

CPO4053: Politics under Authoritarianism
Spring 2026 | 3 credits

NOTE: This course complies with all UF academic policies. For information on those policies and for resources for students, please see UF's "[Academic Policies and Resources](#)" web page.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Meeting days and times: M, W, F (11:45 AM - 12:35 PM)

Class location: Anderson Hall (AND), room 101

Instructor(s):

Name: Mai Frndjibachian

Office Building/Number: Anderson Hall, room 010

Email: m.frndjibachian@ufl.edu

Office Hours: Wednesdays from 12:45 PM to 2:45 PM

Course Description

In the late twentieth century, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union led some scholars to speak about “the end of history” where liberal democracy would be the only form of government left standing. However, authoritarian regimes in different parts of the world continue to demonstrate their resilience. In this course, we will explore the different types of authoritarian regimes, exploring their characteristics and political workings, including legitimation strategies, through various examples. Specifically, we will examine military, single-party, personalistic/sultanistic, and hybrid regimes, exploring how they manage to stay in power and asking ourselves whether regime change could occur.

This course has a heavy reading load, multiple in-class exercises, and team/class discussions. It will be structured following the Team-Based Learning (TBL) system. In the first week of the course, I will place you in a permanent team. You will work in the same team for the entire semester through various assessment sessions and application exercises. I expect that you will come to class fully prepared to discuss and apply the reading contents in class activities. Please feel free to come to my office hours to discuss your concerns regarding any class readings, assignments, presentations, etc.

Prerequisites

Prereq: CPO 2001.

General Education Designation: none.

COURSE MATERIALS

- Brooker, Paul. (2014). *Non-democratic Regimes: Theory, Government and Politics* (3rd ed.). United Kingdom. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Alderman, P. (2023). *Branding Authoritarian Nations: Political Legitimation and Strategic National Myths in Military-Ruled Thailand* (1st ed.). Routledge. (available on UF Digital Library)
- Linz, Juan, & Chehabi, Houchang. (1998). *Sultanistic Regimes*. United Kingdom: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Tan, Netina, & Kasuya, Yuko. (2025). *Routledge Handbook of Autocratization in Southeast Asia*. (1st ed.). Taylor & Francis Group. (available on UF Digital Library)

Additional articles and book chapters are available on UF Library and the provided web links. If you wish to access these readings from off campus, you will need to install the Gatorlink VPN software (available here – UF Gatorlink VPN Service) and follow the instructions.

Materials will be available through the following means: Canvas and UF Digital Library

COURSE GOALS

Course Objectives

In this course we will:

- Analyze the core characteristics, structures, and variations of authoritarian regimes across different contexts.
- Evaluate the strategies used by authoritarian governments to maintain legitimacy and political control.
- Apply theoretical and empirical knowledge to assess the prospects and processes of regime change.
- Develop teamwork, communication, and critical thinking skills through Team-Based Learning and collaborative research projects.

Student Learning Outcomes

A student who successfully completes this course will be able to:

- Identify and differentiate between military, one-party, personalistic/sultanistic, and hybrid authoritarian regimes in written and oral formats.
- Explain and critique the mechanisms of authoritarian legitimation using evidence from assigned readings and case studies.
- Formulate and defend an original, evidence-based argument on the future trajectory of a hypothetical authoritarian regime in both a written paper and a class presentation.
- Collaborate effectively in a team setting to complete assessments, deliver presentations, and engage in constructive peer review.

GRADED WORK

Attendance (10%): Attendance is mandatory. Per the University's policies, absences count from the first-class meeting. Acceptable reasons for absence from or failure to engage in class include the following:

- Illness – *documentation preferred*;
- Title IX-related situations;
- serious accidents or emergencies affecting the student, their roommates, or their family – *needs notification asap*;
- special curricular requirements (e.g., judging trips, field trips, professional conferences) – *needs documentation*;
- military obligation – *documentation preferred*;
- severe weather conditions that prevent class participation – *based on the university's weather alert system*;
- religious holidays – *needs prior notice*;
- participation in official university activities (e.g., music performances, athletic competition, debate) – *needs documentation*;
- and court-imposed legal obligations (e.g., jury duty or subpoena) – *needs documentation*.

