson. 2020. "Autocratic Stability in the Shadow of Foreign Threats." *American Political Science Review* 114 (4): 1247–65.
- Wright, Joseph, Erica Frantz, and Barbara Geddes. 2015. "Oil and Autocratic Regime Survival." *British Journal of Political Science* 45 (2): 287–306.

Recommended:

- Nathan, Andrew J. 2003. "China's Changing of the Guard: Authoritarian Resilience." *Journal of Democracy* 14 (1): 6–17.
- Paine, Jack. 2022. "Strategic Power Sharing: Commitment, Capability, and Authoritarian Survival." *The Journal of Politics* 84 (2): 1226–32.

Module 3: Dynamics of Regime Changes

Week 11 (5/3): Transitions from Autocracy to Democracy

- Acemoglu, Daron, and James A. Robinson. 2005. *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 6.
- Donno, Daniela. 2013. "Elections and Democratization in Authoritarian Regimes." *American Journal of Political Science* 57 (3): 703–16.
- Hadenius, Axel, and Jan Teorell. 2007. "Pathways from Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 18 (1): 143–57.
- Treisman, Daniel. 2020. "Democracy by Mistake: How the Errors of Autocrats Trigger Transitions to Freer Government." *American Political Science Review* 114 (3): 792–810.
- Wright, Joseph, and Abel Escribà-Folch. 2012. "Authoritarian Institutions and Regime Survival: Transitions to Democracy and Subsequent Autocracy." *British Journal of Political Science* 42 (2): 283–309.

Recommended:

- Geddes, Barbara. 1999. "What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1): 115–44.
- North, Douglass C., and Barry R. Weingast. 1989. "Constitutions and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutions Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth-Century England." *The Journal of Economic History* 49 (4): 803–32.

Week 12 (5/10): Development and Democracy

- Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson, James A. Robinson, and Pierre Yared. 2008. "Income and Democracy." *American Economic Review* 98 (3): 808–42.
- Boix, Carles, and Susan C. Stokes. 2003. "Endogenous Democratization." *World Politics* 55 (4): 517–49.
- Epstein, David L., Robert Bates, Jack Goldstone, Ida Kristensen, and Sharyn O'Halloran. 2006. "Democratic Transitions." *American Journal of Political Science* 50 (3): 551–69.
- Inglehart, Ronald, and Christian Welzel. 2005. *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.
- Przeworski, Adam, Michael E. Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi. 2000. *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950–1990*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 2.

Recommended:

- Albertus, Michael. 2017. "Landowners and Democracy: The Social Origins of Democracy Reconsidered." *World Politics* 69 (2): 233–76.
- Lipset, Seymour Martin. 1959. "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy." *The American Political Science Review* 53 (1): 69–105.

Week 13 (5/17): Inequality and Democracy

- Boix, Carles. 2003. *Democracy and Redistribution*. Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.
- Gimpelson, Vladimir, and Daniel Treisman. 2018. "Misperceiving Inequality." *Economics & Politics* 30 (1): 27–54.
- Haggard, Stephan, and Robert R. Kaufman. 2012. "Inequality and Regime Change: Democratic Transitions and the Stability of Democratic Rule." *American Political Science Review* 106 (3): 495–516.
- Houle, Christian. 2009. "Inequality and Democracy: Why Inequality Harms Consolidation but Does Not Affect Democratization." *World Politics* 61 (4): 589–622.
- Ziblatt, Daniel. 2008. "Does Landholding Inequality Block Democratization?: A Test of the 'Bread and Democracy' Thesis and the Case of Prussia." *World Politics* 60 (4): 610–41.

Recommended:

- Ansell, Ben, and David Samuels. 2010. "Inequality and Democratization: A Contractarian Approach." *Comparative Political Studies* 43 (12): 1543–74.
- Kriekhaus, Jonathan, Byunghwan Son, Nisha Mukherjee Bellinger, and Jason M. Wells. 2013. "Economic Inequality and Democratic Support." *The Journal of Politics* 76 (1): 139–51.

Week 14 (5/24): Natural Resource Curse

- Andersen, Jørgen J., and Michael L. Ross. 2014. "The Big Oil Change: A Closer Look at the Haber–Menaldo Analysis." *Comparative Political Studies* 47 (7): 993–1021.
- Dunning, Thad. 2008. *Crude Democracy: Natural Resource Wealth and Political Regimes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1 and 3.
- Haber, Stephen, and Victor Menaldo. 2011. "Do Natural Resources Fuel Authoritarianism? A Reappraisal of the Resource Curse." *The American Political Science Review* 105 (1): 1–26.
- Ross, Michael L. 2001. "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" *World Politics* 53 (3): 325–61.

Recommended:

- Sokoloff, Kenneth L., and Stanley L. Engerman. 2000. "History Lessons: Institutions, Factors Endowments, and Paths of Development in the New World." *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 14 (3): 217–32.

Week 15 (5/31): Democratic Backsliding

- Boese, Vanessa A., Amanda B. Edgell, Sebastian Hellmeier, Seraphine F. Maerz, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2021. "How Democracies Prevail: Democratic Resilience as a Two-Stage Process." *Democratization* 28 (5): 885–907.
- 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 (2): 392–409.
- Lührmann, Anna, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2019. "A Third Wave of Autocratization Is Here: What Is New About It?" *Democratization* 26 (7): 1095–1113.
- Maeda, Ko. 2010. "Two Modes of Democratic Breakdown: A Competing Risks Analysis of Democratic Durability." *The Journal of Politics* 72 (4): 1129–43.
- Svobik, Milan W. 2020. "When Polarization Trumps Civic Virtue: Partisan Conflict and the Subversion of Democracy by Incumbents." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 15: 3–31.

Recommended:

- Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. New York: Crown.

Week 16 (6/7): Student Presentation I

Week 16 (6/14): Student Presentation II