Department of Political Science
Faculty of Arts and Science
University of Toronto
POL382HF:
Topics in Canadian Politics (Public Opinion and Voting)

Summer 2023

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Lecture: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4:00PM – 6:00PM, Location UC256
Office hours: Appointment by email

Contents

Course Description and Learning Objectives 2
Assignments 2
Evaluation Criteria ........................................... 2
Grading and Assessment ....................................... 3
Late Penalty ....................................................... 3
Grade Appeals ..................................................... 3
Accessibility Services 4
Academic Accommodations ................................. 4
Academic Integrity 4
Mental Health and Wellness 4
Class Schedule 6
Session 1: What is public opinion and political behaviour? ............... 6
Session 2: How do you study public opinion and political behaviour? .... 6
Session 3: How do we form political opinions? .......................... 7
Session 4: Do you want to play a game? (Rational Choice) .............. 7
Session 5: Who is the voter? ....................................... 8
Session 6: Isn’t it all just partisanship? ................................. 8
Session 8: Midterm Test ............................................. 9
Session 9: Which groups do we belong to? (Social Identity Theory and Intersectionality) 9
Session 10: Aren’t we ultimately just voting for a person? (Parties and Leaders) 10
Session 11: Are you online? (Social Media and Politics) .................. 11
Session 12: The Politics of Tomorrow (+ Exam Prep) ....................... 11
Course Description and Learning Objectives

This course is intended to introduce you to the attitudes and behaviors of the mass public in Canada and other democracies, highlighting how public opinions shapes elections and policy making. We will examine formal and informal political participation, the mass media, the nature of social, psychological, and economic voting, as well as elite-driven forces on public opinion and voting. There will be a special focus on literature and methods related to measuring public opinion and vote intentions.

This is a course about asking questions: Why do people vote for who they vote for? Why do people vote at all? Why, and how, do people form political opinions? What is the role of gender in public opinion? These questions, and more, will be addressed in this course on public opinion and voting.

The course's key learning objectives include:

- An enhanced understanding of political behaviour
- The ability to identify major theories of public opinion and voting
- An overall better appreciation and grasp of public opinion data gathering methods

Required Texts and Materials

Readings are listed below for each session. Required readings for the course are usually available through the library.

Assignments

The final course grade reflects your level of demonstrated achievement of the course Learning Objectives listed above. Evaluations provide feedback on your progress towards the final course grade. Ouriginal will be used in this course and can be done via Quercus. You do not need to sign in to Ouriginal separately. Please see the section below on academic integrity for important information regarding plagiarism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluations</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
<th>Submit via</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Opinion Critique</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>May 22</td>
<td>Quercus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm test</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>June 1</td>
<td>In-person</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey Proposal Essay</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>June 12</td>
<td>Quercus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>Exam Period</td>
<td>In-person</td>
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We strongly advise students to keep draft work and hard copies of their essays and assignments before handing them to the instructors. All essays/assignments should be kept by the student until the marked essays/assignments have been returned to them and the grades are posted on ACORN.

Evaluation Criteria

The following sections detail the course’s assignment criteria. In addition to the brief descriptions below, detailed rubrics and instructions are provided on Quercus.

Public Opinion Critiques (15%):

Students are expected to submit a 1000-word public opinion critique, due May 22, worth 15% of the overall course grade. The critique provides an opportunity to respond to a publicly-available
public opinion poll or other opinion-related publication using material and theories from the course. Additional information and a rubric for this assignment is available on Quercus. Students are expected to provide each of the following sections as part of their analysis:

- Introduction and Public Opinion Summary
- Critique outlining both the positive aspects of the poll and areas for improvement
- Future research

Midterm Test (20%):

At the course mid-point, students will write an in-class, midterm test worth 20% of the overall course grade. The midterm test is intended to be written in less time than the 2-hours allocated for the course lecture. The midterm requires students to respond to multiple choice questions and short-answer questions. More information about the midterm will be provided in-class and on Quercus.

Survey Proposal Essay (25%):

Students are expected to submit a 2,000-word survey proposal essay, worth 25% of the overall course grade, outlining a proposed survey project. This assignment asks students to not only provide a literature review necessary for their proposal, but also to propose real, meaningful questions for analysis based on existing research. The best proposal will be considered for inclusion as part of a real survey projected to be fielded in late 2023. Additional details about this assignment, as well as a comprehensive assignment overview, is available on Quercus for review.

Final Exam (40%):

During the exam period, students will write a final exam worth 40% of the overall course grade. The final exam is divided in three sections: multiple choice, short answer, and essay response. These sections will have questions which generally reflect the course’s content temporally. The course’s final lecture will provide an overview on some of the material required for the exam, as well as more information about the format.

Grading and Assessment

Final grades for undergraduates are given as percentage grades, which correspond to a letter grade that is used to calculate GPA according to the University of Toronto marking scheme. For more information, see the Faculty of Arts and Science Academic Handbook, section 10. They reflect your overall performance in achieving the stated Course Learning Objectives. Please contact your instructor if you would like more guidance on your individual course performance.

Late Penalty

Written assignments will be subject to a 3-percentage point penalty per day after the submission deadline. Exemptions will be granted for documented, substantive reasons in accordance with UofT extension guidelines.

