COURSE SYLLABUS

ANGLO AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

Authoritarianism in the 21ˢᵗ Century

Course code: POS367/667
Term and year: Fall 2025
Day and time: Monday, 11:15am
Instructor: Doc. Pelin Ayan Musil, PhD
Instructor contact: pelin.ayan@aauni.edu
Consultation hours: Monday, 14.00-15.00

Credits US/ECTS	3/6	Level	Advanced
Length	15 weeks	Pre-requisite	None
Contact hours	42 hours	Course type	BA/MA elective

1. Course Description

The overwhelming majority of regimes in the 21st century is authoritarian, but our theoretical understanding of how authoritarian regimes persist remains less developed compared to the vast amount of knowledge we gained on democratic regimes. Moreover in recent years, many advanced democracies and semi-democratic regimes have retreated since the leading authoritarian regimes like Russia, China and Saudi Arabia bolstered up in the global arena. We live in a historical stage whereby 'authoritarianism goes global.' It is time we explore the varieties and inner workings of authoritarian regimes and the way they challenge the democratic regimes today. How do authoritarian regimes persist and consolidate? What are different types of authoritarian regimes? What strategies and toolkits do the autocrats use to sustain their power? What weakens the power of the autocrats? Why is authoritarianism becoming more salient at the global level? This course introduces the most prominent and up-to-date theoretical approaches to authoritarian regimes to shed light on such questions. It utilizes the comparative method in political science and works with a variety of case studies from Asia, Latin America, Africa, Middle East as well as Europe. Its goal is to clarify our understanding and make a theoretically informed assessment of contemporary authoritarianism and its increasing influence within domestic and international domains.

2. Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:
- Name, describe and classify different types of authoritarian regimes across the world
- Understand the key strategies that the autocratic rulers use to sustain an authoritarian regime and empirically identify these strategies
- Apply the main theoretical approaches to the survival and spread of authoritarian regimes
- Analyze the existing situation (weakness, strength & potential for collapse) in contemporary authoritarian regimes, based on publicly available evidence and knowledge
- Comprehend and critique professional writing

3. Reading Material

Required Materials

- Anastasiya Astapova, Vasil Navumau, Ryhor Nizhnikau & Leonid Polishchuk (2022). "Authoritarian Cooptation of Civil Society: The Case of Belarus." *Europe-Asia Studies*, 74 (1): 1-30.
- Bon Sang Koo, Jun Young Choi & Junseok Kim (2016). "Analyzing Kim Jong-un's Survival Strategy from the Comparative Authoritarian Perspective." *Pacific Focus,* 31: 211– 231.
- Christian Davenport (2007). "State Repression and Political Order." *Annual Review of Political Science* 10 (1): 1-23.
- Dan Slater (2020). "Violent Origins of Authoritarian Variation: Rebellion Type and Regime Type in Cold War Southeast Asia." *Government and Opposition* 55(1), 21-40.
- Davis, T. (2025). The "Case" for Independent Courts: The Insurance Theory of Judicialization in Autocracies. *Journal of Law and Courts*, *13*(1), 35-50.
- Glasius, M. (2018). What authoritarianism is… and is not: a practice perspective. *International affairs*, 94(3), 515-533.
- Heike Holbig (2013). "Ideology after the end of ideology. China and the quest for autocratic legitimation." *Democratization* 20 (1): 61-81.
- Jean Lachapelle (2022). "Repression Reconsidered: Bystander Effects and Legitimation in Authoritarian Regimes." *Comparative Politics,* 54 (4): 695-716
- Jennifer Gandhi & Ellen Lust-Okar (2009). "Elections Under Authoritarianism." *Annual Review of Political Science*, 12: 403–422.
- Johannes Gerschewski (2013). "The Three Pillars of Stability: Legitimation, Repression, and Co-optation in Autocratic Regimes." *Democratization* 20 (1): 13-38.
- Juan J. Linz (1978). *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner *Publishers.*
- Kailitz, Steffen. "Typologies of autocratic regimes." *Research Handbook on Authoritarianism*. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024. 11-24.
- Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, Christopher Walker (2016). *Authoritarianism Goes Global: The Challenge to Democracy*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Lucan A. Way (2005). "Authoritarian State Building and the Sources of Regime Competitiveness in the Fourth Wave: The Cases of Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine." *World Politics* 57(2): 231-261.
- Marcus Michaelsen (2017). "Far away, so close: Transnational activism, digital surveillance and authoritarian control in Iran." *Surveillance and Society*, 15 (3/4).
- Max Bader (2011). "Hegemonic political parties in post-Soviet Eurasia: Towards party-based authoritarianism?" Communist *and Post-Communist Studies,* 44 (3): 189–197.
- Milan W. Svolik (2012). *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sebastian Hellmeier (2016). "The Dictator's Digital Toolkit: Explaining Variation in Internet Filtering in Authoritarian Regimes." *Politics and Policy*, 44: 1158-1191.
- Solomon Jr, P. H. (2007). Courts and judges in authoritarian regimes. *World Politics*, *60*(1), 122-145.
- Stan Hok-wui Wong (2012). "Authoritarian Co-optation in the Age of Globalisation: Evidence from Hong Kong." *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 42 (2): 182-209.

