

Dictators and rebels: authoritarian rule and resistance under authoritarianism



Protests in Belarus, 2020. [Photo: Andrej Stryzhak](#)

Class Time Monday/Wednesday
10.30-11.45
Location Jepson Hall 101



Instructor and contacts

Guzel Garifullina
guzel.garifullina@richmond.edu

Jepson Hall 130
Office hours: by appointment
[Schedule an in-person or Zoom meeting.](#)

Course website: <https://blackboard.richmond.edu>

Course description

In this course, we will explore authoritarian rule – and resistance to authoritarianism. What strategies do authoritarian leaders use to stay in power? How effective are repression and information control? What can people in those regimes do to resist? How do authoritarian leaders come to power and how are they overthrown?

Course goals and learning outcomes

After completing this course, you will understand how contemporary authoritarianism functions and how people who live under such regime (which is up to half of the world population) can experience it, adapt to it, and resist it. We will discuss relevant scholarly findings and illustrate them with historical and contemporary cases. In addition to a general understanding of authoritarian regimes, you will develop your unique regional interest and expertise by picking a country and developing a portfolio of analytical notes about its political development. Knowledge and skills developed throughout this course will help you be a better citizen, navigate contemporary political debates, and prepare for a career in international institutions, public policy, or related spheres.

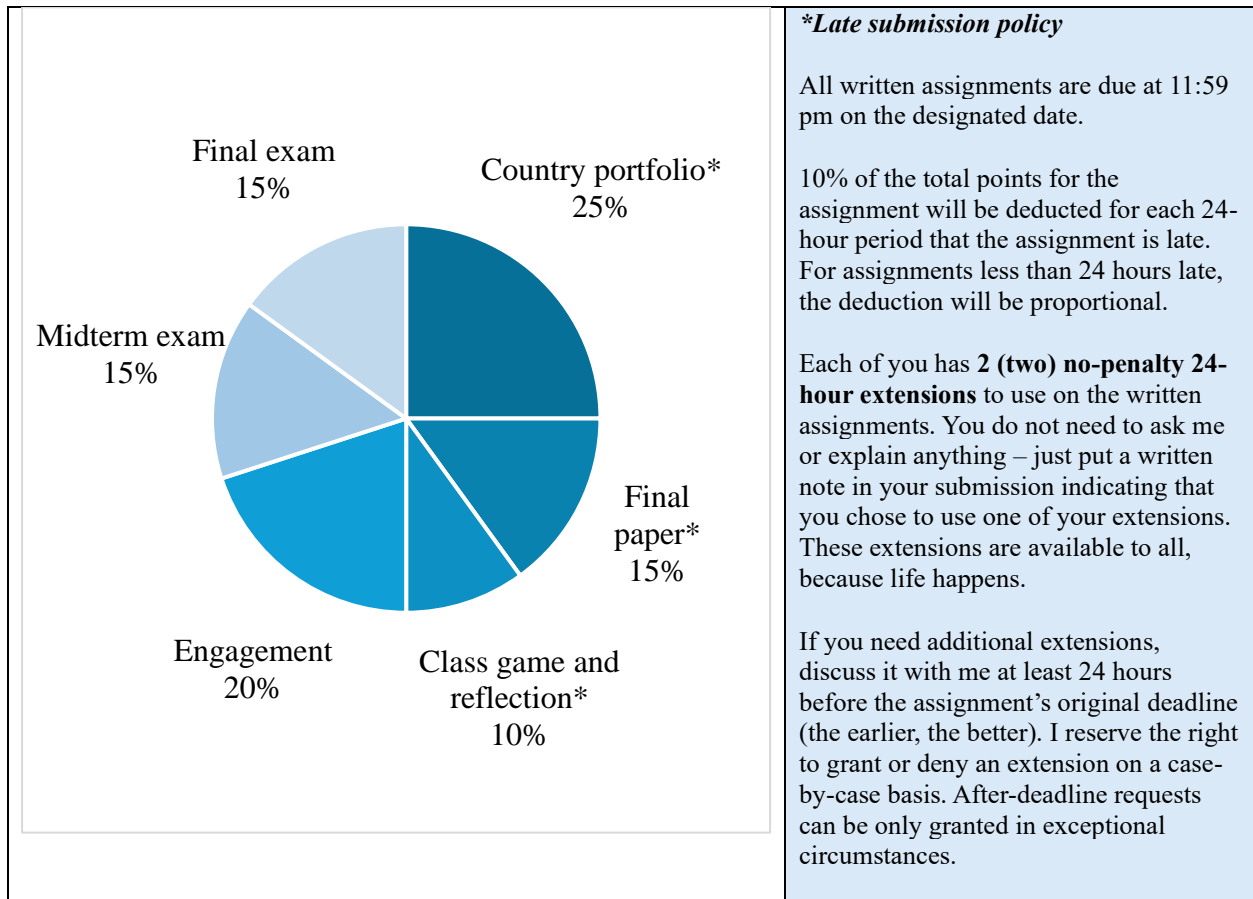
Prerequisites

This course does not have any prerequisites. It is beneficial if you have a regional interest and/or have previously taken courses in comparative politics – either of those would help you narrow down your own interests as you engage with the course material. I am always open to discussing alternative paper topics/countries, etc. that align with your interests or goals.

Reading

There is no required textbook, all course readings (articles and book chapters) will be available on Blackboard.

Assignments and grading



1. Engagement (20%)

