

# **SOSC1510: Politics Through Film**

## **(Tentative Syllabus: Subject to Change)**

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**Class time: Tuesday 13:30PM - 16:20PM**

**(Movie Showing Session - Monday 8:00PM)**

Class location: Zoom (**PMI: 489 093 3026**)

Teaching Assistant: Ruilin Lai ([ruilin.lai@connect.ust.hk](mailto:ruilin.lai@connect.ust.hk))

Office Hours: arranged via email

**Course Overview.** This course targets students with no or little social science background. This course examines world politics through the medium of film. Movies provide original and interesting perspectives on how we view political, economic, social, and cultural issues. This course will pair a film with a reading that provides social and political context. Class time is devoted to movie reviewing and lectures. Separately, the instructor will provide a movie viewing session. For all movies, we will explore the following questions: What does the film tell us about politics and society? Are the stories in the film relevant today? What does the film teach you? Does the film affect the way we view politics?

There are five main requirements for this course. First, students will attend ALL lectures on time, and the attendance will be checked. Second, students will take a weekly quiz about the film. Third, students will take the final exam on readings and lectures. Finally, students will write a short (2-3 pages) "movie and politics" critique as a final report.

***This course will require that you view films outside regular class time (Monday 8 PM)*** because we will review the movies in class and use them to link the academic theories and analyses to reality. If you cannot make this separate session, you will have to watch it on your own.

**Requirements:** Grades are based on the following criteria:

**Attendance Check (10 percent of final grade):** On-time attendance will be checked every class. **Students also need to turn the video on (background photo allowed) in the entire class.** ZOOM will automatically check the attendance throughout the class.

**Film Quiz (40 percent of final grade):** Students will take a weekly quiz right at the beginning of the class. The quiz questions will be strictly on film content. The questions will be easy if you watched the film, but difficult (or even random) if the student did not watch the movie thoroughly and carefully in recent time. Reading the plot will not be enough. If

you do not come on time, you may not be able to take the quiz as it will be open first 15 minutes of the class time. The password for quiz will be provided in class.

**Final Exam on Readings and Lectures (30 percent of total grade):** The final exam will be on the academic contents from the **lectures and readings**.

**Final Essay (20 percent of total grade):** You need to choose a movie and analyze the movie's political implications. **1000 words** limitation. The grading criterion is the **depth** of your *political insight and analysis*.

**[Movie watching session: Monday 8 PM (until the movie ends)]**

Every week, in the night before the class, the instructor or the TA will host a movie-watching session where the students watch the film together (online) before the class. This session is not mandatory. However, I **highly recommend** attending this session to be able to take the in-class quiz and to follow the lecture and discussion. Any student who cannot make the session should watch the movie by oneself **before class**. **Please do not engage in any behavior that violates the property rights protection rule during the session.**

**Class Policy [Serious Ones]**

1. **WATCH MOVIES BEFORE CLASS.** The meaning of this entire class will depend on whether you actually watch movies (thoroughly) before the class. If you cannot attend the watching session, please watch it by yourself. (The instructor or the TA is not responsible for individual watching.) If you watched it before, it is still highly recommended to watch it again. You won't remember the details (necessary for answering quiz questions). All these movies worth re-watching. Sometimes, watching a movie again allows the audience to see deeper and think broader.
2. **During the quiz, please put the cellphone away. Do not communicate with any of your classmates. Do not consult with the internet.** The answers are not there. The exam time is short: Searching, communicating, or other methods will make you turn in unfinished quiz.
3. **Do not engage in any behavior that violates the property rights protection rule.** For instance, recording, screen shooting, or taking video during the film showing is strictly prohibited. In the worst case, you may risk a legal charge.
4. **If you cannot take these rules seriously, reconsider taking the class.**

**Course objectives and learning outcomes.** Politics through Film course gives students an opportunity to:

- Observe various political phenomenon around the world carefully and analytically
- Understand foundational theories in social science
- Analyze how institutions and history shape politics and public policy today
- Appreciate how movies reflect politics and its impacts on society

- Indirectly experience the process in which individuals are affected by politics (often unintentionally) and come to hold their political stance

**Course Schedule.** The scheduled movies are subject to change without prior notification.

**Warnings.** Please note that some of the movies we watch contain disturbing images, violence, and bad language. If you are a freshman or younger than your cohorts, please consult with the instructor.

The movies are not the best movies on the topic as three rules were applied in movie selection

1. No documentaries
2. No movie before your birth
3. Diversity rule in terms of country, gender of the main character, etc

### **Week 1. Introduction: Politics and Conflicting Values**

What is politics? Why does it matter to us? What is political science? How does political science research help us understand politics better?

### **Week 2. State and Power**

Movie: *The Lives of Others* (2006) <https://lbdiscover.ust.hk/bib/991009228189703412>

Essential Reading:

Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright and Erica Frantz. 2014. "Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set," *Perspectives on Politics*, 12 (2) 313-331.