Recommended Materials
- Alyena Batura (2022). "How to Compete in Unfair Elections." *Journal of Democracy* 33 (4): 47–61.
- Bülent Aras & Richard Falk (2015). "Authoritarian 'geopolitics' of survival in the Arab Spring," *Third World Quarterly* 36(2): 322-336.

- Paola Rivetti (2017). "Political activism in Iran: strategies for survival, possibilities for resistance and authoritarianism." Democratization, 24(6): 1178-1194.

4. Teaching methodology

The course will be taught both in the form of a seminar and a lecture. It encourages students to actively participate in seminar discussions; to raise questions and comments during the lectures. In order to take part in seminar discussions, students must come to class having studied for the theme of the week. The instructor will provide lead in-class discussions every week for the seminar session, bringing in case studies to substantiate the concepts and theories learnt.

Course Schedule

Date	Class Agenda
1 September	**Topic:** Introduction to the Course Content and Requirements **Description:** The students will be introduced to course coverage and its requirements. There will be an exchange of expectations from the course between the students and the lecturer and an introductory lecture on the anatomy of dictatorship. **Reading:** Milan W. Svolik (2012). "Introduction: The Anatomy of Dictatorship" in *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-17. **Assignments/deadlines:** Do the readings for next week
8 September	**Topic:** How is authoritarianism different from other similar concepts? From totalitarianism? And from Illiberalism? **Description:** The students will be introduced to the differences and similarities between totalitarian and authoritarian regimes as well as between illiberal democracies and authoritarian regimes. **Reading:** Juan J. Linz (1978). "Introduction" in *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, pp. 49-63. Glasius, M. (2018). What authoritarianism is… and is not: a practice perspective. International affairs, 94(3), 515-533. **Assignments/deadlines:** Discuss case studies comparing totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, illiberal democracies and do the readings for next week
15 September	**Topic:** Typologies of Authoritarianism **Description:** The students will understand the differences among types of contemporary authoritarian regimes, i.e. military regime, personalistic regime, theocracy, one-party regime. **Readings:** Kailitz, Steffen. "Typologies of autocratic regimes." *Research Handbook on Authoritarianism*. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024. 11-24. Dan Slater (2020). "Violent Origins of Authoritarian Variation: Rebellion Type and Regime Type in Cold War Southeast Asia." *Government and Opposition* 55(1), 21-40. **Assignments/deadlines:** Discuss case studies of different types of authoritarian regimes. Do the readings for next week.
22 September	**Topic:** Elite strategy I: Legitimation **Description:** The session will explain the strategy of legitimation, how and why it is vital for authoritarian regime survival. **Readings:** Johannes Gerschewski (2013). "The Three Pillars of Stability: Legitimation, Repression, and Co-optation in Autocratic Regimes." *Democratization* 20 (1): 13-38.

