

POL314H1 Public Opinion and Voting

Section: LEC0101

Date/Time: Tuesday, 11AM-1PM

Instructor: Prof. Eric Merkley

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Office: Room 3121, Sidney Smith Hall

Office Hours: 12:30-1:30PM Friday or by appointment

1. Overview and Objectives

This course introduces students to the attitudes and behaviours of the mass public in Canada and other Western democracies. Themes include political participation, the mass media, and the nature of social, psychological, and economic, and elite-driven forces on public opinion and voting. It will also highlight the role of campaigns, issues, and leaders in elections. Over the course of the term students will engage in a number of important debates in the area of public opinion and voting, such as the on the relative importance of values and partisanship in shaping political behaviour, the nature of social cleavages in public opinion, the capacity of citizens to understand and participate in politics, the effects of the media and political campaigns on public opinion and voting, and the importance of public opinion in policy making. Students will also be given a brief introduction to public opinion polling and survey research methodology.

Over the course of the term students should be able to:

- Understand the strengths and limitations of survey methodology and critically consume public opinion information contained in election discourse
- Explain the fundamental characteristics of public opinion formation and change
- Identify important foundational influences on public opinion and voting and weigh in on important debates regarding their relative importance, like social groups and identities, ideology and partisanship
- Evaluate the ability of the news media and political campaigns to influence public opinion and voting
- Create survey questions and research designs to answer research questions in public opinion research in accordance with best practices

2. Course Format

Your attendance at in-person lectures is mandatory. You will be regularly asked quiz-style questions that require a response via Top Hat in lecture. Your participation in these in-class question-and-answer sessions is the foundation of your class participation. Most in-person lectures will also include group activities that reinforce the material covered. Participation in these activities will also be graded for participation.

3. Required Texts and Materials:

- Clawson, R. A., & Oxley, Z. M. (2020). *Public Opinion : Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice* (4th ed.). Sage/CQ Press.

Purchase e-book at following link: <https://www.vitalsource.com/en-ca/products/public-opinion-rosalee-a-clawson-zoe-m-v9781544390185?srsltid=AfmBOool98gjp0SUreO9Uiv0kQiVZcHpYpJqKuUF14YDi4OilpRP55jv>

- Gidengil, E., Nevitte N., Blais A., Everitt J & Fournier P. (2012). *Dominance & Decline: Making Sense of Recent Canadian Elections*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Available online at the following link: https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma991106963564906196.
- **Readings available through the library or electronically.** As listed below in the detailed syllabus, required readings for the course are usually available through the library. Links to these readings are provided. Others, labelled (Quercus), will be made available through Quercus. It is your responsibility to download all readings from the appropriate location. **Note:** reaction readings are only required for those doing a response paper for a given week.
- **Course webpage and emails.** There is a course webpage on Quercus. I will use this page to post important course documents (readings, syllabus, lecture slides, etc.), post announcements and send emails to you throughout the term. Lecture slides will be posted before each class. It is your responsibility to regularly check Quercus for updates. Written assignments will also be submitted through Quercus.

4. Grading and Assessed Coursework

Assignment	Date/Due Date	Percentage of Overall Grade
Lecture Participation (Top Hat/Activities)	All lectures	10%
In-Class Homework 1	September 16th, end of class	7.5%
In-Class Homework 2	October 14th, end of class	7.5%
Final Paper Outline	November 1st, 11:59pm	5%
Peer Feedback Reflection	November 11th, 11:59pm	5%
Final Paper	December 2nd, 11:59pm	25%
Final Exam	TBA	40%

4.1 Final Exam (40%)

There is a final exam. This exam will test you on all the material covered in the lectures and readings. The date and time of the final exam are set by the Registrar later in the term.

4.2 Class Participation (10%)

We will be using **Top Hat Pro** (www.tophat.com) for class participation. In all lectures you will be asked to answer questions using Top Hat. Part of your participation mark will depend on your engagement with these questions. Your mark does not depend on whether you get the answers right. The questions are exercises to provoke discussion and learning. However, to get credit for participation at a given lecture, you must be present at the lecture and input responses to all questions using your own device (Apple or Android smartphones and tablets, laptops, or through text message). If this is logistically a problem, contact me immediately. For instructions on how to create a Top Hat account and enrol in our Top Hat Pro course, please refer to the invitation sent to your school email address or consult Top Hat's [Getting Started Guide](#).