Grade Appeals

Students are able to request re-grading via email to both course instructors with a short overview in the email text about why the student is seeking a re-grade. The re-grade will be conducted by both course instructors, working together to review the assignment collaboratively. As a reminder, conducting a re-grade can result in a higher grade, the same grade, or, a lower grade. Students have up to 2 weeks from the date of return of the item of term work to query the marking. Once the re-grading process has begun, students can expect to receive feedback within a week.
Accessibility Services

Academic accommodations are provided when you experience disability-related barriers that prohibit demonstration of your knowledge and skills. Accommodations are provided to level the playing field upon which you can establish your success. Students with disabilities may receive accommodation from the University and need to register with accessibility services. Instructors are notified with a request for accommodation and can give the request consideration. You are encouraged to inform yourself about options in this regard at the website for Accessibility Services or email accessibility.services@utoronto.ca or Tel: 416-978-8060.

Academic Accommodations

Occasionally students will need to apply for an academic accommodation due to disability, illness, religious observance, or personal emergency. All requests for an academic accommodation due to disability are handled by the University of Toronto’s Accessibility Services, not the instructor. For disability-related accommodations, Accessibility Services staff will determine suitable accommodations on a case-by-case basis based on recommendation from health providers and with student input.

Students who require consideration for missed academic work for any non-disability related reason (e.g., COVID, cold, flu and other illness or injury, family situation) should report their absence through the online absence declaration available to them directly on ACORN—until otherwise indicated by the University. A Verification of Illness form is not currently required, but may become required should the public health situation change. Students should also inform their instructors of their absence.

Academic Integrity

Papers, assignments and all other deliverables must be original work, giving credit to the work of others where appropriate. This applies to individual and group deliverables. All members of a group are accountable for the academic integrity of their submissions. You are encouraged to consult the following websites to ensure that you follow the appropriate rules. Ignorance of these rules is not a defence in cases of violations, which can result in very serious academic sanctions. Please visit the University of Toronto Academic Integrity or Writing Centres for Arts and Science websites for further detail and help on the proper use of citations. Plagiarism is a serious academic offence and will be dealt with accordingly. For further clarification and information on plagiarism please see Writing at the University of Toronto.

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University’s plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool’s reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University’s use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation website.

Mental Health and Wellness

Feeling distressed? Are you in crisis? There’s help. Call Good2Talk: 1-866-925-5454 (Ontario); text GOOD2TALK to 686868. Free, confidential helpline with professional counselling, information and referrals for mental health, addictions and well-being, 24/7/365. You can also contact My Student Support Program (MySSP) 1-844-451-9700 (North America); 001-416-380-6575 (Outside of North America) or the U of T Employee & Family Assistance Program (EFAP) 1-800-663-1142 (toll-free); 1-866-398-9505 (TTY); 604-689-1717 (collect). The following are also available resources: UofT Health and Wellness, Support if Students are Feeling Distressed, Community
Safety Office (416-978-1485) or UofT Safety and Support. Visit Support When You Feel Distressed or the list of programs for more resources.

*24/7/365; Campus Community Police can direct your call to the right service.
Class Schedule

Session 1 (May 9): What is public opinion and political behaviour?
This session is intended to serve as an overview/introduction to the course material. We will review this syllabus, and the course’s assignments.

Required Readings:

Suggested Readings:

Session 2 (May 11): How do you study public opinion and political behaviour?
Which tools are used to study public opinion and political behaviour? What are the best ways to get at peoples real opinions? In this class we will look at how researchers use surveys and experiments to understand citizens’ preferences.

Required Readings:

Suggested Readings:
Session 3 (May 16): How do we form political opinions?

Required Readings:

How do citizens’ form political opinions? Are these opinions stable, or are they random?


Suggested Readings:


Session 4 (May 18): Do you want to play a game? (Rational Choice)

Rational choice theory has played an important role in public opinion research. The first half of this session will provide a comprehensive overview about how to think of rational choice theory in relation to public opinion. The second half of the session is a hands-on learning exercise, involving game theory.

Required Readings:


Suggested Readings:


Session 5 (May 23): Who is the voter?

Do predispositions matter to voters? If so, what elements of our mind might influence our opinions and behaviours?

Required Readings:


Suggested Readings:


- Mondak, Jeffery J. *Personality and the foundations of political behavior*. Cambridge University Press, 2010. Chapter 1, 2, and 6


Session 6 (May 25): Isn’t it all just partisanship?

Partisanship is increasingly a household topic of discussion. What can we learn about the effects of partisanship on public opinion and voting?

Required Readings:


Who participates in politics? Why? How?

**Required Readings:**


**Suggested Readings:**


Session 8 (June 1): Midterm Test

This session is dedicated to the in-person, midterm exam.

Session 9 (June 6): Social Identity Theory & Intersectionality

Social identity theory “explains relations between large social groups using psychological processes concerning social identity—an individual’s sense of belonging to a group and the positive or negative feelings associated with that membership. The theory has become an umbrella term for a set of more specific theories of inter-group behavior” (Harwood 2020 in *The International Encyclopedia of Media Psychology*).

Intersectionality is a vital lens by which to examine public opinion literature. This session provides an introductory overview of gender-based public opinion and voting literature, highlighting the Canadian context.

**Required Readings:**


Suggested Readings:


• Wells, Paul. “Kathleen Wynne on her political downfall and the private advice she gave Doug Ford.” *Macleans*. 2022.


Session 10 (June 8): Aren’t we ultimately just voting for a person? (Parties and Leaders)

What do political leaders and political parties do? What role does a local candidate play? This session explores the impacts that parties and leaders have on political outcomes.

Required Readings:


Suggested Readings:


Session 11 (June 13): Are you online? (Social Media and Politics)

Can social media help political mobilization? Or is it only a vector for polarization?

Required Readings:


Suggested Readings:


Session 12 (June 15): The Politics of Tomorrow (+ Exam Prep)

The first half of this sessions surveys the future of public opinion research. The second half of this session is intended for exam preparation.

Required Readings:


Suggested Readings:


Final Exam (Exam Period, TBD)