Course Syllabus (Summer Programme)

Western Democracy in Crisis: the Rise of Populism and Post-truth Politics (POL214G)

Contact Details for Professor
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Lectures
Tuesdays 14h00-18h00 & Thursdays 09h00-13h00

Course Description
This course will examine one of the defining political puzzles of our time: from the EU referendum in the United Kingdom to the presidential election in the United States and the rise of populist forces everywhere in Europe, there is a growing realization that truth may no longer be relevant to politics. ‘Post-truth’ politics – the Oxford Dictionaries word of the year – threatens to turn Western liberal democracy upside-down. The public scorns at politicians, technocrats and experts; conspiracies and viral hoaxes run rampant in social media; objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief. We will use an interdisciplinary approach – with lectures, group activities and assignments – to examine the philosophical underpinnings, the evolution and the effects of populism. In the course of seven weeks we will consider a range of questions such as: is populism a crisis of democracy or a legitimate revolt of the masses against their shrinking political importance? To what extent can populism be considered as a descendant of eighteenth century Romanticism? What are the ‘post-truth’ challenges to the European Union, the transatlantic security and the liberal world order?
**Learning Objectives**
By the end of this course, students should:

**In terms of knowledge**
- Have acquired profound knowledge of the theoretical and historical frameworks in the academic literature on populism. He is able to apply these frameworks in order to understand and interpret the current processes and dynamics in international affairs.
- Have gained an understanding of the main actors and the main processes that contributed to the rise of populism and is able to apply this knowledge in order to examine current international affairs.
- Have gained insight into the broad societal context conducive to the rise of populist politics and is able to take this societal context into account in the analysis and interpretation of current problems in international affairs.

**In terms of skills**
- Have improved the ability to apply common qualitative and quantitative research methods and is able to apply these in the field of international affairs.
- Have improved the ability to communicate clearly, fluently and accurately; as well in a written report as in an oral presentation.
- Have developed the ability to apply a multi-disciplinary perspective in his analysis of international affairs.

**In terms of attitude**
- The bachelor has an open and academic attitude, characterized by accuracy, critical reflection and academic curiosity.
- The bachelor is able to work in a multi-cultural team.

**Teaching Method**
This is a research-oriented course with a heavy reading requirement. Students will be given the theoretical tools to examine a populist movement of their choice (either in groups or individually, depending on class composition). Ex-cathedra teaching will be combined with group discussions, short essays and other in-class activities.

**Course Materials**
The course will not use a textbook. The professor will provide all required readings.
### Course Outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W1 – S1</td>
<td>Introduction to the Course: defining (liberal) democracy:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W1 – S2</td>
<td><em>Legal holiday – no class</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>W2 – S1</td>
<td>The liberal democratic recession and the return of authoritarianism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W2 – S2</td>
<td>Populism: pathological form, ideology or corrective for democracy?</td>
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<tr>
<td>W3 – S1</td>
<td>Other approaches: populism as a style, discourse and strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>W3 – S2</td>
<td>Populism as an (anti)-intellectual movement: a romantic revival?</td>
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<tr>
<td>W4 – S1</td>
<td>Themes: globalization, immigration and foreign policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>W4 – S2</td>
<td>Culture: the postmodern shift in the western concept of truth</td>
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<tr>
<td>W5 – S1</td>
<td>Technology: post-truth culture and the network society</td>
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<tr>
<td>W5 – S2</td>
<td>Implications: international order, cyberspace and net-wars</td>
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<tr>
<td>W6 – S1</td>
<td>Presentations of Group/Individual Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W6 – S2</td>
<td>Presentations of Group/Individual Projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>W7</td>
<td>Final Exams</td>
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### Detailed course schedule

**Week 1 – Session 1 (May 23)**

**Introduction**

- Introduction to the course: objectives, schedule and assignments

**Defining (liberal) democracy: history, theory and conditions**

- What is and what is not democracy? Principles and procedures that make democracy possible. Liberal Democracy, Democratization and International Order. Historical examination of waves of democratization.
Essential Readings

Recommended Readings

Week 1 – Session 2 (May 25)
Legal Holiday – no class

Week 2 – Session 1 (May 30)
The liberal democratic recession and the return of authoritarianism
- The end of democratic transition, the end of democratization? Elections without democracy. Democratic contestation and tensions. Non-democracies, competitive authoritarianism, and illiberal democracies, pseudo-democracies and hybrid regimes.

Essential Readings

Recommended Readings
Carothers, T. (January 01, 2002). The end of the transition paradigm. *Journal of Democracy (print)*, 5-21
Week 2 – Session 2 (June 1)

**Populism: pathological form, ideology or corrective for democracy?**

- Populism as a pathological form. Populism as a perennial possibility in democracy. Populism as a political logic and legitimate revolt of the masses. Populism as a thin-centered ideology. Characteristics and variations of left and right populism in the West.

**Essential Readings**


Canovan, M. (March 01, 1999). Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy. *Political Studies*, 47, 1, 2-16

**Recommended Readings**


Week 3 – Session 1 (June 6)

**Other approaches: populism as a style, discourse and strategy**

- Populism as a political style and as a discursive technique. Framing analysis and populism. Populism and political communication. Populist mobilization.