Your engagement with the class material is critical in this course. There are several elements of engagement:

What	% grade	How often	Details
Submit questions	5%	Once a week for a full grade	Read the assigned chapter/article and submit 1-2 discussion questions that meaningfully engage with the assigned reading and can encourage a class conversation. Where and when: on Blackboard by 6 pm the day before class. Grading: on submission
Lead class discussion	5%	Twice during the semester	Use the reading questions submitted by your classmates and your own takes on the class readings to lead a 10-15 minute conversation about the topic

			You will sign up for leading the discussion in Week 1 of class, each of you will lead class reading discussion twice during the semester
Engage in class conversations	10%	Every class	<p>There are various ways to participate in this class – all of them help us have more interesting conversations in class.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current events: What is happening in the world right now that is relevant to today’s topic? We will start every class with an opportunity to talk about current events – anyone can jump in with a recent event they read about and explain how it illustrates something we are talking about in class. That’s a chance to have a “prepared” thing to boost your participation score • Individual contributions to class discussion (answering questions, offering comments, participating in the reading discussion, etc.) • Emailing/talking to the instructor about class material. Your meaningful questions and reflections outside of class can count as elements of your participation. <p>Grading: After each class, you get a participation mark: plus, check, or minus. If you have mostly “plus” marks, you get an “A” for this participation element, mostly “checks” – a “B”, and mostly “minuses” results in a “C”.</p>

2. Country portfolio assignments (~2 pages each) (25%)

These assignments build your regional expertise. Throughout the semester, you will explore the political institutions and events in a county of your choice. You will use that knowledge to contribute to class discussions and to write your final paper.