If you already have a Top Hat account, go to <https://app.tophat.com/login> to be taken directly to our course. If you are new to Top Hat, follow the link in the email invitation you received or...

- Go to <https://app.tophat.com/register/student>
- Click "Search by school" and input the name of our school
- Search for our course with the following join code: 887967

If a paid subscription is required, it will be listed at checkout when you enrol in our Top Hat Pro course. Should you require assistance with Top Hat at any time please contact their Support Team directly by way of email (support@tophat.com), the in-app support button, or by calling 1-888-663-5491. Specific user information may be required by their technical support team when troubleshooting issues.

In addition to questions and structured discussion via Top Hat, most class meetings dedicate some time to practical exercises, for which you will be working with your peers in small groups. You will be asked to discuss specific questions with your group, share your answers with the class, and email your collective response to me at eric.merkley@utoronto.ca.

For classes featuring group activities, 50% of your grade will be Top Hat participation and 50% will be the group activity. In classes with no group activity, Top Hat will be 100% of your grade.

4.3 In-Class Methods Homeworks (15%, 7.5% each)

Over the course of the term, you will complete two short homework assignments in-class. These homeworks require no secondary research, rather they ask you to apply what you learned in class to generate research questions, identify relevant causal theories and associated hypotheses, identify potential confounding variables, and draft survey questions and critique these questions on reliability and validity grounds. These homeworks will be posted during class on the assigned day with submission due at the end of class on Quercus. Late in-class homeworks will not be accepted without prior accommodation.

4.4 Final Paper, Outline, and Peer Feedback Reflection (25% + 5% + 5%)

You have two options for your final paper. The first option is to do a research proposal on a topic related to public opinion and voting. You will be graded the originality of your research question, your review of the relevant scholarly literature, your identification of key concepts and confounding variables, the coherence of your theory, the presentation and clarity of your hypotheses and original, survey-based measures, and the clarity of your proposed analysis. You will also discuss important limitations to your proposed research related to causal inference, measurement error, and sampling bias.

The second option is to write a research paper that includes a quantitative analysis of existing public opinion datasets, like the Canadian Election Study or the World Values Survey. There are three principal differences with the evaluation of such a paper: 1) you will use pre-existing survey measures from the dataset rather than creating your own; 2) you will actually implement your proposed analysis using crosstabs and multivariate regression; and 3) you will not be expected to engage in as thorough of a review of secondary research on your proposed research question and theory in light of the additional work involved in running the analysis.

To take the second option, you **must** have a background in working with quantitative datasets using R or Stata provided by either POL232 or an equivalent in another non-political science discipline. You must contact the instructor for permission to complete the quantitative analysis in lieu of the research proposal. I highly encourage students with knowledge of data analysis to take this option. It is helpful to practice and apply the skills you learned in POL232.

There are three steps to this process. First, you will write an outline for this paper (worth 5%, approximately 600 words). You should provide a preview of your research question, theory, variables, and proposed survey measures. The outline can consist of detailed bullet points, but evidence **must** be properly sourced. The outline is due on Quercus at 11:59PM on March 8th. The main purpose of this task is to provide feedback for your research paper. It will be given one of five grades: Excellent (100); Very Good (85); Good (75); Satisfactory (65); Failure (0). Without documentation, late outlines will be penalized 2 points out of 100 per day, including weekends.

The second step in this process is connected to peer feedback generated in Week 9's final paper workshop. You will share your research questions, theories, and proposed measures from your outline (and any work you have completed since) with small groups for peer feedback. We will also bring some of this discussion to the full class where appropriate.

After the class, you will complete a reflection exercise consisting of a series of questions that ask you about feedback you provided your peers, that you received from your peers, and how you will accommodate that feedback in your final paper. This exercise will be worth 5% of your grade. More details on this reflection exercise can be found on Quercus. This is due one week later, on March 18th on Quercus at 11:59pm. Without documentation, late reflections will be penalized 2 points out of 100 per day, including weekends. If you are unable to attend the workshop, *and you have arranged for accommodation in advance*, you will instead provide a reflection on how you will account for my feedback on the outline.

