

Professor Vladimir Tismaneanu  
University of Maryland  
Spring 2015  
GVPT459X: Seminar in Comparative Politics:  
Thursdays 2:00pm- 4:45pm

## Political Radicalism: Dictators, Dictatorships, and Film

Vladimir Lenin, the founder of the Soviet Union, called film “the most important art”. One cannot understand the emotional impact of totalitarian regimes, left and right wing alike, without taking into account the crucial role that propaganda played in these systems.

Hence, this course will examine via film presentations, assigned readings, and class discussions the nature and dynamics of 20<sup>th</sup> century dictatorships. This course will highlight distinctions between traditional authoritarian regimes and totalitarian tyrannies as a novel and unique form of political domination. The course will use mostly documentaries and fiction movies based on historical events. We will emphasize the relationship between dictators, ideology, propaganda, personality cult and terror. Following each movie presentation there will be class discussions where these major concepts will be actively examined.

### Requirements

Students are required to read the assigned readings before each class period. In addition, students are expected to read one newspaper on a daily basis (either Washington Post or New York Times). Participation in class discussions is strongly encouraged. Grades will be based on a mid-term in-class exam, a final take home exam, class participation and attendance. Extra credit can be earned by preparing a short class presentation on a relevant topic; the time and details must first be approved by the professor.

**Note:** Please keep in mind that this week-by-week syllabus is subject to modification, in connection to extended class discussions on certain topics. The syllabus is meant to give students a structural view of the topics approached in this course.

### Readings

Robert Gellately, Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler: The Age of Social Catastrophe  
Daniel Chirot, --Modern Tyrants: The Power and Prevalence of Evil in Our Age (New York: Free Press, 1994). Paperback edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).  
Simon Sebag Montefiore, The Court of the Red Tsar (Knopf), paperback

**Topic 1:** *Myth, Charisma, National Communism*Josip Broz Tito:

1) "Communist Cinema"(documentary film)

Readings: Daniel Chirot**Topic 2:** *Myth, Terror, and Personality Cult.*Joseph Stalin

1) "Katyn"

2) "Burnt by the Sun"

3) "Stalin Took Care of Me"

Readings: Montefiore, Gellately**Topic 3:** *Nazism, Ideology, and Propaganda*Adolf Hitler: Myth, charisma, and cult.

1) "Downfall"

2) "The Goebbels Experiment"

Readings: Gellately**Topic 4:** *Fascism as a Revolutionary Movement. The Nature of Mussolini's Totalitarian Power.*Benito Mussolini

1) "A Very Special Day"

Readings: Daniel Chirot**Topic 5:** Dreams of Absolute Control: The Khmer Rouge Regime*"Enemies of the People"*Readings: Daniel Chirot, "Modern Tyrants".**Topic 6:** *Remembering Dictatorship: Myth-making, nostalgia, open wounds**"Goodbye, Lenin!"*Readings: Daniel Chirot, "Modern Tyrants".**Topic 7:** *Nationalism and Stalinism; Megalomania and Political Paranoia.*Nicolae Ceausescu

1) QED

2) "Ceausescu's Last Days"

Readings: Daniel Chirot, "Modern Tyrants".**Topic 8:** *Survival under Communist Terror, Invasion of Privacy, Censorship and Complicity.*

1) "The Lives of the Others"