**Essential Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


**Week 3 – Session 2 (June 8)**

**Populism as an intellectual movement: a revival of political romanticism**


**Essential Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


**Week 4 – Session 1 (June 13)**

**Themes: Globalization, immigration and foreign policy**

- From mercantilism to the dominance of the (neo)-liberal model. Globalization and its discontents in the West. Anti-globalization movements and the return of economic nationalism.

- The anti-immigration discourse of the European far right. Anti-immigrant frames and strategies in the European refugee crisis.

- The foreign policy discourse of left and right populist parties. Anti-American narratives and the rise of pro-Russian populism in Europe. Europeanism versus Eurasianism.
Essential Readings


Recommended Readings


Balfour, R. et al. (2016) ‘Europe’s Troublemakers: The Populist Challenge to Foreign Policy’, *European Policy Centre*, Ch. 4 & 5

Week 4 – Session 2 (June 15)

Culture: the postmodern shift in the western concept of truth

- Understanding the post-truth culture. From the absolute to the elusive: the post-modern shift of the concept of truth in western societies. What is ‘new’ about fake news? The decline of truth and the rise of bullshit.

Essential Readings


Recommended Readings


Week 5 – Session 1 (June 20)

Technology: post-truth culture and the network society
• The revolution in information technology. The Network Society: the changing concepts of space and time. Instant communication and social media. Facts, emotions and the psychology of the network masses.

Essential Readings


Recommended Readings


Week 5 – Session 2 (June 22)

Implications: international order, cyberspace and net-wars

• From unipolar to multipolar international system. International competition in the information domain. Cyberspace as a battle-space. Old wars and net-wars. Information warfare, propaganda and wars of ideas.

Essential Readings


Recommended Readings


Week 6 – Session 1 and Session 2 (June 27 and June 29)

Presentations of group/individual project

Week 7 (exam date and time tbc)

Preparation and final exams
**Course Assessment**

The students will be evaluated on the basis of their performance as follows:

- **QQCs** 25%
- **Group or Individual Paper** 35%
- **Final examination** 40%
- **TOTAL** 100%

**Description of Assignments and Grading Criteria**

**QQCs (25%)**: The course involves a demanding reading schedule and discussion of assigned readings in class forms a major part of each session. In the beginning of each lecture, the students will have to submit a **Question**, a **Quote** and a **Comment** for each assigned reading. QQCs are designed to ensure student participation and a structured, meaningful discussion of texts in the class. (The professor will provide a template). Grading: 0.5 points for each QQC, plus bonus points for consistency.

**Group/individual Research Paper (35%)**: Using the theoretical frameworks of the literature presented and discussed in class, students will be asked to examine one, two or more populist movements. The projects will examine the main narratives and strategy of the populist actors along the following axes: reasons for emergence, intellectual and cultural context, electoral base and targeted groups or constituencies, narratives used in foreign policy-globalization-immigration, policy implications and influence, stance on fake news, appeals to emotion and conspiracy theories. The final format of this assignment will depend on final class size and composition. Depending on class size, the groups may consist of two or three students; or, if class is too small, the students may tackle the assignment with individual research papers. Depending on class composition and language range the case studies can vary from Brexit to Trump, from Russian foreign policy narratives to Le Pen’s French Front National, etc. Week 6 of the course will be dedicated to the presentation of on-going projects, discussion and exchange of ideas in the class. This will be an opportunity for the students to get feedback from the professor and fellow students for their on-
going projects, with the primary purpose of sharpening the theoretical consistency, the argument and focus on their own research papers. [Deadline for submission: end of Week 6 (July 2), via Turnitin]

**Final exam:** will include 10 multiple choice questions (10%); two long open answers on definitions and concepts approximately half a page each (20%); one long answer comparing/contrasting theoretical approaches (30%); one longer essay, two pages maximum (40%).

*Detailed grading criteria and rubrics for each assignment to be provided*

**Grading Scale of Vesalius College**

Vesalius College grading policy, in line with the Flemish Educational norms, is now as stated follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter grade</th>
<th>Scale of 20</th>
<th>Scale of 100</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>17.0-20.0</td>
<td>85-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>16.1-16.9</td>
<td>81-84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>15.3-16.0</td>
<td>77-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>14.5-15.2</td>
<td>73-76</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>13.7-14.4</td>
<td>69-72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>13.1-13.6</td>
<td>66-68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>12.3-13.0</td>
<td>62-65</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>11.5-12.2</td>
<td>58-61</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>10.7-11.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>10.0-10.6</td>
<td>50-53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-9.9</td>
<td>0-49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Additional Course Policies**

Late papers will not be accepted unless there are serious legitimate reasons. Provision of a signed medical note is required, and notice must be given prior to the deadline.
**Academic Honesty Statement**

Academic dishonesty is **NOT** tolerated in this course.

Academic honesty is not only an ethical issue but also the foundation of scholarship. Cheating and plagiarism are therefore serious breaches of academic integrity.

Following the College policy, cheating and plagiarism cases will be communicated in writing to the Associate Dean for Students and submitted to the Student Conduct Committee for disciplinary action.

If you refer to someone else’s work, appropriate references and citations must be provided. Grammar, spelling and punctuation count, so use the tools necessary to correct before handing in assignments.