Finally, you will write a 1800-2400 word, properly sourced, final paper that builds on your research outline and considers feedback provided on the outline. The paper is due on April 3rd at 11:59pm. This paper is worth 25% of your grade for the course.

Detailed instructions will be posted on Quercus. Extensions on deadlines will be given for documented emergencies only. Without documentation, late papers will be penalized 2 points out of 100 per day, including weekends.

5. Course Schedule and Readings

Section I. Definitions and Measurement

Topic 1 (September 2) – Introduction/Public Opinion and Democracy

Readings:

- Course Syllabus
- Public Opinion, Ch. 1
- Dominance and Decline, Ch. 1
- Verba, S. (1996). “The Citizen as Respondent: Sample Surveys and American Democracy.” *American Political Science Review*, 90(1): 1-7.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/fedca1/cdi_pr_oquest_journals_214432172.

Topic 2 (September 9) – Measuring Public Opinion

Readings:

- Public Opinion, Ch. 1 (Appendix)
- Zaller, J., and Feldman, S. (1992). “A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences.” *American Journal of Political Science*. 36: 579-616.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/fedca1/cdi_pr_oquest_journals_1301254872.
- Johnston, R. (2008). “Survey Methodology.” In Box-Steffensmeier, Brady, H. E., & Collier, D. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*. Oxford University Press.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma9_91106658233606196.

Topic 3 (September 16) – Characterizing Public Opinion

In-Class Homework #1

Readings:

- Public Opinion, Ch. 4.
- Gidengil, E. (2004). *Citizens*. UBC Press, Ch. 3-4.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma9_91106027792806196.

- Kuklinski, J. H., and Quirk, P. J. (2000). “Reconsidering the Rational Public: Cognition, Heuristics, and Mass Opinion.” In Lupia, A., McCubbins, M., and Popkin, S., eds. *Elements of Political Reason*. New York: Cambridge University Press. **(Quercus)**

Section II. Foundational Influences on Voting

Topic 4 (September 23) – Social Influences on Public Opinion

Readings:

- Public Opinion, Ch. 2 (pp.59-77)
- Dominance and Decline, Ch. 2
- Wilkins-Laflamme, S. (2016) “The Changing Religious Cleavage in Canadians’ Voting Behaviour.” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 49(3): 499-518.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/fedca1/cdi_pr_oquest_journals_1832159079.

Topic 5 (September 30) – Values, and Ideology

Readings:

- Public Opinion, Ch. 5 (pp. 151-168), Ch. 6
- Cochrane, C. (2015). *Left and Right: The Small World of Political Ideas*. McGill-Queen’s University Press, Ch. 8 “The Rise of Left/Right in Canadian Politics”
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma991106963685906196.

Topic 6 (October 7) – Partisan Identity

Readings:

- Public Opinion, Ch. 5 (remainder)
- Dominance and Decline, Ch. 4
- Belanger, E., and Stephenson, L. (2010). “Partisans and Parties: The Influence of Ideology and Brokerage on the Durability of Partisanship in Canada.” In Anderson, C., and Stephenson, L., Eds. *Voting Behaviour in Canada*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma991106119223306196.

Section III. Proximate Influences on Voting

Topic 7 (October 14) – Instrumental Theories of Voting

In-Class Homework #2

Readings:

- Dominance and Decline, Ch. 5, 8
- Anderson, C. (2010). "Economic Voting in Canada." In Anderson, C., and Stephenson, L., Eds. *Voting Behaviour in Canada*, Vancouver: UBC Press.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma991106119223306196.

Topic 8 (October 21) – News Media

Readings:

- Public Opinion, Ch. 3
- Dobrzynska, A., Blais, A., and Nadeau, R. (2003). "Do the Media Have a Direct Impact on the Vote? The Case of the 1997 Canadian Election." *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 15: 27-43.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/fedca1/cdi_gale_infotracademiconefile_A100736955.
- Tolley, E. (2015). *Framed: Media and the Coverage of Race in Canadian Politics*. Vancouver: UBC Press, Ch. 2.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/fedca1/cdi_proquest_ebookcentral_EBC4397155.