<p>PORTFOLIO 1 (due Week 3) Pick a country, describe its basic institutions (type of authoritarianism) and current leader. Describe how the current leader came to power. Identify 2 trustworthy news sources <u>in this country's language</u>. You will use these sources in the following assignments. Describe how you found the sources and how you evaluated their trustworthiness.</p> <p>PORTFOLIO 2 (due Week 6) What strategies does this leader use, based on the evidence you see in the news reports in the past 6 months? Identify 2-3 strategies from the ones discussed in class and observed in your selected case, explain their relative prominence, and illustrate with examples from the country's recent history.</p> <p>PORTFOLIO 3 (due Week 10) How is the opposition organized in your country? Describe their strategies and recent actions/success specifically regarding electoral and revolutionary resistance</p>	<p><i>Pick a country¹</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Azerbaijan 2. Belarus 3. Cambodia 4. Cuba 5. Egypt 6. Gabon 7. Iran 8. Kazakhstan 9. Kyrgyzstan 10. Laos 11. Libya 12. Mali 13. Myanmar 14. Qatar 15. Turkey 16. Turkmenistan 17. Vietnam 18. Zimbabwe <p>If you want to focus on a country that's not on this list – please talk to me, we will see if that would be a good case to explore.</p> <p><i>Finding local sources:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus on online news portals/online newspaper portals. Find one state-run media in the country and one opposition/critical source. DO NOT use primarily English-language sources – you need sources whose audience is inside the country ▪ Particularly for the critical source, it will be difficult – you might need to go into some Reddit discussions to see what people inside and outside of this country consider credible and why. Authoritarian governments are normally not fond of independent media.
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¹ A sign-up sheet will be available in Week 1

3. Final paper (choose one) (15%)

This is a short ~3 page piece, and you will decide which of those formats is more interesting/useful for you. Discuss your preliminary ideas with me no later than 2 weeks before the final paper is due. I will provide tips and guidance on the expected format.

OPTION 1: policy memo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use your portfolio to write a short policy memo with a prediction: what do you think will be the political trajectory of this country in the next year? 5 years? Explain how the evidence you collected earlier supports these predictions. ▪ This is essentially a political risk assessment.
OPTION 2: essay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Write a reflection paper bringing together (1) a work of fiction (see the list below), (2) at least one of the class readings and (3) evidence you observed in your portfolio case ▪ You can focus on these <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategies of the authoritarian leader/regime elite and their effectiveness ○ Strategies of resistance and their effectiveness ○ Or suggest your own theme that you see present across (1)-(3) and want to explore
+ final paper presentation	Present your final papers (either policy memo or essay) in class. Prepare ONE slide with your biggest takeaways and be ready to answer (and ask) questions. Your performance will be part of the final paper grade.

Suggested works of fiction for the essays

Pick a work of fiction from the list below (or suggest your own) for your final essay. I expect you to choose based on some preliminary ideas you have as you're working on a country portfolio and class readings.

Warning: some of these works contain depictions of violence, including torture and sexual violence. I suggest you read a synopsis/spoilers first if you are worried about processing these topics – or talk to me. Reach out to me if you have any concerns or questions before or during working on this assignment.

Type	Name and year of production	Main theme(s)
Watch	Andor. Season 1 (2022)	resistance movements and ethical dimensions of a rebellion
	The Lives of Others (2006)	surveillance state
	The Death of Stalin (2018)	leadership succession in personalist regimes
	The Official Story (1985)	repression and human rights violations under authoritarian regimes

	Jojo Rabbit (2019)	repression and resistance under repression
Read	The Queue (2012) by Basma Abdel Aziz	nature of authoritarianism and citizen experience of authoritarianism
	One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (1962) by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn	humanity and individual resistance
	Story of a Secret State: My Report to the World (1944) by Jan Karski	repression and resistance under repression

Feel free to suggest (and discuss with me) other works of fiction that can help you explore specific themes.

4. Class game and reflection (10%)

We will play a simulation game in class to explore the topics covered in this course in a more hands-on way. In the game, you will be assigned a side (authoritarian elites or resistance), formulate your actions in a given situation, and respond to the other side’s actions.

The game assignment includes reading the game materials beforehand, participating in the class exercise, and writing a 1-page reflection after the game, connecting it to class readings.

5. Midterm exam and final exam (15% and 15%)

In-class exams will consist of multiple-choice and short-answer questions that focus on the key concepts and theories covered in class lectures and readings. They will also include short-answer questions that will ask you to discuss historical and current events relevant to specific topics.

