

# POL377H1 S

## Topics in Comparative Politics I

### Winter 2026 Syllabus

## Course Meetings

### POL377H1 S

Section	Day & Time	Delivery Mode
LEC0301 Democracy: Citizens' Perspective s	Thursday, 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM	In Person

Refer to ACORN for the most up-to-date information about the location of the course meetings.

## Course Contacts

**Course Website:** <https://q.utoronto.ca/courses/426896>

**Instructor:** Prof. Dr. Thorsten Faas

**Email:** [thorsten.faas@utoronto.ca](mailto:thorsten.faas@utoronto.ca)

**Office Hours and Location:** In-person office hours: Tuesdays, 1:45–2:45pm (or by appointment), Room 219N (Trinity College, 1 Devonshire Place)

**Additional Notes:** Please send emails from your university email account. I will try my best to respond to your emails within 48 hours, excluding weekends.

## Course Overview

Abraham Lincoln famously said that democracy is government by the people and for the people. In this seminar, we will focus on how citizens conceive of democracy and their very own role in a democratic system. We will examine the prerequisites necessary at the individual, societal, and political level. Topics include competing normative understandings of democracy and their support among citizens, citizens' political awareness (interest, knowledge, and efficacy), media usage. We will also look at populism, populist attitudes, as well as (affective) polarization. On a behavioral level, we will focus on political participation in a general sense, but also specifically on voter turnout and voting behavior.

## **Course Learning Outcomes**

The main objectives of this course are to help you:

1. democratic systems and the role of citizens
2. improve your research and writing skills.
3. critically evaluate academic and policy writings in comparative politics
4. compare countries and understand how institutions differ across countries and affect attitudes and behaviour

This course is designed to help students:

1. learn and evaluate core concepts of political sociology.
2. critically assess academic and contemporary writings on democracy and the role of citizens.
3. compare countries and understand how institutions differ across countries and affect attitudes and behaviour
4. develop writing skills with attention to evidence and logical rigor.

**Prerequisites:** 1.0 credit in POL/ JPA/ JPF/ JPI/ JPR/ JPS/ JRA courses

**Corequisites:** None

**Exclusions:** None

**Recommended Preparation:** None

**Credit Value:** 0.5

## Marking Scheme

Assessment	Percent	Details	Due Date
<b>Final In-Class Test</b>	25%	Final In-Class Test consisting of multiple-choice questions as well as short questions and one essay question covering all our sessions.	2026-04-02
<b>Midterm test</b>	25%	Midterm test consisting of multiple-choice questions focusing on our first five sessions.	2026-02-12
<b>Writing assignment</b>	20%	Blog Post / op-ed: You will write a short piece (could be a blog post or an op-ed) essay in which you have a detailed look at a topic related to democracy from a citizen perspective in a country of your choice in light of (at least) one our sessions. You should use empirical evidence/statistics/data as a focus point of your piece. Length: ~1,000 words.	2026-03-12
<b>Analyze a Paper</b>	20%	Analyze a Paper: Find and analyze a journal article for one session based on a pre-defined coding-scheme that I will provide as a PowerPoint template and be ready to present your result in class. You will be assigned to a session by me.	No Specific Date
<b>Attendance</b>	10%	Attendance of lectures: This is a lecture course, and you are expected to attend all classes in person. I will take attendance for every session. If you have to miss class, please inform me of your absence prior to class and provide appropriate documentation (see details below). All lectures involve plenty of class discussion, which requires you to complete the readings before class.	No Specific Date

### Late Assessment Submissions Policy

Late assignments will be subject to a late penalty of 5% per day (including weekends) of the total marks for the assignment. Assignments submitted five calendar days beyond the due date will be assigned a grade of zero. Assignments handed in AFTER the work has been returned to the class cannot be marked for credit. Accommodations due to late registration into the course will NOT be approved.

## Course Schedule

### 1 08.01.2026 Introduction

### 2 15.01.2026 Internal Political Efficacy and Political Knowledge

Oser, J., Feitosa, F., & Dassonneville Ruth (2023). Who Feels They Can Understand and Have an Impact on Political Processes? Socio-demographic Correlates of Political Efficacy in 46 Countries, 1996–2016, *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 35, edad013. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edad013>

Schemer, C., Stanyer, J., et al. (2024). The Relationship Between Political Entertainment Media Use and Political Efficacy: A Comparative Study in 18 Countries, *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 36, edae046. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edae046>

### 3 22.01.2026 The Role of Media

Damstra, A., Vliegthart, R., Boomgaarden, H., Glüer, K., Lindgren, E., Strömbäck, J., & Tsifti, Y. (2021). Knowledge and the News: An Investigation of the Relation Between News Use, News Avoidance, and the Presence of (Mis)beliefs, *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 28, 29-48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612211031457>

Haugsgjerd, A., Hesstvedt, S., & Karlsen, R. (2021). Increased Media Choice and Political Knowledge Gaps: A Comparative Longitudinal Study of 18 Established Democracies 1995-2015, *Political Communication*, 38(6), 731–750. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2020.1868633>

### 4 29.01.2026 External Efficacy and Populist Attitudes

Rico, G., Guinjoan, M. & Anduiza, E. (2020). Empowered and enraged: Political efficacy, anger and support for populism in Europe. *European Journal of Political Research*, 59, 797-816. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12374>

Henderson, G., & Han, H. (2020). Linking Members to Leaders: How Civic Associations Can Strengthen Members' External Political Efficacy. *American Politics Research*, 49, 293-303. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X20972101>

### 5 05.02.2026 Understandings of Democracy

Landwehr, C., & Steiner, N. D. (2017). Where Democrats Disagree: Citizens' Normative Conceptions of Democracy. *Political Studies*, 65, 786-804. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321717715398>

Wegscheider, C., Rovira Kaltwasser, C., & Van Hauwaert, S. M. (2023). How citizens' conceptions of democracy relate to positive and negative partisanship towards populist parties. *West European Politics*, 46, 1235–1263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2023.2199376>

**6 12.02.2026 Mid-Term Test**

**7 19.02.2026 Reading Week**

**8 26.02.2026 Institutional Trust**

Verboord, M., Janssen, S., Kristensen, N. N., & Marquart, F. (2023). Institutional Trust and Media Use in Times of Cultural Backlash: A Cross-National Study in Nine European Countries. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 30, 752-774. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612231187568>

Nielsen, L.H. & Petersen, M.B. (2025), Beyond left and right: The role of system trust in COVID-19 attitudes and behaviours across eight western countries. *European Journal of Political Research*, 64, 1233-1256. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12749>

**9 05.03.2026 Affective Polarization**

Garzia, D., Ferreira da Silva, F., & Maye, S. (2023). Affective Polarization in Comparative and Longitudinal Perspective, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 87, 219–231, <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfad004>

Wagner, M. (2021). Affective polarization in multiparty systems, *Electoral Studies*, 69, 102199. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2020.102199>

**10 12.03.2026 Political Representation**

Powell, G.B. (2004). Political Representation in Comparative Politics. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 7, 273-296, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.7.012003.104815>

Bailer, S., Breunig, C., Giger, N., & Wüst, A.M. (2022): The Diminishing Value of Representing the Disadvantaged: Between Group Representation and Individual Career Paths. *British Journal of Political Science*, 52, 535–52. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123420000642>

**11 19.03.2026 Turnout**

Hirvonen, S., Schafer, J., & Tukiainen, J. (2025). Policy feedback and voter turnout: Evidence from the Finnish basic income experiment. *American Journal of Political Science*, 69, 1388–1405. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12915>

Huber, G.A., Gerber, A.S., Fang, A.H., & Cho, J.J. (2025). Field Experiments Invoking Gloating Villains to Increase Voter Participation: Anger, Anticipated Emotions, and Voting Turnout. *British Journal of Political Science*, 55, e104. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123425000298>

## **12 26.03.2026 Vote Choice**

Frese, J., Hix, S., & Lachat, R. (2025). Quality Not Quantity: How a VAA Affected Voting Behavior in Three Large-Scale Field Experiments. *British Journal of Political Science*, 55, e176. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000712342510118X>

Polacko, M. (2025). Canada's Increasing Class-Based Voting Disparities Amidst Declining Economic Policy Saliency. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 58, 821–47. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423925100462>

## **13 02.04.2026 In-Class-Test**

## **Policies & Statements**

### **Late/Missed Assignments**

Late assignments will be subject to a late penalty of **5%** per day (including weekends) of the total marks for the assignment. Assignments submitted five calendar days beyond the due date will be assigned a grade of zero. Assignments handed in AFTER the work has been returned to the class cannot be marked for credit. Accommodations due to late registration into the course will NOT be approved.

If you are unable to meet the deadline of your assignment/paper due to unforeseen circumstances, you may apply for an extension of time using the [UTM Special Consideration Request application](https://uoft.service-now.com/utm_scr) ([https://uoft.service-now.com/utm\\_scr](https://uoft.service-now.com/utm_scr)). This request must be submitted within 3 days of the missed deadline. The request must explain the reason for missing the deadline and include appropriate documentation, e.g., [Verification of Student Illness or Injury form](#).

Each request for special consideration is carefully reviewed by the department/course <tor based on the information provided and approval is not guaranteed.

### **Plagiarism Detection Tool**

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>).

## **Students with Disabilities or Accommodation Requirements**

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have an acute or ongoing disability issue or accommodation need, you should register with Accessibility Services (AS) at the beginning of the academic year by visiting <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/department/accessibility-services/>. Without registration, you will not be able to verify your situation with your instructors, and instructors will not be advised about your accommodation needs. AS will assess your situation, develop an accommodation plan with you, and support you in requesting accommodation for your course work. Remember that the process of accommodation is private: AS will not share details of your needs or condition with any instructor, and your instructors will not reveal that you are registered with AS.

## **Academic Integrity**

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2019) (<https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2019>). 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, to learn more about how to cite and use source material appropriately and for other writing support, see the U of T writing support website at <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca>. Consult the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters for a complete outline of the University's policy and expectations. For more information, please see [A&S Student Academic Integrity](https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/academic-advising-and-support/student-academic-integrity) (<https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/academic-advising-and-support/student-academic-integrity>) and the [University of Toronto Website on Academic Integrity](https://www.academicintegrity.utoronto.ca) (<https://www.academicintegrity.utoronto.ca>).

## **Specific Medical Circumstances**

If you become ill and it affects your ability to do your academic work, consult me right away. Normally, I will ask you for 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.

## **Attendance**

This is a lecture course, and you are expected to attend all classes in person. I will take attendance for every session. If you have to miss class, please inform me of your absence prior

to class and provide appropriate documentation (see details below). All lectures involve plenty of class discussion, which requires you to complete the readings before class.

### **Religious Accommodations**

As a student at the University of Toronto, you are part of a diverse community that welcomes and includes students and faculty from a wide range of cultural and religious traditions. For my part, I will make every reasonable effort to avoid scheduling tests, examinations, or other compulsory activities on religious holy days not captured by statutory holidays. Further to University Policy, if you anticipate being absent from class or missing a major course activity (such as a test or in-class assignment) due to a religious observance, please let me know as early in the course as possible, and with sufficient notice (at least two to three weeks), so that we can work together to make alternate arrangements.

### **Quercus Info**

This Course uses the University's learning management system, Quercus, to post information about the course. This includes posting readings and other materials required to complete class activities and course assignments, as well as sharing important announcements and updates. New information and resources will be posted regularly as we move through the term. To access the course website, go to the U of T Quercus log-in page at <https://q.utoronto.ca>. SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT GRADES POSTED ONLINE: Please also note that any grades posted are for your information only, so you can view and track your progress through the course. No grades are considered official, including any posted in Quercus at any point in the term, until they have been formally approved and posted on ACORN at the end of the course. Please contact me as soon as possible if you think there is an error in any grade posted on Quercus.

### **Accommodation for Personal Reasons**

There may be times when you are unable to complete course work on time due to non-medical reasons. If you have concerns, speak to me or to an advisor in your College Registrar's office; they can help you to decide if you want to request an extension or other forms of academic consideration. They may be able to email your instructors directly to provide a College Registrar's letter of support and connect you with other helpful resources on campus.