



COURSE UNIT (MODULE) DESCRIPTION

Course unit (module) title	Code
Politics of Authoritarian Regimes	

Academic staff	Core academic unit(s)
Coordinating: Dr. Mažvydas Jastramskis Other:	Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius university, Vokiečių str. 10, LT-01130, Vilnius

Study cycle	Type of the course unit
First	Elective

Mode of delivery	Semester or period when it is delivered	Language of instruction
Face-to-face	4 (spring semester)	English

Requisites	
Prerequisites:	Co-requisites (if relevant):

Number of ECTS credits allocated	Student's workload (total)	Contact hours	Individual work
5	145	32	113

Purpose of the course unit

The aim of this course is to provide knowledge, grounded in extensive research, on the various types of authoritarian regimes, the processes through which they are formed, and the reasons for the survival of and support for the dictatorships. The course will also explore consequences of authoritarianism for state and societal development, as well as the relationship of autocracies with the international system. With democracy watchdogs and scholars agreeing that democracy has been in crisis globally, and with autocracies proliferating over the past decade, a deeper understanding of the politics of such regimes is becoming increasingly crucial – especially as the aggressive foreign policies of autocracies pose a direct threat to Western democracies. Students will be introduced to the main theories and research on authoritarian regimes. The course content has been chosen to cover a wide range of approaches and topics, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of authoritarian politics. These themes include the theoretical and empirical classification of autocracies (such as regime types and the paths of their formation or failure), historical case studies (e.g., Hitler's rise to power, authoritarian enclaves in the southern United States), institutional analysis (e.g., the relationship between organization of security services and repression), sociology and electoral studies of autocracies (e.g., public support, manipulation of electoral results), international politics of autocracies, economic and quantitative data studies (including comparisons with democracies), and case studies of contemporary autocracies (e.g., Russia and China).

Learning outcomes of the course unit	Teaching and learning methods	Assessment methods
To provide a comprehensive, research-based understanding of the types, politics, and institutions of authoritarian regimes, as well as their relationships with history, economics, society, and the international environment.	Study of course literature, work in seminars, discussions	Evaluation of work in seminars, test
To gain a deeper understanding of the theories explaining the politics of authoritarian regimes and to apply this	Study of course literature, work in seminars, discussions	Evaluation of work in seminars, test

knowledge in formulating arguments and analyzing political events.		
To become familiar with the methods, challenges, and potential solutions involved in the research of authoritarian regimes.	Study of course literature, work in seminars, final written examination in essay form	Evaluation of work in seminars, evaluation and comments on final written examination in essay form
To analyze a research question related to authoritarian regimes by formulating and addressing a research problem, while applying the theories learned in the course.	Final written examination in essay form	Evaluation and comments on final written examination in essay form

