



The University of Western Ontario  
**SOCIOLOGY 2133B-001**

**Public Opinion**

**Winter 2024**

**Mon 9:30am-12:30pm**

**In-person**

**Instructor:** Anders Holm

**Office Hours:** Tuesday, 1-3pm

**Department of Sociology**

**Email:** aholm@uwo.ca

---

*This is a DRAFT only. Please see the course site for the final version.*

**Course Description:**

Political scientists have tended to emphasize the role of public opinion in government and politics, paying particular attention to its influence on the development of government policy. Sociologists, in contrast, usually conceive of public opinion as a product of social interaction and communication. According to this view, there can be no public opinion on an issue unless members of the public communicate with each other. In this course we will discuss different views on what public opinion is, what shapes public opinion and how it's negotiated among members of society. We will discuss theories and investigate their empirical support.

***Prerequisite(s):*** None

***Anti-requisite(s):*** None

**Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:**

This course offers the opportunity to learn various views on what constitutes public opinion and what factor lies behind a particular set of public opinions. In addition, the participant in the course will learn how to evaluate theories on public opinion by empirical evidence.

**Course Material:**

The readings for this class are excerpts from the book: Clawson, R. A., & Oxley, Z. M. (2020). *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc. (US). <https://bookshelf.vitalsource.com/books/9781544390185>. It is available at the UWO bookstore. [https://bookstore.uwo.ca/textbook-search?campus=UWO&term=W2023B&courses%5B0%5D=001\\_UW/SOC2133B](https://bookstore.uwo.ca/textbook-search?campus=UWO&term=W2023B&courses%5B0%5D=001_UW/SOC2133B). In addition, research paper and articles will be used. They are available for download via OWL.

### **Communication:**

Students are responsible for checking the course OWL site (<http://owl.uwo.ca>) on a regular basis for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class.

### **Method of Evaluation:**

The evaluation methods described in the course outline are essential requirements for the course. There will be one midterm test, an essay assignment, and a final exam.

### ***Evaluation Breakdown:***

Midterm test (February 26). 3 hours, Multiple choice, and short answers, in person (in class). Weight = 33.3%

Student essay (due March 18). Take home. Weight = 33.3%

Final Examination 3 hours. Multiple choice and short answers, in person, date: TBA, Weight = 33.3%

### ***Essay:***

Each student is expected to write a research essay for the course. Students are required to pick a topic of their choice that deals with public opinion, either globally or in Canada. A range of possible topics will also be presented in class. The instructor must approve the topic. The essay should not exceed 7 pages and be double-space typed. The essay should specify the main questions raised; begin with a thesis statement; contain a relevant literature review; and conclude with your position on the topic. The instructor will hand out detailed instructions for the essays.

In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence during the course that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, affected course content will be delivered entirely online, synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable). The grading scheme will **not** change. Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online.

### **Student Absences:**

If you are unable to meet a course requirement due to illness or other serious circumstances, please follow the procedures below.

### ***Assessments worth 10% or more of the overall course grade:***

For work totaling 10% or more of the final course grade, students must provide valid medical or supporting documentation to their Home Faculty Academic Counselling Office as soon as possible.

Students with an approved absence from an in-class test or exam will be required to write a makeup exam. Course professor or teaching assistant(s) may not be available to respond to questions during the makeup exam. Students should be aware that the make-up test will not necessarily be in the same format, be of the same duration, or cover the same material as the original test.

## **Course Schedule and Readings:**

### **Jan. 8. Introduction.**

### **Jan. 15. Role of Citizens in a democratic society.**

Clawson & Oxley, chapter 1.

### **Jan. 22. Are Citizens Pliable**

Clawson & Oxley, chapter 2-4.

### **Jan. 29. Inequality and attitudes (Guest lecturer Robert Andersen, Ivey Business School).**

Haddon, E. and Cary Wu (2021) How does Actual Inequality Shape People's Perceptions of Inequality? A Class Perspective. *Sociological Perspectives*, 65(5), 825-847.

Andersen and T. Fetner (2008) Economic Inequality and Intolerance: Attitudes toward Homosexuality in 35 Democracies, *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 52(4), 942–958.

Bastian Becker (2021) Temporal change in inequality perceptions and effects on political attitudes, *Political Research Exchange*, 3:1, 1, 1860652.

### **Feb. 5. Do individuals organize their political thinking?**

Clawson & Oxley, chapter 5-7.

### **Feb. 12. Class awareness, voting and populism (Guest lecturer Robert Andersen, Ivey Business School).**

Evans, G. and R. Andersen (2006) The Political Conditioning of Economic Perceptions. *The Journal of Politics*, 68(1), 194-207.

Sprong, S. et al. (2019) "Our Country Needs a Strong Leader Right Now": Economic Inequality Enhances the Wish for a Strong Leader. *Psychological Science*, 30(11), 1625-1637.

Polacko, M., S. Kiss and P. Graefe (2022) The Changing Nature of Class Voting in Canada, 1965-2019. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 55, 663-686.

**Feb. 19. Reading week**

**Feb. 26. Midterm Exam**

**Mar 4. Do individuals organize their political thinking?**

Clawson & Oxley, chapter 5-7.

**Mar. 11. Do individuals endorse democratic basics?**

Clawson & Oxley, chapter 8-10.

**Mar. 18. Citizens and government**

Clawson & Oxley, chapter 8-10.

**Mar. 25. Public opinion and democracy**

Wike, R., K. Simmons, B. Stokes and J. Fetterolf (2017) Globally, Broad Support for Representative and Direct Democracy. Pew Research Center.

Gunnell, J. (2011) Democracy and the Concept of Public Opinion. In Edward et al., The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media. Oxford University Press.

**Apr. 1. Wrap up and overview.**

**Apr. TBA. Final Exam**

### **Academic Policies:**

Please review the Department of Sociology “[Important Academic Policies](https://sociology.uwo.ca/undergraduate/courses/Academic_Policies.pdf)” document

[https://sociology.uwo.ca/undergraduate/courses/Academic\\_Policies.pdf](https://sociology.uwo.ca/undergraduate/courses/Academic_Policies.pdf) for additional information regarding:

- Scholastic Offences
- Plagiarism
- Copyright
- Academic Accommodation
- Accessibility Options
- Mental Health