	Heike Holbig (2013). "Ideology after the end of ideology. China and the quest for autocratic legitimation." *Democratization* 20 (1): 61-81. **Assignments/deadlines:** Discuss examples of legitimation
29 September Response Paper I	**Topic:** Elite strategy II: Co-optation **Description:** The session will explain the authoritarian strategy of co-optation, how and why it is vital for authoritarian regime survival. **Reading:** Stan Hok-wui Wong (2012). "Authoritarian Co-optation in the Age of Globalisation: Evidence from Hong Kong." *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 42 (2): 182-209. Anastasiya Astapova, Vasil Navumau, Ryhor Nizhnikau & Leonid Polishchuk (2022). "Authoritarian Cooptation of Civil Society: The Case of Belarus." *Europe-Asia Studies*, 74 (1): 1-30. **Assignments/deadlines:** Discuss examples of cooptation.
6 October	**Topic:** Elite strategy III: Repression **Description:** The session will explain the authoritarian strategy of repression, how and why it is vital for authoritarian regime survival. **Reading:** Christian Davenport (2007). "State Repression and Political Order." *Annual Review of Political Science* 10 (1): 1-23. Jean Lachapelle (2022). "Repression Reconsidered: Bystander Effects and Legitimation in Authoritarian Regimes." *Comparative Politics,* 54 (4): 695-716 **Assignments/deadlines:** Discuss examples of repression, high-intensity repression, low-intensity repression, which type of repression is preferable under certain conditions. Do readings for next week.
13 October	**Topic:** Institutions of authoritarianism I: Elections **Description:** The students will understand the function of elections under authoritarianism, how dictators benefit from holding elections. **Reading:** Jennifer Gandhi & Ellen Lust-Okar (2009). "Elections Under Authoritarianism." *Annual Review of Political Science*, 12: 403–422. **Assignments/deadlines:** Discuss cases of authoritarian elections, how they are designed and why they are designed that way.
20 October Response Paper II	**Topic:** Institutions of authoritarianism II: Parties **Description:** The students will understand the function of political parties under authoritarianism, how dictators benefit from controlling parties. **Reading:** Milan W. Svolik (2012). "Why Authoritarian Parties? The Regime Party as an Instrument of Co-optation and Control." In *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 162-195. Max Bader (2011). "Hegemonic political parties in post-Soviet Eurasia: Towards party-based authoritarianism?" Communist and Post-Communist Studies, 44 (3): 189–197. **Assignments/deadlines:** Discuss cases of parties under authoritarianism and the function they serve for. Do the readings for next week.
27 October	**Mid-Term Break**
3 November	**Topic:** Institutions of authoritarianism III: Judiciary **Description:** The students will understand the function of a judiciary under authoritarianism, the function of courts. **Reading:** Solomon Jr, P. H. (2007). Courts and judges in authoritarian regimes. *World Politics*, 60(1), 122-145. **Assignments/deadlines:** Do the readings for next week.
10 November	**Topic:** Autocrats' New Toolkits: The Digital Space

	Description: This session will aim to understand how authoritarianism is transforming and changing face through the use of digital toolkits **Readings:** Sebastian Hellmeier (2016). "The Dictator's Digital Toolkit: Explaining Variation in Internet Filtering in Authoritarian Regimes." *Politics and Policy*, 44: 1158-1191. Marcus Michaelsen (2017). "Far away, so close: Transnational activism, digital surveillance and authoritarian control in Iran." *Surveillance and Society*, 15 (3/4). **Assignments/deadlines:** Discuss the case of Iran with regard to how digital surveillance works. Review for Mid-term Exam.
17 November	**National Holiday**
24 November Mid-Term Exam	**Topic:** How Authoritarianism Goes Global **Description:** The role of China and Russia in spreading authoritarian practices **Readings:** Peter Pomerantsev (2015). "Authoritarianism Goes Global: The Kremlin's Information War." *Journal of Democracy* 26 (4): 40-50. Anna-Marie Brady (2015). "Authoritarianism Goes Global: China's Foreign Propaganda Machine." *Journal of Democracy* 26(4), 51-59. **Assignments/deadlines:** Find and discuss examples of propaganda by China and disinformation by Russia. Do reading for next week.
1 December	**Topic:** Opposition Parties under Authoritarianism **Description:** The student will learn opposition strategies under authoritarian regimes **Reading:** Alyena Batura (2022). "How to Compete in Unfair Elections." *Journal of Democracy* 33 (4): 47–61. **Assignments/deadlines:** Do reading for next week.
8 December	**Topic:** Protest movements in Authoritarian Regimes **Description:** **Readings:** Paola Rivetti (2017). "Political activism in Iran: strategies for survival, possibilities for resistance and authoritarianism." *Democratization*, 24(6): 1178-1194. Bülent Aras & Richard Falk (2015). "Authoritarian 'geopolitics' of survival in the Arab Spring," *Third World Quarterly* 36(2): 322-336. **Assignments/deadlines:** Review/Preparation for the final exam
15 December	**Final Exam**