Weekly schedule and readings

Week	Monday	Wednesday	Assignments and due dates
1	<p>What does political regime mean for human experience? Course overview and expectations.</p> <p>Read the course syllabus</p>	<p>Authoritarianism. Definition and types/examples.</p> <p>The Politics of Authoritarian Rule (pp.19-26)</p>	
2	<p>No class – Martin Luther King Day</p>	<p>Institutions of authoritarianism: it's not just the dictator</p> <p>HDW Chapter 6 (pp.129-143)</p> <p>Levitsky, S. and Way, L.A., 2002. Elections without democracy: The rise of competitive authoritarianism. <i>Journal of Democracy</i>, 13(2), pp.51-65.</p>	
3	<p>Strategies of authoritarian survival: coercion/repression. Institutions of repression. The military and the secret police.</p> <p>HDW Chapter 7</p>	<p>Strategies of repression. When are (and aren't) repressions effective?</p> <p>Young, L.E., 2019. The psychology of state repression: Fear and dissent decisions in Zimbabwe. <i>American Political Science Review</i>, 113(1), pp.140-155.</p>	<p>PORTFOLIO 1 Monday, January 27th</p>
4	<p>Information: propaganda</p>	<p>Information: controlling citizen expression in the digital age</p>	

	Strongmen. Chapter 5 (Propaganda)	Miles Kenyon. 2020. WeChat Surveillance Explained (The Citizen Lab) Zhenqi Jessie Liu. 2020. How Allowing a Little Bit of Dissent Helps the Chinese Government Control Social Media (Promarket)	
5	Cooptation: neutralizing your opponents Sika, N. (2019). Repression, cooptation, and movement fragmentation in authoritarian regimes: Evidence from the youth movement in Egypt. <i>Political Studies</i> , 67(3), 676-692.	Guest speaker: Natalia Forrat Forrat, N. (2024). <i>The Social Roots of Authoritarianism</i> . Oxford University Press, Chapter 1.	
6	Strategies of resistance. Everyday resistance. Resistance of the weak. Scott, James C. "Everyday forms of resistance." In <i>Everyday forms of peasant resistance</i> , pp. 3-33. Routledge, 2016.	Opposition and elections. When can the opposition win authoritarian elections? Bunce, V. J., & Wolchik, S. L. (2010). Defeating dictators: Electoral change and stability in competitive authoritarian regimes. <i>World politics</i> , 62(1), 43-86.	PORTFOLIO 2 Monday, February 17th
7	Post-election protests Tucker, Joshua A. 2007. "Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Color Revolutions." <i>Perspectives on Politics</i> .	Leading a revolution. The Arab Spring Who are the revolutionary leaders? Who joins them and why? Soueif, A. (2011). <i>Tweets from Tahrir: Egypt's revolution as it unfolded, in the words of the people who made it</i> . OR Books. (Introduction and Chapters 1-3)	
8	Midterm review	Midterm exam	

9	<p>(How) can authoritarians lose power? Change without change: coups.</p> <p>Clayton Besaw. 2020. Mali celebrates after president's ouster – but there are few 'good coups' (The Conversation)</p>	<p>A rare beast: pacted transitions</p> <p>The Guardian. Polish round table talks - archive, 1989</p> <p>Kramer, K. (2006). Arab political pacts: an unlikely scenario. <i>Journal of Democracy</i>, 17(4), 160-165.</p>	
10	<p>Democratization. Revolutions</p> <p>Goodwin, J., & Skocpol, T. (1989). Explaining revolutions in the contemporary Third World. <i>Politics & Society</i>, 17(4), 489-509.</p>	<p>Revolutions (continued)</p> <p>Daniel P. Ritter. 2016. Why unarmed revolutions topple some dictators but not others (Monkey Cage)</p> <p>Lucia Ardovini. 2016. Five years on, the spirit of Tahrir Square has been all but crushed (The Conversation)</p>	<p>PORTFOLIO 3 Monday, March 24th</p>
11	<p>GAME</p> <p>Read posted game materials</p>	<p>Dictators and death</p> <p>Kendall-Taylor, A., & Frantz, E. (2016). When dictators die. <i>Journal of Democracy</i>, 27(4), 159-171.</p>	
12	<p>(How) can authoritarians come to power in democracies? Coups.</p> <p>Schiel, R. E. (2019). An assessment of democratic vulnerability: Regime type, economic development, and coups d'état. <i>Democratization</i>, 26(8), 1439-1457.</p>	<p>Democratic backsliding and self-coups.</p> <p>Shin, G.-W. (2024) What Happened to South Korea's Democracy? <i>Journal of Democracy</i> (online exclusive)</p>	<p>Written reflection on the game: Monday, April 7th</p>
13	<p>Authoritarians winning (democratic) elections. Populism</p>	<p>What can autocracies and resistance to them teach us about preserving democracy?</p>	