Other reasons (e.g., a job interview or club activity) may be deemed acceptable if approved by the instructor. For all planned absences, a student in a situation that allows an excused absence from a class, or any required class activity must inform the instructor as early as possible prior to the class. For all unplanned absences because of accidents or emergency situations, students should contact their instructor as soon as conditions permit (refer to the list above to see what's needed). Students shall be permitted a reasonable amount of time to make up the material or activities covered during absence from class or inability to engage in class activities because of the reasons outlined above.

Participation (15%): Participation includes all forms of in-class engagement, such as leading class discussion, completing worksheets, contributing to simulations, and actively participating in team-based tasks. You will be assessed on the quality of your engagement and your contribution to class activities; behaviors such as not speaking during discussions, being distracted (e.g., using your phone or unrelated materials), or disengaging from team tasks will negatively affect this grade.

- As part of participation, **each team will serve once (1) as the discussion leader** on one of the eight designated presentation days. The discussion leader will begin class with a 10–15 minute presentation introducing the assigned country case, summarizing the assigned readings, highlighting central arguments and concepts. Afterwards, the class will move into a whole-class Q&A/discussion session.
- During this Q&A, **each of the other teams must ask reading-based, non-repeated questions**, and the entire class – including the discussion leader team – will collaboratively work through the answers.
- The discussion leading team must submit their presentation/visuals, and all audience teams must submit three (3) discussion questions **on Canvas by 11:59 PM the night before the scheduled discussion.**
- This activity (leading discussion and submitting questions) accounts for 5% of the total participation grade on its own. There are other activities to be announced in class that will account for the remaining 10%.

Five Assessment Sessions (40%): There are five assessment sessions. For each assessment session, individual and team sections will occur in the following order:

- At the start of the class session, students will take Individual section in 20 minutes, on Canvas.
- After submitting answers to the Individual quiz, students will break into their assigned team to collectively take the Team section in the next 25 minutes on paper.
- To account for varied interpretations, each quiz will provide space for you/your group to explain your choices of answer.

Students are required to bring proper devices and stationery, such as 2B pencils and erasers to work on the quizzes. Contact me immediately if you have to miss or have missed any assessment sessions. We will schedule for make-up quizzes accordingly.

Final Paper Team Project (35%):

This is a team project comprising of three (3) parts: a written team paper, a team presentation, and inter-team constructive review/defense. No late submissions allowed. Late submissions will receive a 10% penalty, and it will be applied to every member of the team.

- **Part I: Team Paper (15-20 pages) – 20%**

The final team paper for this course will be a combination of creative and academic writing. The team paper comprises of 2 smaller papers, each paper asks the following questions:

- **PAPER 1: If you could have your own authoritarian regime, what would it look like? How would you keep the regime in power?**
 - The answer to this question should be approximately 10-15 pages and will be due on **March 22**.
 - This small paper is worth 75 points
- **PAPER 2: Will it stay as it is, become even more non-democratic/authoritarian, or democratize?**
 - The answer to this question should be approximately 5 pages and will be due on **April 11**.
 - This small paper is worth 25 points

The final score of the team paper is the sum of the points your team earn from both smaller papers 1 and 2, totaling 100 points. Use your knowledge about the different types of authoritarian regimes and the various empirical cases to justify/explain your choice of authoritarian regime as well as how you think your regime would proceed in history.

Your grade for **Part I** will be calculated based on the quality of the entire **team paper**. The team paper's grade is your grade for this part of the project.

- **Part II: Team Presentation – 10%**

Each team will prepare presentation slides based on their team paper (Part I) to present in front of class for 10 minutes. Every team member will have to participate in the presentation. After the presentation, another team chosen as your reviewer will begin asking questions. The ensuing Q&A session will proceed in approximately 10 minutes

Your grade for **Part II** will be calculated as follows:

- **Individual performance** in presenting their specific slides will account for 60% of the team presentation grade.
- **Team performance** on the whole presentation AND during the Q&A with the reviewing team will account for the remaining 40% of the team grade.