5. Course Requirements and Assessment (with estimated workloads)

Assignment	Workload (hours)	Weight in Final Grade	Evaluated Course Specific Learning Outcomes	Evaluated Institutional Learning Outcomes*
Class Participation	42	%20	Regular contribution to class discussions, critique of readings	1,2
Response Paper I and II	28	%30	Demonstrate the ability to form a meaningful	1,2,3

			argumentative essay building upon a selected case study and course materials	
Mid-term Exam: Short Answer Questions on Concepts and Theories	32	%15	Ability to demonstrate an understanding of course material with sufficiently detailed answers to questions on authoritarian regimes	1,3
Final Exam: Short Answer Questions on Case Studies	48	%35	Ability to demonstrate the knowledge attained through the course by giving substantial and logical answers to exam questions on the core concepts and theories of authoritarian regimes.	1,2,3
TOTAL	**150**	**100%**		

*1 = Critical Thinking; 2 = Effective Communication; 3 = Effective and Responsible Action

6. Detailed description of the assignments

Assignment 1: Class Participation

Communicate ideas/comments/questions on the readings with the lecturer and the classmates. Demonstration of knowledge of the readings in the classroom as well as stimulation of discussion are positively evaluated.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Be present in classes	10%
Raise comments and questions on the readings	45%
Respond to lecturer's questions on the readings	45%

Assignment 2: Response Papers I & II

You will write an essay presenting an original idea with a clear argument about a question raised during the class discussions. You will utilize at least two course readings in the essay

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Utilize at least 2 readings to form the paper	20%
Clearly articulate the (one) idea/argument in the paper	30%
Show an ability to be reasoned and convincing	30%
Refer to at least 2 external sources to provide facts in the essay	20%

Assignment 3: Mid-term Exam: Short Answer Questions

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Be articulate in answering exam questions	50%
Demonstrate knowledge of core concepts or theories of authoritarianism in answers	50%

Assignment 4: Final Exam: Short Answer Questions on Case Studies

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Be articulate in answering the questions	%50
Demonstrate knowledge of core concepts or theories of authoritarianism in answers	%50

7. General Requirements and School Policies

General requirements

All coursework is governed by AAU's academic rules. Students are expected to be familiar with the academic rules in the Academic Codex and Student Handbook and to maintain the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity in their work.

Electronic communication and submission

The university and instructors shall only use students' university email address for communication, with additional communication via NEO LMS or Microsoft Teams.
Students sending e-mail to an instructor shall clearly state the course code and the topic in the subject heading, for example, "COM101-1 Mid-term Exam. Question".
All electronic submissions are through NEO LMS. No substantial pieces of writing (especially take-home exams and essays) can be submitted outside of NEO LMS.

Attendance

Attendance, i.e., presence in class in real-time, at AAU courses is default mandatory; however, it is not graded as such. (Grades may be impacted by missed assignments or lack of participation.) Still, students must attend at least two thirds of classes to complete the course. If they do not meet this condition and most of their absences are excused, they will be administratively withdrawn from the course. If they do not meet this condition and most of their absences are not excused, they will receive a grade of "FW" (Failure to Withdraw). Students may also be marked absent if they miss a significant part of a class (for example by arriving late or leaving early).

Absence excuse and make-up options

Should a student be absent from classes for relevant reasons (illness, serious family matters), and the student wishes to request that the absence be excused, the student should submit an Absence Excuse Request Form supplemented with documents providing reasons for the absence to the Dean of Students within one week of the absence. Each student may excuse up to two sick days per term without any supporting documentation; however, an Absence Excuse Request Form must still be submitted for these instances. If possible, it is recommended the instructor be informed of the absence in advance. Should a student be absent during the add/drop period due to a change in registration this will be an excused absence if s/he submits an Absence Excuse Request Form along with the finalized add/drop form.
Students whose absence has been excused by the Dean of Students are entitled to make up assignments and exams provided their nature allows. Assignments missed due to unexcused absences which cannot be made up, may result in a decreased or failing grade as specified in the syllabus.
Students are responsible for contacting their instructor within one week of the date the absence was excused to arrange for make-up options.

Late work: No late submissions will be accepted – please follow the deadlines.

Electronic devices

Electronic devices (e.g. phones, tablets, laptops) may be used only for class-related activities (taking notes, looking up related information, etc.). Any other use will result in the student being marked absent and/or being expelled from the class. No electronic devices may be used during tests or exams unless required by the exam format and the instructor.

Eating is not allowed during classes.