Additional Movies: *Hunger Games* (2012-2015), *Pan's Labyrinth* (2005), *Snowpiercer* (2013), *The Stanford Prison Experiment* (2015), *Attorney* (2014)

Additional Readings: [Adam Day et al. \*When dictators fall\*, United Nations University](#)

### **Week 3. Democratization**

Movie: *No* (2012)

Essential Reading: Larry Diamond's lecture on "[What is Democracy?](#)"

Additional Movies: *Goodbye Lenin* (2003), *1987: When the day comes* (2018), *No* (2012), *A Taxi Driver* (2017)

Additional Readings: [B. De Cleen "Populism and Nationalism," Oxford Handbook of Populism, 2017.](#)

### **Week 4. Presidency, Congress, and Constitution**

Movie: *Lincoln* (2012) 2:30 <https://lbdiscover.ust.hk/bib/991009528919703412>

Essential Readings: James Madison, *Federalist Papers No. 47* “The Particular Structure of the New Government and the Distribution of Power Among Its Different Parts”

Additional Movies: *JFK* (1991); *Nixon* (1995); *Seven Days in May* (1964); *Dr. Strangelove* (1964); *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington* (1939)

Additional Readings: Moe, Terry M., and Michael Caldwell. "The Institutional Foundations of Democratic Government: A Comparison of Presidential and Parliamentary Systems." *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics* (JITE) 150, no. 1 (1994): 171-95

## **Week 5. Election and Campaign**

Movie: *The Ides of March* (2011) <https://lbdiscover.ust.hk/bib/991009460789703412>

Essential Reading:

Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris. 2017. Trump and the Populist Authoritarian Parties: The Silent Revolution in Reverse. *Perspectives on Politics* 15(2): 443-454.

Additional Movies: *Bulworth*; *Election*; *Game Change*; *The War Room*; *The Manchurian Candidate*; *Primary Colors*

Additional Readings: C. Ingraham “somebody-just-put-a-price-tag-on-the-2016-election-its-a-doozy!”

## **Week 6. Universal Suffrage and Civil Rights**

Movie: *Selma* (2014) 2:08 <https://lbdiscover.ust.hk/bib/991009605539703412>

Essential Reading:

Adam Przeworski. 2009. “Conquered or Granted? A History of Suffrage Extensions” *British Journal of Political Science* 39(2) 291-321.

Additional Movies: *Ghosts of Mississippi* (1996); *Malcolm X* (1992); *Mississippi Burning* (1988); *Erin Brockovich* (2000); *The Life of David Gale* (2003); *Suffragettes* (2015)

Additional Readings: [Why You Should Care That Selma Gets LBJ Wrong vs. Why “Selma” Is More Than Fair to L.B.J.](#)

## **Week 7. Discrimination and Racism**

Movie: *Green Book* (2018)

Essential Reading:

[The History of Racism in America](#) by Smithsonian Magazine (read the comments too)

Additional Movies: *Gran Torino* (2008), *Crash* (2004), *Green Mile* (1999), *Hidden Figures* (2016), *The Help* (2011)

Additional Readings: [26 simple charts to show friends and family who aren't convinced racism is still a problem in America](#)

Ibram Kendi [“Is This the Beginning of the End of American Racism?”](#)

## **Week 8. Media**

Movie: *The Post* (2017)

Essential Reading:

Allcott, Hunt, and Matthew Gentzkow. 2017. "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31 (2): 211-36.

Additional Movies: *Wag the Dog* (1997)

<https://lbdiscover.ust.hk/bib/991009138709703412>

Additional Readings:

Shepard, Geoff (2013), “The Watergate Cover Up Trial: Justice Denied,” *The Atlantic*, Online August 9.

## **Week 9. Corruption and Lobbying**

Movie: *Leviathan* (2014) 2:20

Essential Reading:

Daniel Treisman. 2000. The causes of corruption: a cross-national study, *Journal of Public Economics*, 76(3):399-457.

Additional Movies: *Bowling for Columbine* (2002); *Fed up* (2014); *Thank You For Smoking* (2005);

Additional Readings: [“25 Corruption Scandals That Shook The World”](#)

## **Week 10. Civil Conflict**

Movie: *American Sniper* (2015) 2:13 <https://lbdiscover.ust.hk/bib/991009605139703412>

Essential Reading:

Robert A. Pape. 2003. “The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism,” *American Political Science Review* 97(3), 343-361.

Additional Movies: *Blood Diamond* (2006); *Hotel Rwanda* (2004); *Lone Survivor* (2013); *Taegukgi* (2004); *集结号* (2008); *No Man’s Land* (Bosnia-Herzegovina 2001); *Munich* (2005); *Saving Private Ryan* (1998)

Additional Readings: James Fearon and David Laitin. 2003. “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War.” *American Political Science Review* 97(1): 75-90.

## **Week 11. Terrorism and Human Rights**

Movie: *Unthinkable* (2010)

Essential Reading: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  
“[Human Rights, Terrorism, and Counter-terrorism](#)”

Additional Movies: *Munich* (2005); *World Trade Center* (2006); *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012)

Additional Readings: Julie Mertus & Tazreena Sajjad, 2008, “[Human Rights and Human Insecurity: The Contributions of US Counterterrorism](#),” *Journal of Human Rights* 7(1): 2-24.

## **Week 12. Poverty (and Refugee)**

Movie: *Capernaum* (2018)

Essential Reading:

[Esses, V.M., Hamilton, L.K. and Gaucher, D. \(2017\), The Global Refugee Crisis: Empirical Evidence and Policy Implications for Improving Public Attitudes and Facilitating Refugee Resettlement. \*Social Issues and Policy Review\*, 11: 78-123.](#)

Additional Movies: *Human Flow* (2017), *The Rest* (2019), *More* (2017)

Additional Readings: [The Global Refugee Crisis, Region by Region in \*New York Times\*](#)

## **Week 13. Economic Inequality (and Poverty)**

Movie: *Parasite* (2019) [PN1997.A12 S627 2008b](#)  
<https://lbdiscover.ust.hk/bib/991009317019703412>

Essential Reading:

[Global Inequality Dynamics: New Findings from WID.world \(AEA Conference\)](#)

Additional Movies: *Snowpiercer* (2013), *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), *Elysium* (2013)

Additional Readings: [World Inequality Report 2018](#)