

Political Science 191  
Political Control in Contemporary China  
Kevin J. O'Brien

Wednesday 10am-12pm  
Spring 2023

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## Course Description

This course focuses on a central issue that all political leaders face: how to exert and maintain control over society. This topic is particularly timely in present-day China and one that the Party leadership has approached in many different ways. Topics covered will include: policing of protest and crime, censorship and information control, the Wuhan lockdown, and how the social welfare system is used to defuse discontent. We will consider both “hard” and “soft” repression and also strategies that incorporate responsiveness to popular expectations. Finally, the course will examine ways in which different social groups are coping with increased control.

The course is designed, and will be conducted, like a graduate seminar. Students who enroll must be ready to do all the reading in advance of seminar meetings and to participate actively in class discussions.

Prerequisites: Political science majors with junior or senior status, or other juniors and seniors who are very highly motivated to learn about Chinese politics. Some prior study of Chinese politics, economics, or society is strongly recommended.

## Course Materials

- 1) Daniel C. Mattingly, The Art of Political Control in China (Cambridge, 2020)
- 2) Jennifer Pan, Welfare for Autocrats: How Social Assistance in China Cares for its Rulers (Oxford, 2020)
- 3) Margaret (Molly) Roberts, Censored: Distraction and Diversion Inside China's Great Firewall (Princeton, 2018)
- 4) Suzanne Scoggins, Policing China: Street-Level Cops in the Shadow of Protest (Cornell, 2021)
- 5) Guobin Yang, The Wuhan Lockdown (Columbia, 2022)
- 6) Journal articles which, like all the books, are available at bCourses “modules” in week-by-week order.

## Course Requirements

Three take-home essay quizzes, due February 10, March 3, and March 24 at 11:59pm, via e-mail to kobrien@berkeley.edu, formatted in Word. Approximately 750 words. 1000 words maximum. (15% of course grade each)

One final essay exam, due May 7, 11:59pm (35% of course grade)

Class participation (20% of course grade) -- All students will be expected to participate in class discussions and to come to class prepared *every* week.

### **Academic Honesty**

All the work you do in this course is expected to be your own. Absolutely no cheating or plagiarism (using someone else's words or ideas without proper citation) will be tolerated. Any cases of cheating or plagiarism will be reported to the university and handled according to university policy.

### **Disabilities**

Students with disabilities are responsible for making their needs known to the instructor, and seeking available assistance, in a timely manner. All efforts will be made to facilitate the learning of students with any sort of disability.

### **Week 1 (1/18) Introduction**

#### **Week 2 (1/25) Policing Protest: Repression, Hard and Soft**

Zhou Kai and Yan Xiaojun, "The Question for Stability: Policing Popular Protest in the People's Republic of China," Problems of Post-Communism 61:3 (May/June 2014): 3-17

Kevin J. O'Brien and Yanhua Deng, "Preventing Protest One Person at a Time: Psychological Coercion and Relational Repression in China," China Review 17:2 (June 2017): 179-201

Lynette Ong, "Thugs and Outsourcing of State Repression in China," China Journal 80 (July 2018): 1-17

Rui Hou, "Maintaining Social Stability without Solving Problems: Emotional Repression in the Chinese Petition System," China Quarterly 243 (September 2020): 635-654

#### **Week 3 (2/1) Policing (Mostly) Crime, Part 1**

Suzanne Scoggins, Policing China, Introduction, Chapters 1-3 (pp. 1-90)

#### **Week 4 (2/8) Policing (Mostly) Crime, Part 2**

Suzanne Scoggins, Policing China, Chapters 4-6 (pp. 91-142)

### **Take-home Essay Quiz Distributed by 2/8 5pm, due Friday 2/10 11:59pm**

#### **Week 5 (2/15) Control and Accountability, Part 1**

Daniel Mattingly, The Art of Political Control in China, Chapters 1-3 (pp. 1-86)

Lily Tsai, "Solidary Groups, Informal Accountability, and Local Public Goods Provision in Rural China," American Political Science Review 101:2 (May 2007): 355-72

Weeks 6 (2/22), **Control and Accountability, Part 2**

Daniel Mattingly, The Art of Political Control in China, Chapters 4-7 (pp. 87-192)

Week 7 (3/1) **Signaling and Information**

Peter L. Lorentzen, "Regularized Rioting: Permitting Public Protest in an Authoritarian Regime," Quarterly Journal of Political Science 8:2 (2013): 127-58

Martin K. Dimitrov, "Internal Government Assessments of the Quality of Governance in China," Studies in Comparative International Development 50:1 (March 2015): 50-72

Huirong Chen and Sheena Chestnut Greitens, "Information Capacity and Social Order: The Local Politics of Information Integration in China," Governance 35:2 (April 2022): 497-523

Rachel E. Stern and Kevin J. O'Brien, "Politics at the Boundary: Mixed Signals and the Chinese State," Modern China (March 2012): 174-98

Haifeng Huang, "Propaganda as Signaling," Comparative Politics 47:4 (July 2015): 419-437

**Take-home Essay Quiz Distributed by 3/1 5pm, due Friday 3/3 11:59pm**

Week 8 (3/8) **Censorship, Part 1**

Margaret Roberts, Censored: Distraction and Diversion Inside China's Great Firewall, Chapters 1-4 (pp. 1-146)

Week 9 (3/15) **Censorship, Part 2**

Margaret Roberts, Censored: Distraction and Diversion Inside China's Great Firewall, Chapters 5-7 (pp. 147-236)

Rongbin Han and Li Shao, "Scaling Authoritarian Information Control: How China Adjusts the Level of Online Censorship," Political Research Quarterly 75:4 (December 2022): 1345-1359

Week 10 (3/22) **Self-Censorship and Living with Repression**

Self-Censorship:

Rachel Stern and Jonathan Hassid, "Amplifying Silence: Uncertainty and Control Parables in Contemporary China," Comparative Political Studies 45:10 (2012): 1230-54

Sheena Greitens and Rory Truex, "Repressive Experiences Among China Scholars: New Evidence from Survey Data," China Quarterly 242 (June 2020): 349-75

Living with Repression and Avoiding Conflict:

Kevin J. O'Brien: "Neither Withdrawal nor Resistance: Adapting to Increased Repression in China," Modern China 49:1 (January 2023): 3-25

Elizabeth Perry, "Educated Acquiescence: How Academia Sustains Authoritarianism in China," Theory & Society 49 (2020): 1-22

Lawrence Liu and Rachel Stern, "State-Adjacent Professionals: How Chinese Lawyers Participate in Political Life," China Quarterly 247 (September 2021): 793-813

**Take-home Essay Quiz Distributed by 3/22 5pm, due Friday 3/24 11:59pm**

Week 11 (4/5), **COVID and Control, Part 1**

Guobin Yang, The Wuhan Lockdown, Chapters 1-5 (pp. 1-110)

Week 12 (4/12), **COVID and Control, Part 2**

Guobin Yang, The Wuhan Lockdown, Chapters 6-9, Conclusion (pp. 111-224)

Week 13 (4/19) **Political Stability and Social Welfare Provision, Part 1**

Jennifer Pan, Welfare for Autocrats: How Social Assistance in China Cares for its Rulers, Chapters 1-4 (pp. 1-111)

Week 14 (4/26) **Political Stability and Social Welfare Provision, Part 2**

Jennifer Pan, Welfare for Autocrats: How Social Assistance in China Cares for its Rulers, Chapters 5-7 (pp. 112-177)

***Sunday, May 7, 11:59pm, Take-Home Essay Exam Due, e-mail to kobrien@berkeley.edu, formatted in Word.***