• **Part III: Team Review – 5%**

- Each team will serve as the reviewer for the presentation of one other team. The review session lasts 5 minutes, occurring right after the other team's presentation. You will not know in advance which other team you are reviewing until the day of the presentation. If your team has served as the reviewer on the previous presentation day, you will not be asked to do another review. All members of your team will have to participate in the review process, posing questions and making constructive suggestions to the other team.

Your grade for **Part III** will be calculated based on *the whole team's performance* during the reviewing process.

Two Peer Evaluation Rounds

There will be two (2) rounds of peer evaluation in which you are required to evaluate and comment on the performance of every team member (except yourself) based on the form to be provided by me. This will be done anonymously, so honesty is greatly encouraged. You will also receive a peer evaluation score from your team members. The student with the highest average after both rounds of peer evaluation will receive an additional 1% to their total course performance at the end of the semester.

For example, if student A has 89.2% at the end of the semester, and if student A receives the highest average rating from their teammates after both rounds of peer evaluation, student A's final grade to be reported to UF is $89.2\% + 1\% = 90.2\%$.

***Note: I do not provide any other opportunities for extra credit or for rounding up your grade*

TOTAL: 100%

Grading Scale

A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	84-86
B-	80-83
C+	77-79

C	74-76
C-	70-73
D+	67-69
D	64-66
D-	61-63
E	60 or below

Note: A minimum grade of C is required to earn General Education credit.

CALENDAR

Date	Topic	Readings/Preparation
January 12	Intro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explaining the syllabus: Course objectives, requirements, etc. Team surveys.

January 14	Post Cold-War Perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fukuyama, F. (1989). The end of history? <i>The National Interest</i>. http://www.wesjones.com/eoh.htm Huntington, S. (1993). The clash of civilizations? <i>Foreign Affairs</i>, 72(3), 22–49.
January 16	What is an Authoritarian Regime?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schmitter, P., & Karl, T. (1991). What democracy is...and is not. <i>Journal of Democracy</i>, 2(3), 75–88. Schlumberger, O. (2015). Authoritarian regimes. In <i>Oxford Handbook Topics in Politics</i>. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935307.013.18
January 19	NO CLASS	Team assignment announced on Canvas + presentation day assigned
January 21	Intro Military Regimes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brooker, P. (2014). <i>Non-democratic regimes: Theory, government and politics</i> (Chapter 3, pp. 68–85). Role of military in politics
January 23	Tactics/Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grewal, S., & Kureshi, Y. (2019). How to sell a coup: Elections as coup legitimization. <i>Journal of Conflict Resolution</i>, 63(4), 1001–1031. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002718770508 Catoggio, M. (2011). Religious beliefs and actors in the legitimization of military dictatorships in the Southern Cone, 1964–1989. <i>Latin American Perspectives</i>, 38(6), 25–37.
January 26	Military: Myanmar (Team present 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maizland, L. (2022). <i>Myanmar's troubled history: Coups, military rule, and ethnic conflict</i>. Council on Foreign Relations. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/myanmar-history-coup-military-rule-ethnic-conflict-rohingya Kwak, S. (2024). No regime change in Myanmar, so far: Exploring the conceptual chains between civil resistance and junta repression. <i>Contemporary Southeast Asia</i>, 46(2), 271–294.
January 28	Military: Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alderman, P. (2023). <i>Branding authoritarian nations: Political legitimization and strategic national myths in military-ruled Thailand</i> (1st ed.). Routledge. Chapter 3 and 4.
January 30	Assessment #1	IN-CLASS QUIZZES
February 2	Intro One-Party Regimes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brooker, P. (2014). <i>Non-democratic regimes: Theory, government and politics</i> (Chapter 4, pp. 86–101). Huntington, S. (1970). Social and institutional dynamics of one-party systems. In S. P. Huntington & C. H. Moore (Eds.), <i>Authoritarian politics in modern society: The dynamics of established one-party systems</i> (pp. 3–44). Basic Books.
February 4	Life Cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smith, B. (2005). Life of the party: The origins of regime breakdown and persistence under single-party rule. <i>World Politics</i>, 57(3), 421–451. Kalyvas, S. (1999). The decay and breakdown of communist one-party systems. <i>Annual Review of Political Science</i>, 2(1), 323–343.
February 6	Tactics/Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wu, W.-C. (2020). Rethinking coalition size and trade policies in authoritarian regimes: Are single-party dictatorships less protectionist? <i>Party Politics</i>, 26(2), 143–153. Malesky, A., Abrami, R., & Zheng, Y. (2011). Institutions and inequality in single-party regimes: A comparative analysis of Vietnam and China. <i>Comparative Politics</i>, 43(4), 409–427.
February 9	One-Party: Cuba (Team present. 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hoffmann, B. (2015). The international dimension of authoritarian regime legitimization: Insights from the Cuban case. <i>Journal of International Relations and Development</i>, 18(4), 556–574. Thiery, P. (2016). Political rule in revolutionary Cuba between legitimization, co-optation, and repression. In <i>Ideocracies in Comparison</i> (pp. 261–286). Routledge.
February 11	One-Party: East Asia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Olbrich, P., & Shim, D. (2019). Symbolic practices of legitimization: Exploring domestic motives of North Korea's space programme. <i>International Relations of the Asia-Pacific</i>, 19(1), 33–61.