Content	Contact hours							Individual work: time and assignments	
	Lectures	Tutorials	Seminars	Workshops	Laboratory work	Internship	Contact hours, total	Individual work	Tasks for individual work
<p>1. What is a Dictatorship? Democracies vs. Autocracies vs. Autocracies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How has the term “dictatorship” evolved historically? How do we separate autocracy from democracy? Procedural definition of dictatorship What are the advantages of focusing on elections when defining a dictatorship? How do the dictatorships and dictators differ? Historical origins of different types of dictators What are the nominally democratic institutions? Why do dictators need them? 	2		2				4	4	<p>Reading and analysis of:</p> <p>Jennifer Gandhi, <i>Political Institutions under Dictatorship</i>. Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 1–41.</p>
<p>2. Types and Dilemmas of Dictatorships. Russia as a Personalist Autocracy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major types of autocracies What are the characteristics of personalist autocracies? Main dilemmas and trade-offs faced by (personalist) dictators Why does Frye claim Putin is a weak strongman? Is Putin popular? If so, what are the reasons for his popularity? 			2				2	5	<p>Reading and analysis of:</p> <p>Timothy Frye, <i>Weak Strongman: The Limits of Power in Putin's Russia</i>. Princeton University Press, 2021, pp. 37–65.</p>
<p>3. Autocracies in 21st century: from Repression to Spin Dictatorships?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the main features of 20th century dictatorships? 			2				2	6	<p>Reading and analysis of:</p> <p>Sergei Guriev and Daniel Treisman, <i>Spin Dictators: The</i></p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is a dictatorship of spin? Is it a new model? • Role of violence and repression in a dictatorship (of fear) • Role of the Singapore model in contemporary authoritarianism. • What are the main techniques in the new playbook of dictators? • How can we assess trends in violence and repression in autocracies over time? 									<p><i>Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century</i>. Princeton University Press, 2022, pp. 1–61.</p>
<p>4. Authoritarian Enclaves in Democracy: Southern United States until 1972.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is an authoritarian enclave? • What are the main features of reconstruction period? • What techniques of political exclusion were enshrined in the Southern constitutions of the 1890s? • Why did southern economic elites prefer autocratic and one-party rule? • How was enclave rule maintained in the South? 			2				2	4	<p>Reading and analysis of:</p> <p>Robert Mickey, <i>Paths Out of Dixie: The Democratization of Authoritarian Enclaves in America's Deep South, 1944-1972</i>. Princeton University Press, 2015, pp. 33–63.</p>
<p>5. How Dictatorships Begin? Third Wave of Autocratization.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main ways in which modern dictatorships emerge • Which regimes succumb to dictatorship? • Dictatorial seizure of power: typical mechanics and organisation. • What is special about the third wave of autocratisation (compared to the first two waves)? • How does the erosion of democracy differ from other types of autocratisation? 			2				2	6	<p>Reading and analysis of:</p> <p>Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright and Erica Frantz, <i>How Dictatorships Work</i>. Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 25–43.</p> <p>Anna Lührmann ir Staffan I. Lindberg, “A third wave of autocratization is here: what is new about it?”. <i>Democratization</i> 26(9), pp. 1095–1013.</p>
<p>6. The Weimar Catastrophe: Who Voted for Hitler?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did Hitler come to power? • Theories of the Weimar Catastrophe. • Who voted for Hitler and why? • Different electoral reactions to the Great Depression in Western countries: social structures and political reactions. 			2				2	5	<p>Reading and analysis of:</p> <p>Richard F. Hamilton, <i>Who Voted for Hitler?</i> Princeton University Press, 1982, pp. 3–8, 420–453.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is common between the (authoritarian) aftermath of the American Civil War and the World War I in Europe? • What does Hitler's rise to power say about the origins of authoritarianism/totalitarianism? 								
<p>7. Elections under Authoritarianism. Vote Buying and Ballot-box Stuffing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do dictators need (multiparty) elections? • Definition and types of electoral fraud • Counterfeit democracy and competitive authoritarianism • The toolbox of electoral manipulation and the reasons for the use of different methods • Electoral fraud in autocracies • Ballot box stuffing: effectiveness and risks for autocrats 		2				2	5	<p>Reading and analysis of:</p> <p>Brian Klaas and Nic Cheeseman, <i>How to Rig an Election</i>. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018, pp. 1–12; pp. 61–92 (chapter 2) or pp. 157–181 (chapter 5).</p>
<p>8. Authoritarian Middle Class in the Post-Communist Region.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The link between middle-class growth and regime (change) • Modernisation theory and democratisation • Types of regimes in the post-communist region • The role of economic statism and public employment in autocracies • Reasons for the formation of authoritarian middle class 		2				2	4	<p>Reading and analysis of:</p> <p>Bryn Rosenfeld, <i>The Autocratic Middle Class: How State Dependency Reduces the Demand for Democracy</i>. Princeton University Press, 2021, p. 1–28.</p>
<p>9. Coup-Proofing, Secret Police and Violence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do dictators respond to the threat of overthrow? • Institutions of coercion in authoritarian regimes. • The theory and practice of coups and coup proofing. • The relationship between types of secret police and repressions. • Cases of coup proofing and coercive institutions in the Middle East, Pinochet's Chile and East Germany. 		2				2	7	<p>Reading and analysis of:</p> <p>James Quinlivan, "Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East." <i>International Security</i> 24(2), 1999, pp. 131–165.</p> <p>Sheena Chestnut Greitens, <i>Dictators and their Secret Police</i>. Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 271–291.</p>
<p>10. International Sponsorship of Authoritarianism.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratic decline as a global phenomenon 		2				2	8	<p>Reading and analysis of:</p> <p>Larry Diamond, "Democratic regression in</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International factors contributing to democratic decline • The sharp power of Russia and China • International politics of repression • Violent crackdowns and international influence: the case of the Arab Spring 								<p>comparative perspective: scope, methods, and causes”. <i>Democratization</i> 28(1), 2021, pp. 22–42.</p> <p>Oisín Tansey, <i>International Politics of Authoritarian Rule</i>. Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 14–17, pp. 122–150.</p>
<p>11. Economy and Corruption under Authoritarianism.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is authoritarianism compatible with economic growth? • A historical comparison of democracies and autocracies in terms of economic indicators. • Social development and accountability under dictatorships. • How do skyscrapers contribute to the study of corruption under different regimes? 		2				2	6	<p>Reading and analysis of:</p> <p>Carl Henrik Knutsen, 2021. „A business case for democracy: regime type, growth, and growth volatility“. <i>Democratization</i> 28(8), pp. 1505–1524.</p> <p>Haakon Gjerløw and Carl Henrik Knutsen, 2019. „Leaders, Private Interests, and Socially Wasteful Projects: Skyscrapers in Democracies and Autocracies“. <i>Political Research Quarterly</i> 72(2), pp. 504–520.</p>
<p>12. Authoritarian Welfare State and Welfare for Autocrats.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The welfare state under authoritarianism. • Welfare as an instrument of repression. • The mechanism of the Dibao programme and its authoritarian consequences in China. • Targeted population and social assistance in China. • Seepage politics and political order under dictatorship. 		2				2	6	<p>Reading and analysis of:</p> <p>Jennifer Pan, <i>Welfare for Autocrats: How Social Assistance in China Cares for Its Rulers</i>. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020, p. 1–26; 74–111.</p>