Fall Reading Week: No class on October 28

Research Outline Due (November 1)

Topic 9 (November 4) – Final Paper Workshop

- No readings but bring your outlines and work in progress for the final paper to class.

Topic 10 (November 11) – Issues, Leaders, and Campaigns

Peer Feedback Reflection Due

Readings:

- Dominance and Decline, Ch. 7
- Bittner, A. (2018). "Leaders Always Mattered: The Persistence of Personality in Canadian Elections." *Electoral Studies*, 54: 297–302.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/fedca1/cdi_gale_infotracademiconefile_A547963893.
- Fournier, P., Nadeau, R., Blais, A., Gidengil, E., and Nevitte, N. (2004). "Time-of-Voting Decision and Susceptibility to Campaign Effects." *Electoral Studies* 23: 661-81.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/fedca1/cdi_crossref_primary_10_1016_j_electstud_2003_09_001.

Section IV. Participation and Policy

Topic 11 (November 18) – Political Participation

Readings:

- Blais, A. et al. (2004). “Where Does Turnout Decline Come From?” *European Journal of Political Research*, 43(2): 221-236.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/fedca1/cdi_rossref_primary_10_1111_j_1475_6765_2004_00152_x.
- Nevitte, N. (1996). *The Decline of Deference: Canadian Value Change in Cross National Perspective*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Ch 4.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/fedca1/cdi_as_kewsholts_vlebooks_9781442602519.
- Rubenson, Blais, A., Fournier, P., Gidengil, E., & Nevitte, N. (2007). “Does Low Turnout Matter? Evidence from the 2000 Canadian Federal Election.” *Electoral Studies*, 26(3): 589–597.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/fedca1/cdi_gale_infotraccademiconefile_A190801319.

Topic 12 (November 25) – Public Opinion and Policy/Conclusions

Readings:

- Public Opinion, Ch. 12
- Soroka, S. N., and Wlezien, C. (2004). “Opinion Representation and Policy Feedback: Canada in Comparative Perspective.” *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 37(3): 531–559.
https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/fedca1/cdi_proquest_journals_204489709.

Final Paper Due (December 2)

6. Course Policies

6.1 Contacting the Course Instructor

I strongly recommend asking substantive questions about course content and requirements in scheduled office hours or by appointment. Email should be reserved strictly for time sensitive questions or quick points of clarification. We will try to respond within 24 hours, but emails received during the weekend will be answered on Monday and we will not respond to emails on the due date of an assignment.

6.2 Possible Changes to the Syllabus

I reserve the right to make adjustments to the course syllabus. I will give notice to students in the event of any changes, and amended syllabi will be posted on Quercus.

6.3 Re-grading

If you would like anything re-graded, you must prepare a one-page memo outlining your case for re-grading. You must submit this memo after a 48 hour cooling off period subsequent to the release of the grade and no later than 14 days after the release of the grade. The memo needs to be serious and specific. I will then re-examine a particular assignment. Know, however, that a given grade can either increase or decrease.

6.4 Missing Class and Late Assignments

Attendance and participation is required at all class sessions. Late assignments will be penalized 2 points out of 100 per day, including weekends, except in the event of a documented serious illness or serious personal emergency (see section on Accommodation below). In-class homeworks cannot be submitted late. They will be graded a zero unless prior accommodation has been made.

6.5 Accommodation for Emergency Situations

Students who need additional time for an assignment or will miss a lecture or exam for a medical or serious personal reason **must contact me before the due date or exam/lecture date** and as soon as the problem arises. All requests for accommodation must be made to me directly via email.

We will require some documentation in support of your specific medical circumstances. This documentation can be an Absence Declaration (via ACORN) or the University's Verification of Student Illness or Injury (VOI) form. The VOI indicates the impact and severity of the illness, while protecting your privacy about the details of the nature of the illness. If you cannot submit a VOI due to limits on terms of use, you can submit a different form (like a letter from a doctor), as long as it is an original document, and it contains the same information as the VOI (including dates, academic impact, practitioner's signature, phone and registration number). For more information on the VOI, please see <http://www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca>. For information on Absence Declaration Tool for A&S students, please see <https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/absence>. If you get a concussion, break your hand, or suffer some other acute injury, you should register with Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

Please note that accommodations will not be made for foreseeable circumstances, such as having multiple papers due in the same week. Accommodations are reserved for unforeseeable events that are outside a student's control (e.g., illness, a death in the family).

Requests for accommodation **made on or after an assignment's due date, or after the missed exam or lecture will not be considered**. Due date extensions will not usually be granted for work lost due to computer crashes or the loss of a computer file. There are simple and free ways of regularly and automatically backing up your work. Students are strongly advised to backup copies of their essays and assignments before submitting via Quercus. These backups should be kept until the marked assignments have been returned.

6.6 Other Accommodations

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility> as soon as possible.

The University provides academic accommodations for students with disabilities in accordance with the terms of the Ontario Human Rights Code. This occurs through a collaborative process that

acknowledges a collective obligation to develop an accessible learning environment that both meets the needs of students and preserves the essential academic requirements of the University's courses and programs.

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the [Accessibility Services office](#).

The University provides reasonable accommodation of the needs of students who observe religious holy days other than those already accommodated by ordinary scheduling and statutory holidays. Students have a responsibility to alert members of the teaching staff in a timely fashion to upcoming religious observances and anticipated absences and instructors will make every reasonable effort to avoid scheduling tests, examinations or other compulsory activities at these times. Please reach out to me as early as possible to communicate any anticipated absences related to religious observances, and to discuss any possible related implications for course work.

6.7 Equity and Harassment

The University of Toronto is committed to equity, human rights and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect where all members of our community can express themselves, engage with each other, and respect one another's differences. U of T does not condone discrimination or harassment against any persons or communities.

6.8 Academic Integrity and Responsibility

Academic integrity is essential to the pursuit of learning and scholarship in a university, and to ensuring that a degree from the University of Toronto is a strong signal of each student's individual academic achievement. As a result, the University treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. The [University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#) outlines the behaviours that constitute academic dishonesty and the processes for addressing academic offences. Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

In papers and assignments:

- Using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement.
- Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor in all relevant courses
- Making up sources or facts
- Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment

On tests and exams:

- Using or possessing unauthorized aids
- Looking at someone else's answers during an exam or test
- Misrepresenting your identity

In academic work:

- Falsifying institutional documents or grades
- Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University, including (but not limited to) doctor's notes

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, please reach out to me. Note that you are expected to seek out additional information on academic integrity from me or from other institutional resources (for example, the [University of Toronto website on Academic Integrity](#)).

6.9 Plagiarism Detection

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 web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>)

6.10 Usage of Generative Artificial Intelligence

The use of generative artificial intelligence (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, GPT-enabled Bing) is not entirely prohibited at the University of Toronto, provided it is used carefully and ethically. In this course, generative AI tools are not considered legitimate sources of information (i.e., do not use AI tools to circumvent reading the literature). These tools often produce inaccurate claims and fabricated citations. Submitting fake citations constitutes academic dishonesty and will be treated as a violation of the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters.

Generative AI use in this class is entirely prohibited for in-class homeworks and exams. Any unauthorized use of AI in these settings will be treated as a violation of the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters.

For the various components of the final paper, however, careful and ethical use of generative AI is acceptable. The most acceptable uses of generative AI are for brainstorming, outlining, and coding (for a data analysis). That being said, generative AI is **not** considered a legitimate source of information for the purposes of assignments in this class (akin to other non-academic sources of information). It will not be treated and rewarded as evidence of students engaging with the literature on their topic of interest. Further, failing to cite this source when its output is used in assignments constitutes academic dishonesty, just as it is for all other sources used but not cited. Generative artificial intelligence platforms also typically produce fake citations in their output. Using fake citations in an assignment also constitutes academic dishonesty. If we find evidence that generative AI was used in such a manner, we will consider it an academic offense (see 6.8).

If you use generative AI at any stage of preparing for the various components of the final paper (outline, peer review, final paper), you must include an **AI Use Appendix** to your submission. This appendix should clearly list the AI tool used and include:

- The exact prompt(s) you entered to the AI tool

- A brief explanation of how you used the output in your work

This is intended to promote academic transparency and allow instructors to provide constructive feedback on your use of the tool.