

**The University of Western Ontario
Department of Political Science
Political Science 3337G
Comparative Public Opinion
Winter 2026**

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Course Description:

This seminar course will critically assess the topic of public opinion within politics and the study of political science. The course addresses topics including the definition and measurement of public opinion, how citizens determine and organize their attitudes and beliefs, the relationship of public opinion and citizen competence, the interaction of public opinion and policy, the influences of political communication on public opinion, as well as the nature of public opinion on contemporary issues.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the course students will:

- Be able to demonstrate understanding of issues relating to the meaning and measurement of public opinion
- Be able to demonstrate understanding of diverse theories of and approaches to the study of public opinion
- Be able to interpret and analyze public opinion data

Course Readings:

Required book available in UWO bookstore.

Anderson and Turgeon (ed.). 2023. Comparative Public Opinion. Routledge: New York.

Additional Readings available through course page on Brightspace or online through the Western Library's website.

Course Requirements:

Participation 5%

Research Paper Proposal 5%

Research Paper 20%

Midterm Exam 30%

Final Exam 40%

DISCUSSION OF COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1.) Participation (5%): As this is a smallish third-year course, there will be a mix of lecture and classroom discussion. Students are expected to actively participate each week. The participation grade will be based on attendance, the quality of comment, evidence of preparation, willingness to challenge accepted ideas and concern for the views expressed by others. If unable to attend, please inform the instructor in advance. Students will be given a preliminary grade for participation in the seventh week of the course. The final participation grade may change based on whether in-class performance improves, declines or stays the same.

2.) Research Paper Proposal (5%): The research paper proposal will be submitted online through the OWL course page and will be due at the beginning of class on **March 6, 2026**. This proposal should consist of a 1-page outline of the paper which includes an introduction of the topic, a thesis statement, tentative plan of the paper and (on a second page) a working bibliography of at least **6 (six)** academic sources (refereed books and journal articles) (not on the course outline).

3.) Research Essay (20%): You are required to write a research paper of 8-10 double-spaced pages in length using Times New Roman 12-point font. This paper will be submitted online through the Brightspace course page. There are two due dates for this paper. If you want written comments on the paper, please submit the essay by **11:55pm on April 3, 2026**. If you just want the grade and no comments, please submit the essay by **11:55pm on April 10, 2026**. The intent of this assignment is to have you write a research essay that probes some topic of relevance within the field of public opinion. You may choose to further delve into a topic covered in class or you may find something outside of the class which is both of interest to you and within the broad subject nature of the class. As this is a research essay, you will be expected to utilize a minimum of **8 (eight)** academic sources (books and refereed journal articles) to develop and support your arguments/ideas.

4.) Mid-term Exam (30%): An in-class midterm exam will occur on **February 9, 2026**. The exam will be a mix of multiple choice, short answer and essay. There will be choice of questions in the short answer and essay questions.

5.) Final Exam (40%): A final exam to be scheduled during the April examination period. The exam will consist of a mixture of multiple choice, short answer and essay questions. There will be choice of written questions.

IMPORTANT COURSE POLICIES

Submission of Assignments:

Assignments are due at the beginning of class and must be submitted through the Brightspace course page.

Academic Offences:

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

https://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#Page_20. All papers must be submitted through the Turnitin program portal on the Brightspace course page.

Late penalty:

Late assignments will be penalized at a rate of 5% per day. Assignments that are more than 1 week late will **not be accepted** for grading.

Extensions:

Extensions are not given. However, when there are genuine and unavoidable family or medical circumstances an extension may be granted at the discretion of the professor.

Artificial Intelligence: The University regulations on AI use in course work are listed here: <https://ai.uwo.ca/>. I expect you to complete all work for this course adhering to the spirit and principles of intellectual honesty and integrity **and to not use AI for the generation and completion of written assignments this course**. Should I suspect the use of AI on an assignment, I will convene a meeting with the student to verify your understanding of the material and argument. Where the student is not able to defend the content or origination of their work, I will ask the student to redo the assignment with late penalties in force from the original due date.

Course Topics and Readings:

I. Introducing Public Opinion:

Week 1 (January 5) Introduction and Overview

Anderson and Turgeon (A and T) 'Chapter 1'

II. Issues in the Study of Public Opinion:

Week 2 (January 12) Defining Public Opinion

A and T 'Chapter 2'

Clawson, R. and Z. Oxley. 2017. Public Opinion. 3rd ed. CQ Press. (Chapter 1)

Glynn, C. et al. 2004. Public Opinion. 2nd edition. Westview Press. (Chapter 1)

Week 3 (January 19) Issues in Measurement, Sampling and Survey Response (Experiments?)

A and T 'Chapter 2'

Asher, H. 2012. *Polling and the Public*. 8th edition. (Chapters 2 and 3)

Week 4 (January 26) Knowledge, Citizen Competence and Public Opinion

Wolak, J. 2022. "Political Knowledge." In Rudolph (ed.) *Handbook on Politics and Public Opinion*. Edward Elgar: Cheltenham, UK.

Gilens, M. 2012. "Two-Thirds Full? Citizen Competence and Democratic Governance" in Adam Berinsky (ed.) New Directions in Public Opinion. Routledge.

III. Explaining Public Opinion

Week 5 (February 2) Age, Gender, Language and Opinion about Immigration

A and T Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 15

Week 6 (February 9) In-class Midterm Exam

*******(February 16) No class - Reading Week*******

Week 7 (February 23) Religion, Immigrant Status, Race, Class and Opinion about Immigration

A and T Chapters 6, 7, 8

Week 8 (March 2) Ideology, Partisanship and Opinion about Immigration

******Research Paper Proposal Due Friday March 6******

A and T Chapter 10 and 11

Merkley, E., 2022. "Polarization eh? Ideological divergence and partisan sorting in the Canadian mass public." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 86, 4, 932-943.

Week 9 (March 9) Biology, Personality and Emotion and Opinion about Immigration

A and T Chapter 9

Brader, T. 2020. "The Emotional Foundations of Democratic Citizenship" in Adam Berinsky (ed.) New Directions in Public Opinion 3rd Ed. Routledge.

Gonzalez, F. J. Hibbing and K. Smith. 2020. "No Longer "Beyond our Scope": The Biological and Non-Conscious Underpinnings of Public Opinion" in Adam Berinsky (ed.) New Directions in Public Opinion 3rd Ed. Routledge.

IV. Public Opinion and Politics

Week 10 (March 16) Political Communication and Public Opinion

A and T Chapter 16

Baum, M. and D. Young. 2020. "The "Daily Them": Hybridity, Political Polarization and Presidential Leadership in a Digital Media Age" in Adam Berinsky (ed.) New Directions in Public Opinion 3rd Ed. Routledge.

Week 11 (March 23) Public Opinion, Public Policy and Representation

Campbell, A. and E. Rigby. 2020. "Public Opinion and Public Policy" in Adam Berinsky (ed.) New Directions in Public Opinion 3rd Ed. Routledge.

Soroka, S. and C. Wlezien. 2004. "Opinion Representation and Policy Feedback: Canada in Comparative Perspective" Canadian Journal of Political Science, 2004, 4, 530-59.

Week 12 (March 30) Conclusions

A and T Chapter 18

Achen, Christopher and Larry Bartels. 2017. *Democracy for Realists*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 1.

Week 13 (April 6) Flex week/paper writing