<p>13. Autocratic Bias in Data and Surveys.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can we trust the data provided by authoritarian regimes? • How do satellite images of night-time lights help us study dictatorships? • Fear of power and self-censorship: survey bias in autocracies. • Empirical challenges and solutions in quantitative research on autocracies. 		2				2	6	<p>Reading and analysis of:</p> <p>Magee, Christopher S. P., and John A. Doces. “Reconsidering Regime Type and Growth”: Lies, Dictatorships, and Statistics.” <i>International Studies Quarterly</i> 59(2), 2014, pp. 223–237.</p> <p>Marcus Tannenber. “The autocratic bias: self-censorship of regime support”. <i>Democratization</i> 29 (4), 2022, pp. 591–610.</p>
<p>14. Censorship and Information Manipulation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of censorship in a dictatorship. • Censorship as a system of rewarding the regime's supporters: pop culture in Chile under Pinochet. • Strategies for manipulating the news under autocracy. • Selective assignment of blame for the economy on state television: the case of Russia. 		2				2	6	<p>Reading and analysis of:</p> <p>Esberg, Jane. “Censorship as Reward: Evidence from Pop Culture Censorship in Chile.” <i>American Political Science Review</i> 114(3), 2020, pp. 821–836.</p> <p>Rozenas, Arturas and Denis Stukal. “How Autocrats Manipulate Economic News: Evidence from Russia’s State-Controlled Television.” <i>Journal of Politics</i> 81(3), 2019, pp. 982–996.</p>
<p>15. How Do Autocracies Fall?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How and why do dictatorships fail? • Factors determining the vulnerability of autocracies. • The relationship between the types of autocracies and the processes by which they collapse. 		2				2	7	<p>Reading and analysis of:</p> <p>Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright and Erica Frantz, <i>How Dictatorships Work</i>. Cambridge</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What happens when a dictatorship fails? • Rethinking modernisation theory: does economic growth lead to demands for democratisation? • The impact of modernisation on political values and the interceptive power of autocracy. 									<p>University Press, 2018, pp. 177–217.</p> <p>Yu Liu, Yu-Sung Su & Wenquan Wu, “How modernization theory has stumbled in China: A political interception perspective”. <i>Democratization</i>, 30 (2), 2023, pp. 302–324.</p>	
Test									8	Preparation for test
Final written examination in essay form									20	At the end of the course, select one of the suggested topics related to authoritarian regimes, as proposed by the lecturer. Formulate a clear problem or question to address, and write an essay of at least 10,000 characters (including spaces). This essay will be evaluated as final assignment and should demonstrate the knowledge acquired during the course.
Total									32	113

Assessment strategy	Weight %	Deadline	Assessment criteria
Work in seminars	40	During the semester	Seminar attendance is assessed on a scale of 5 to 10. A score of 5 is given for attending all seminars (with no unexcused absences) and making very infrequent contributions, which are mostly based on personal opinion. A score of 10 is given for attending all seminars and frequently making well-reasoned, logical contributions based on the assigned readings. Alternatively, missed seminars can be made up by providing the lecturer with written answers to the seminar-specific questions.
Test	20	May	The test consists of 20 multiple-choice questions designed to assess the basic knowledge acquired during the course. The maximum score is 10 points, awarded to the student with the highest number of correct answers. For example, if the highest score is 18 out of 20, that student receives 10 points, and other students are awarded proportionately lower scores. A passing grade (5) is given for at least half of the correct answers.
Final written examination in essay form	40	Submitted at the end of the	The assessment of an essay is based on several key criteria. An unsatisfactory score indicates that none of the criteria

		semester (during the exam session)	<p>have been met, while the highest score (10) is awarded for fully meeting all criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The essay is free of grammatical and stylistic errors. • The essay addresses one of the indicative topics suggested by the teacher and formulates a clear problem or question to be answered. • The knowledge acquired during the course is demonstrated, including the correct use of relevant literature, examples, theoretical arguments, and data. • The essay meets the minimum length requirement of 10,000 characters, including spaces.
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Author (-s)	Publishing year	Title	Issue of a periodical or volume of a publication	Publishing house or web link
Required reading				
Jennifer Gandhi	2008	Political Institutions under Dictatorship		Cambridge University Press
Timothy Frye	2021	Weak Strongman: The Limits of Power in Putin's Russia		Princeton University Press
Sergei Guriev and Daniel Treisman	2022	Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century		Princeton University Press
Robert Mickey	2015	Paths Out of Dixie: The Democratization of Authoritarian Enclaves in America's Deep South, 1944-1972		Princeton University Press
Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright and Erica Frantz	2018	How Dictatorships Work		Cambridge University Press
Richard F. Hamilton	1982	Who Voted for Hitler?		Princeton University Press
Brian Klaas and Nic Cheeseman	2018	How to Rig an Election		New Haven: Yale University Press
Bryn Rosenfeld	2021	The Autocratic Middle Class: How State Dependency Reduces the Demand for Democracy		Princeton University Press
Sheena Chestnut Greitens	2016	Dictators and their Secret Police		Cambridge University Press
James Quinlivan	1999	Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East	International Security 24(2)	
Oisín Tansey	2016	International Politics of Authoritarian Rule		Oxford University Press
Larry Diamond	2021	Democratic regression in comparative perspective: scope, methods, and causes	Democratization 28(1)	
Carl Henrik Knutsen	2021	A business case for democracy: regime type, growth, and growth volatility	Democratization 28(8),	
Haakon Gjerløw and Carl Henrik Knutsen	2019	Leaders, Private Interests, and	Political Research Quarterly 72(2)	

		Socially Wasteful Projects: Skyscrapers in Democracies and Autocracies		
Jennifer Pan	2020	Welfare for Autocrats: How Social Assistance in China Cares for Its Rulers		Cambridge University Press
Christopher S. P. Magee and John A. Dozes	2014	Reconsidering Regime Type and Growth“: Lies, Dictatorships, and Statistics.”	International Studies Quarterly 59(2)	
Marcus Tannenberg	2022	The autocratic bias: self-censorship of regime support	Democratization 29	
Jane Esberg	2020	Censorship as Reward: Evidence from Pop Culture Censorship in Chile	American Political Science Review 114(3),	
Arturas Rozenas and Denis Stukal	2019	How Autocrats Manipulate Economic News: Evidence from Russia’s State-Controlled Television.	Journal of Politics 81(3),	
Yu Liu, Yu-Sung Su and Wenquan Wu	2023	How modernization theory has stumbled in China: A political interception perspective	Democratization 30(2)	
Recommended reading				
V-Dem Institute	2024	Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot		https://v-dem.net/documents/43/v-dem_dr2024_lowres.pdf
Carl Henrik Knutsen and Magnus Rasmussen	2018	The Autocratic Welfare State: Old-Age Pensions, Credible Commitments, and Regime Survival	Comparative Political 51(5)	
Hannah Arendt	2017 (1951)	The Origins of Totalitarianism		Penguin Books Limited
Milan W. Svoblik	2013	The Politics of Authoritarian Rule		Cambridge University Press
Diana T. Kudaibergen	2024	The Kazakh Spring: Digital Activism and the Challenge to Dictatorship		Cambridge University Press
Jose Antonio Cheibub,, Jennifer Gandhi and James Vreeland	2010	Democracy and Dictatorship Revisited	Public Choice 143 (1-2)	
Lee Morgenbesser	2022	The Rise Of Sophisticated		Cambridge University Press

		Authoritarianism In Southeast Asia		
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