Cheating and disruptive behavior

If a student engages in disruptive conduct unsuitable for a classroom environment, the instructor may require the student to withdraw from the room for the duration of the class and shall report the behavior to the student's Dean.
Students engaging in behavior which is suggestive of cheating will, at a minimum, be warned. In the case of continued misconduct, the student will fail the exam or assignment and be expelled from the exam or class.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism obscures the authorship of a work or the degree of its originality. Students are expected to create and submit works of which they are the author. Plagiarism can apply to all works of authorship – verbal, audiovisual, visual, computer programs, etc. Examples are:

- **Verbatim plagiarism**: verbatim use of another's work or part of it without proper acknowledgement of the source and designation as a verbatim quotation,
- **Paraphrasing plagiarism**: paraphrasing someone else's work or part of it without proper acknowledgement of the source,
- **Data plagiarism**: use of other people's data without proper acknowledgement of the source,
- **False quotation**: publishing a text that is not a verbatim quotation as a verbatim quotation,
- **Fictious citation**: quoting, paraphrasing, or referring to an incorrect or a non-existent work,
- **Inaccurate citation**: citing sources in such a way that they cannot be found and verified,
- **Ghostwriting**: commissioning work from others and passing it off as one's own,
- **Patchwriting**: using someone else's work or works (albeit with proper acknowledgement of sources and proper attribution) to such an extent that the output contains almost no original contribution,
- **Self-plagiarism**: unacknowledged reuse of one's own work (or part of it) that has been produced or submitted as part of another course of study or that has been published in the past,
- **Collaborative plagiarism**: delivering the result of collective collaboration as one's own individual output.

At minimum, plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the assignment and shall be reported to the student's Dean. A mitigating circumstance may be the case of novice students, and the benefit of the doubt may be given if it is reasonable to assume that the small-scale plagiarism was the result of ignorance rather than intent. An aggravating circumstance in plagiarism is an act intended to make the plagiarism more difficult to detect. Such conduct includes, for example, the additional modification of individual words or phrases, the creation of typos, the use of machine translation tools or the creation of synonymous text, etc. The Dean may initiate a disciplinary procedure pursuant to the Academic Codex. Intentional or repeated plagiarism always entail disciplinary hearing and may result in expulsion from AAU.

Use of Artificial Intelligence and Academic Tutoring Center

The use of artificial intelligence tools to search sources, to process, analyze and summarize data, and to provide suggestions or feedback in order to improve content, structure, or style, defined here as AI-assisted writing, is not in itself plagiarism. However, it is plagiarism if, as a result, it obscures the authorship of the work produced or the degree of its originality (see the examples above).
AAU acknowledges prudent and honest use of AI-assisted writing, that is, the use of AI for orientation, consultation, and practice is allowed. For some courses and assignments, however, the use of AI is counterproductive to learning outcomes; therefore, the course syllabus may prohibit AI assistance.
A work (text, image, video, sound, code, etc.) generated by artificial intelligence based on a mass of existing data, defined here as AI-generated work, is not considered a work of authorship. Therefore, if an AI-generated work (e.g. text) is part of the author's work, it must be marked as AI-generated. Otherwise, it obscures the authorship and/or the degree of originality, and thus constitutes plagiarism. Unless explicitly permitted by the instructor, submission of AI-generated work is prohibited.
If unsure about technical aspects of writing, and to improve their academic writing, students are encouraged to consult with the tutors of the AAU Academic Tutoring Center. For more information and/or to book a tutor, please contact the ATC at: http://atc.simplybook.me/sheduler/manage/event/1/.

Course accessibility and inclusion

Students with disabilities should contact the Dean of Students to discuss reasonable accommodations. Academic accommodations are not retroactive.
Students who will be absent from course activities due to religious holidays may seek reasonable accommodations by contacting the Dean of Students in writing within the first two weeks of the term. All requests must include specific dates for which the student requests accommodations.

8. Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Percentage*	Description
A	95–100	**Excellent performance**. The student has shown originality and displayed an exceptional grasp of the material and a deep analytical understanding of the subject.
A–	90–94	
B+	87–89	**Good performance**. The student has mastered the material, understands the subject well and has shown some originality of thought and/or considerable effort.
B	83–86	
B–	80–82	
C+	77–79	**Fair performance**. The student has acquired an acceptable understanding of the material and essential subject matter of the course, but has not succeeded in translating this understanding into consistently creative or original work.
C	73–76	
C–	70–72	
D+	65–69	**Poor**. The student has shown some understanding of the material and subject matter covered during the course. The student's work, however, has not shown enough effort or understanding to allow for a passing grade in School Required Courses. It does qualify as a passing mark for the General College Courses and Electives.
D	60–64	
F	0–59	**Fail**. The student has not succeeded in mastering the subject matter covered in the course.

* Decimals should be rounded to the nearest whole number.

Prepared by: Pelin Ayan Musil
Date: 26 August 2025

Approved by:
Date: