

American Politics in Film  
Political Science 190.110  
Prof. Adam Sheingate  
Summer 2017  
M,W,Th: 9:30-11:45am

Populism is a political style that emphasizes the power of ordinary people. Throughout American history, political and social movements have drawn on populist rhetoric to criticize what they see as the corrupting influence of a political and economic elite. The idea of a “government by and for the people” is a powerful one in American politics, but it raises questions about exactly who constitutes “the people” and what, if any, limits should be placed on a government acting in the name of the popular will. Authoritarianism is characterized by a preference for a strongman that will enforce social order and hierarchies, even (or especially) at the expense of minority rights. The election of Donald Trump has focused attention on strains of both authoritarianism and populism in American politics.

In this class, we will examine authoritarianism and populism through a combination of popular film and scholarly writing. With regard to the former, we will analyze several films released over the past eighty years that examine the promise and pitfalls of a popular democracy. Drawing on political science research as well as popular commentary informed by political science, we will explore ideas about populism and authoritarianism in greater detail. Our goal is to develop an understanding of these key concepts and their expression through popular culture to understand some of the dynamics of the current presidential contest.

Your grade in this course will be based on four short essays plus participation in class discussion. Specific topics for each essay will be distributed in class. Each essay will count toward 20% of your grade; the remaining 20% will be determined based on class participation.

Course materials will be available on electronic reserve. Although we will watch the five selected films in class, it is recommended that students purchase or rent digital copies that can be streamed outside of class. All of the films are available for streaming through Blackboard.

July 3 Introduction to course (no readings assigned)

July 5 Authoritarianism

Karen Stenner, “Three Kinds of Conservatism,” *Psychological Inquiry* (electronic reserve)

Amanda Taub, “[The Rise of American Authoritarianism](#),” *Vox*, March 1, 2016.

Various, “[Authoritarianism: The political science that explains Trump](#),” *YouTube*

July 6 *Gabriel Over the White House* (Gregory La Cava, 1933)

Andrew Sullivan, “[Democracies End When They are Too Democratic](#),” *New York Magazine*, May 1, 2016.

Robert Kagan, “[This is How Fascism Comes to America](#),” *Washington Post*, May 18, 2016.

July 10 Populism

Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, Basic Books, 1995, chapters 1-3 (pp. 1-45)  
(electronic reserve)

Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," *Harper's Magazine*,  
1964. (electronic reserve)

Charles Postel, "[If Trump and Sanders Are Both Populists, What Does Populist  
Mean?](#)" *The American Historian*

July 12 *All the King's Men* (Robert Rossen, 1949)

**First Essay Due**

Bart Bonikowski and Noam Gidron, "[Trump and Sanders aren't blazing new trails.  
Populism has run through U.S. politics for a very long time.](#)" *Washington Post*,  
April 28, 2016.

July 13 Public Opinion

Philip Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," *Critical Review* 2006  
[1964] (electronic reserve)

Samuel DiCanio, "Mass Opinion and American Political Development," *Critical  
Review* 2006 (electronic reserve)

Andrew Keen, "[How the Internet Is Threatening Our Freedom](#)," *Politico*, May 18, 2016.

July 17 *A Face in the Crowd* (Elia Kazan, 1957)

David Dunning, "[The Psychological Quirk That Explains Why You Love Donald  
Trump](#)," *Politico*, May 25, 2016.

Anne Pluta, "[Trump Supporters Appear To Be Misinformed Not  
Uninformed](#)," *FiveThirtyEight*, January 7, 2016.

July 19 Populism versus Authoritarianism

**Second Essay Due**

John Cassidy, "[Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump Ride the Populist Wave](#)" *The New  
Yorker*, February 10, 2016.

Wendy Rahn and Eric Oliver, "[Trump's voters aren't authoritarians, new research says.  
So what are they?](#)" *Washington Post*, March 9, 2016.

Michael Kazin, "[How can Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders Both Be 'Populist'?](#)" *New  
York Times*, March 22, 2016.

July 20 Political Ambition

Anthony King, "Running Scared," *The Atlantic Monthly* (January 1997), pp. 41-61.  
(electronic reserve)

John Aldrich, *Why Parties? A Second Look*, University of Chicago Press, 2011, chapter 8  
(pp. 255-292). (electronic reserve)

July 24 *The Best Man* (Franklin Schaffner, 1964)

**Third Essay Due**

Jennifer Victor, "[The Clockwork Rise of Donald Trump and the reorganization of  
American Parties](#)," *Vox*, March 14, 2016.

Ryan Lizza, "[Donald Trump and Our Messy Nominating System](#)," *The New Yorker*, April 21, 2016.

July 26 Right Wing Populism in Europe and the United States

Cas Mudde, *On Extremism and Democracy in Europe*, Routledge, 2016, chapters 1-2 (pp. 1-18). (electronic reserve)

Matthew Yglesias, "[If you want to understand Donald Trump, look to the success of the European far-right](#)," *Vox*, August 25, 2015.

Cas Mudde, "[The Trump Phenomenon and the European Populist Right](#)," *Washington Post*, August 26, 2015.

E.J. Dionne, Adrianna Pita, and Constanze Stelzenmuller, "[The Rise of the Right: Right-wing populism in the U.S. and Europe](#)" Brookings Institution, April 13, 2016 (podcast)

July 27 Nationalism and Ethnocentrism

Donald Kinder and Cindy Kam, *Us Against Them: Ethnocentric Foundations of American Opinion*, University of Chicago Press, 2011, chapters 2, 5, 9 (pp. 31-41, 105-124, 182-199). (electronic reserve)

Matthew Yglesias, "[Donald Trump ditched free market ideology for nationalism-and its working](#)," *Vox* March 1, 2016.

Philip Klinkner, "[The easiest way to guess if someone supports Trump? Ask if Obama is a Muslim](#)," *Vox*, June 2, 2016.

July 31 *Bob Roberts* (Tim Robbins, 1992)

Dylan Mathews, "[I asked 5 fascism experts whether Donald Trump is a fascist. Here's what they said](#)," *Vox*, May 19, 2016.

Adam Gopnik, "[The Dangerous Acceptance of Donald Trump](#)," *The New Yorker*, May 20, 2016.

August 2 Resentment or Renewal?

Katherine Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*, University of Chicago Press, 2016, chapter 3 (pp. 45-89). (electronic reserve)

August 3 The Future of American Democracy

**Fourth Essay Due**

Amy Erica Smith, "[Do Americans Still Believe in Democracy?](#)" *Washington Post*, April 9, 2016.

Firmin Debrabander, "[Donald Trump is just the scare we need: Here's how a toxic despot might reinvigorate our democracy](#)," *Salon*, May 19, 2016.