	Scheppele, K. L. (2022). How Viktor Orbán wins. <i>Journal of Democracy</i> , 33(3), 45-61.	Saving Democracy (chapter from How Democracies Die)	
14	Final paper presentations (in class)	Final review	FINAL PAPER (memo OR essay) Monday, April 21st

Resources

If you experience difficulties in this course, do not hesitate to consult with me. There are also other resources that can support you in your efforts to meet course requirements.

Academic Skills Center (asc.richmond.edu):

Assists students in assessing their academic strengths and weaknesses; honing their academic skills through teaching effective test preparation, critical reading and thinking, information conceptualization, concentration, and related techniques; working on specific subject areas (e.g., calculus, chemistry, accounting, etc.); and encouraging campus and community involvement. Tutors will be available virtually. The on-call peer tutors available for these appointments are listed in the Box file: On-Call Online Tutors (<https://richmond.box.com/s/dpe37chr2zodr3o1amtj8omjk72v2ktb>). Email Roger Mancastroppa (rmancast@richmond.edu) and Hope Walton (hwalton@richmond.edu) for appointments in academic and life skills to request a Zoom conference.

Boatwright Library Research Librarians: (library.richmond.edu/help/ask/ or 289-8876):

Research librarians help students with all steps of their research, from identifying or narrowing a topic to locating, accessing, evaluating, and citing information resources. Librarians support students in their classes across the curriculum and provide library instruction, tutorials, research guides, and individual help. All research support will be provided online or by appointment and students can contact a librarian for help via email (library@richmond.edu), text (804-277-9ASK), chat, or Zoom (by appointment).

Career Services: (careerservices.richmond.edu or 289-8547):

Can assist you in exploring your interests and abilities, choosing a major or course of study, connecting with internships and jobs, and investigating graduate and professional school options. We encourage you to schedule an appointment with a career advisor early in your time at UR.

Counseling and Psychological Services (caps.richmond.edu or 289-8119):

Assists currently enrolled, full-time, degree-seeking students in improving their mental health and well-being, and in handling challenges that may impede their growth and development. Services include brief consultations, short-term counseling and psychotherapy, skills-building classes, crisis intervention, psychiatric consultation, and related services.

Disability Services (disability.richmond.edu)

The Office of Disability Services works to ensure that qualified students with a disability (whether incoming or current) are provided with reasonable accommodations that enable students to participate fully in activities, programs, services, and benefits provided to all students. Please let your professors know as soon as possible if you have an accommodation that requires academic coordination and planning.

Speech Center (speech.richmond.edu or 289-6409):

Assists with preparation and practice in the pursuit of excellence in public expression. Recording, playback, coaching, and critique sessions offered by teams of student consultants trained to assist in developing ideas, arranging key points for more effective organization, improving style and delivery, and handling multimedia aids for individual and group presentations. Remote practice sessions can be arranged; we look forward to meeting your public speaking needs.

Writing Center (writing.richmond.edu or 289-8263):

Assists writers at all levels of experience, across all majors. Students can schedule appointments with trained writing consultants who offer friendly critiques of written work.

Course Policies

Academic Integrity and Collaboration

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are vital for any intellectual community. For the oral or written assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics or seek advice from your peers. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit is the result of your own research and writing. You should also adhere to standard citation practices in the discipline by properly citing any written works that you reference in your assignments. You will be expected to pursue your academic studies with integrity and must follow the Honor Code. The shortened version of the honor pledge is the following: “I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work.”

All assignments are expected to be the student’s original work. The Jepson School follows the provisions of the Honor System as outlined by the School of Arts and Sciences. This means that no student is to use, rely on or turn in work that was paid-for, copied, excessively summarized without citation, created in collaboration (without permission), produced by AI, or is otherwise not the original work of the student for the specific assignment (without explicit permission).

Awarding of Credit

To be successful in this course, a student should expect to devote 10-14 hours each week, including class time and time spent on course-related activities.

registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/academic-credit.html

Disability Accommodations

The University of Richmond’s office of Disability Services strives to ensure that students with disabilities and/or temporary conditions (i.e., concussions & injuries) are provided opportunity for full participation and equal access. Students who are approved for academic accommodations must complete the following steps to implement their accommodations in each class:

- 1) Submit their Disability Accommodation Notice (DAN) to each of their professors via the Disability Services Student Portal available at this link: sl.richmond.edu/be.
- 2) Request a meeting with each professor to create an accommodation implementation plan. Disability Services is available to assist, as needed.

It is important to complete these steps as soon as possible because accommodations are never retroactive, and professors are permitted a reasonable amount of time for implementation. Students who are experiencing a barrier to access due to a disability and/or temporary condition are encouraged to apply for accommodations by visiting disability.richmond.edu. Disability Services can be reached at disability@richmond.edu or 804-662-5001.

Honor System

The Jepson School supports the provisions of the Honor System. The shortened version of the honor pledge is: “I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work.”

<https://studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/student-handbook/honor/index.html>

Religious Observance

Students should notify their instructors within the first two weeks of classes if they will need accommodations for religious observance.

registrar.richmond.edu/planning/religiousobs.html

Addressing Microaggressions on Campus

Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership². Recent research has found that, when professors do not address microaggressions in class, microaggressions foster alienation of marginalized groups³. Furthermore, both students and faculty who are exposed to microaggressions more often are more likely to have depressive symptoms and negative affect (a negative view of the world)⁴. A comfortable and productive environment where meaningful learning happens can be collectively created through actions, words, or environmental cues that promote the inclusion and success of marginalized members, recognizing their embodied identity, validating their realities, resisting sexism, ableism, and racism⁵.

The University of Richmond is committed to building an inclusive community. To this end, the Student Center for Equity and Inclusion (SCEI) was created in 2021 and offers ongoing support and assistance for a diverse student body.⁶ With this in mind, as a community member at the University of Richmond, I pledge to address microaggressions in the classroom by holding myself, other students, and faculty accountable for what is said and being receptive to criticism when perpetuating these slights, snubs, or insults.

² Sue, S., Zane, N., Nagayama Hall, G. C., & Berger, L. K. (2009). The Case for Cultural Competency in Psychotherapeutic Interventions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60(1), 525–548. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163651>

³ Bergom, I., Wright, M.C., Brown, M.K. and Brooks, M. (2011), Promoting College Student Development through Collaborative Learning: A Case Study of Hevruta. *About Campus*, 15, 19-25. <https://doi.org/10.1002/abc.20044>

⁴ Nadal, K. L., Griffin, K. E., Wong, Y., Hamit, S., & Rasmus, M. (2014). The Impact of Racial Microaggressions on Mental Health: Counseling Implications for Clients of Color. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 92(1), 57– 66. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2014.00130.x>

⁵ Rolón-Dow, R. (2019). Stories of Microaggressions and Microaffirmation: A Framework for Understanding Campus Racial Climate. *NCID Currents*, 1(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/currents.17387731.0001.106>

⁶ <https://inclusion.richmond.edu/>