Commented [MOU1]: the professionalism thesis, the modernization thesis, and the democratization thesis

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hellmann, O. (2021). The dictator's screenplay: Collective memory narratives and the legitimacy of communist rule in East Asia. <i>Democratization</i>, 28(4), 659–683.
February 13	Assessment #2	IN-CLASS QUIZZES
February 16	Intro Personalist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linz, J., & Chehabi, H. (1998). <i>Sultanistic regimes</i> (Chapter 1, pp. 7–23). Johns Hopkins University Press. Brooker, P. (2014). <i>Non-democratic regimes: Theory, government and politics</i> (Chapter 2, pp. 50–67).
February 18	Tactics/Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Van den Bosch, J. (2021). <i>Personalist rule in Africa and other world regions</i> (Chapter 2: Fear and greed, pp. 28–53).
February 20	Personalist: Philippines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linz, Juan, & Chehabi, Houchang. (1998). <i>Sultanistic Regimes</i> (Chapter 9, pp. 206–229).
February 23	Sultanistic: Iran (Team present 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linz, Juan, & Chehabi, Houchang. (1998). <i>Sultanistic Regimes</i>. (Chapter 8, pp. 182–205). Ansari, A. (2013). L'état, c'est moi: The paradox of sultanism and the question of "regime change" in modern Iran. <i>International Affairs</i>, 89(2), 283–298.
February 25	Personalist: Syria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wedeem, Lisa. (2015). <i>Ambiguities Of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria</i>. University of Chicago Press. (Chapters 2 and 3). (available through UF Library).
February 27	Assessment #3	IN-CLASS QUIZZES
March 2	Intro Hybrid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Levitsky, S., & Way, L. (2002). The rise of competitive authoritarianism. <i>Journal of Democracy</i>, 13(2), 51–65. Schedler, A. (2002). The menu of manipulation. <i>Journal of Democracy</i>, 13(2), 36–50. Gilbert, L., & Mohseni, P. (2011). Beyond authoritarianism: The conceptualization of hybrid regimes. <i>Studies in Comparative International Development</i>, 46(3), 270–297.
March 4	Defective Democracies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zakaria, Fareed. (1997). The Rise of Illiberal Democracy. <i>Foreign Affairs</i>, 76(6), 22–43. Cameron, M. (2018). Making sense of competitive authoritarianism: Lessons from the Andes. <i>Latin American Politics and Society</i>, 60(2), 1–22.
March 6	Tactics/Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mazepus, H., et al. (2016). A comparative study of legitimization strategies in hybrid regimes. <i>Policy Studies</i>, 37(4), 350–369. Kim, W., Bernhard, M., & Hicken, A. (2024). Party system institutionalization and the durability of competitive authoritarian regimes. <i>European Journal of Political Research</i>, 63, 1374–1396.
March 9	Hybrid: Russia (Team present 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hale, H. E. (2010). Eurasian politics as hybrid regimes: The case of Putin's Russia. <i>Journal of Eurasian Studies</i>, 1(1), 33–41. Taras, R. (Ed.). (2024). <i>Exploring Russia's Exceptionalism in International Politics</i> (First edition.). Routledge. (Chapter 6: Messianic Discourses and the Ideology of Putinism, pp. 82–96).
March 11	Hybrid: Latin America	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guachalla, V., et al. (2021). Latin America erupts: When does competitive authoritarianism take root? <i>Journal of Democracy</i>, 32(3), 63–77. Balderacchi, C. (2018). Political leadership and the construction of competitive authoritarian regimes in Latin America: Implications and prospects for democracy. <i>Democratization</i>, 25(3), 504–523.
March 13	Assessment #4	IN-CLASS QUIZZES
March 14 – March 22	SPRING BREAK	March 22: PAPER 1 DUE
March 23	Democratization: Bhutan (Team present 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Turner, M., & McCarthy-Jones, A. (2020). Bhutan's reluctant democrats and the challenge of legitimization. <i>Asian Studies Review</i>, 44(3), 515–532. Christensen, L. K. (2021). Driglam Namzha and silenced ethnicity in Bhutan's monarchical democracy. <i>Social Identities</i>, 27(6), 644–659.

March 25	Democratization: Brazil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hagopian, F. (1990). "Democracy by undemocratic means"? Elites, political pacts, and regime transitions in Brazil. <i>Comparative Political Studies</i>, 23(2), 147–170.
March 27	Democratization: Arab Spring (Team present 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brownlee, J., Masoud, T., & Reynolds, A. (2015). From dynamic events to deep causes: Outcomes and explanations of the Arab Spring. <i>Middle East Law and Governance</i>, 7(1), 3–15. https://doi.org/10.1163/18763375-00701009 King, S. J. (2020). The Arab winter: Summary and conclusions. In <i>The Arab Winter: Democratic Consolidation, Civil War, and Radical Islamists</i> (pp. 301–314). Cambridge University Press.
March 30	Intro Backsliding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bermeo, N. (2016). On democratic backsliding. <i>Journal of Democracy</i>, 27(1), 5–19. Haggard, S., & Kaufman, R. (2021). The anatomy of democratic backsliding. <i>Journal of Democracy</i>, 32(4), 27–41.
April 1	Backsliding: Europe (Team present 7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bernhard, M. (2021). Democratic backsliding in Poland and Hungary. <i>Slavic Review</i>, 80(3), 585–607. https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2021.145 Över, D. (2021). Democratic backsliding and the media: The convergence of news narratives in Turkey. <i>Media, Culture & Society</i>, 43(2), 343–358.
April 3	Backsliding: Southeast Asia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tan, N., & Kasuya, Y. (2025). <i>Routledge Handbook of Autocratization in Southeast Asia</i>. (1st ed.). (Chapter 4 and 5) (available through UF Library).
April 6	Assessment #5	IN-CLASS QUIZZES
April 8	Arab: Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diamond, L. (2011). Why are there no Arab democracies? <i>Journal of Democracy</i>, 21(1), 93–104. Ross, M. (2008). Oil, Islam, and women. <i>American Political Science Review</i>, 102(1), 107–123.
April 10	Arab: Religion (Team present. 8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kuru, Ahmet T. (2019). <i>Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment: A Global and Historical Comparison</i>. Cambridge University Press. (Chapters 1, 2 and 3) (available through UF Library).
April 11		PAPE 2 DUE
April 13		FINAL PAPER PRESENTATION/REVIEW
April 15		FINAL PAPER PRESENTATION/REVIEW
April 17		FINAL PAPER PRESENTATION/REVIEW
April 20		FINAL PAPER PRESENTATION/REVIEW
April 22		FINAL PAPER PRESENTATION/REVIEW

***This is a live document. I reserve the right to make changes to this syllabus as the course proceeds.
Should any change occur, I will notify you promptly.***

PROCEDURE FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Any classroom issues, disagreements or grade disputes should be discussed first between the instructor and the student. If the problem cannot be resolved, please contact Ben Smith (bbsmith@ufl.edu). Be prepared to provide documentation of the problem, as well as all graded materials for the semester. Issues that cannot be resolved departmentally will be referred to the University Ombuds Office (<http://www.ombuds.ufl.edu>; 352-392-1308) or the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu>; 352-392-1261).