



The University of Western Ontario

SOCIOLOGY 4426G-001
Protest and Contentious Action
Winter 2026
In-person

Instructor: Professor Edward Bell

I have made a ceaseless effort not to ridicule, not to bewail, not to scorn human actions, but to understand them. Baruch Spinoza, circa 1677

Course Description:

Calendar description: This course will focus on the study of contemporary protest, contentious action and mobilization in pursuit of social change. Students will be introduced to theoretical perspectives and critically examine actual current and historical forms of protest or contentious action.

Prerequisite(s): Registration in third year or above in any Department of Sociology module, or fourth year in any module. Unless you have either the prerequisites or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in the course, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. The decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Anti-requisite(s): None

Note: Departmental grade guidelines require that a 4000-level course have a mean for the final grades that is between 78% and 82%.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:*

- To understand key concepts and theories related to protest, social and political movements, and other forms of contentious political action.
- To examine the causes, tactics, and outcomes of political protest and collective behaviour.
- To analyze historical and contemporary case studies of contentious political action.
- To develop your critical thinking and research skills by producing your own case study of an episode of contentious political action.

*To achieve these goals, you will be required to read 40 – 60 pages of course materials per week, actively participate in class discussions and presentations, take part in in-class exercises, and complete written assignments.

Course Materials:

1) Sidney Tarrow (2022). *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics. Fourth Edition*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Bookstore link for this book: [SOC 4426G Custom Link](#)

This book provides a “big picture” overview of the historical origins and development of contentious political behaviour, and how it has been interpreted and analyzed by scholars over the years.

2) Additional material posted on the UWO Libraries *Course Readings* website:
<https://course readings.lib.uwo.ca/ares/>.

Communication:

Students are responsible for checking the course OWL Brightspace site (<https://westernu.brightspace.com/d2l/login>) 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.

How to contact the instructor:

By email: eabell@uwo.ca; and in-person, during office hours.

I will endeavour to answer emails within 48 business hours. It is unlikely that you will receive a response during the evening or on a weekend. Generally, email is not suitable for questions requiring more than two or three sentences to answer. Questions requiring longer answers should be asked in person, during office hours or by appointment.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

In this course, students are permitted to use AI tools only for information gathering and preliminary research purposes. These tools are intended to enhance the learning experience by providing access to diverse information sources. However, it is essential that students critically evaluate the obtained information, exercise independent thinking, and engage in original research to synthesize and develop their own ideas, arguments and perspectives. Students must produce original written contributions, i.e., ***they must write their assignments in their own words***. The use of AI tools can serve as a starting point for exploring a topic, but students are expected to uphold academic integrity by appropriately attributing all sources of information and avoiding plagiarism. Materials submitted for assessment must reflect the student's own thoughts and independent written work. By adhering to these guidelines, students contribute to a responsible and effective learning environment that promotes critical thinking and independent inquiry. The same principles also apply to the use of translation software to support the writing of essays and other written assessments.

For each written assignment, students must clearly indicate whether AI tools were used, and if they were, students must specify which tools were used and for what purposes.

Method of Evaluation:

The evaluation methods described in the course outline are essential requirements for the course.

Evaluation breakdown:

Note: the page lengths given below assume a 12-point font, double-spacing, and standard margins, and **do not** include the bibliography or the AI statement.

You will produce, by completing four separate written assignments, a case study of a contemporary or historical instance of a protest, strike, social movement, or some other form of contentious political action. **Additional information on each assignment is provided on OWL Brightspace under Assessments → Assignments.**

Assignment 1

A) Select a specific contentious political action or a related set of contentious actions (e.g., Paris Commune of 1871, Winnipeg General Strike of 1919, Black Lives Matter movement, movement for truth and reconciliation for Indigenous peoples in Canada, etc.).

B) Present a specific research question or questions pertaining to your topic.

C) Explain why your topic is important.

Length: no more than three pages.

Due on January 22, in class, hard copy and uploaded to Brightspace by January 22, 9:30 am.

On January 22, each student will lead a 10-minute class discussion on what they have prepared for this assignment.

Weight: 10% of the final grade (based on the written part only).

Assignment 2

A) Define and discuss the key concepts that will be used in your case study.

B) Discuss the analytic framework or theoretical perspective that will be used to analyze your topic (e.g., Marxism, resource mobilization perspective, rational choice theory, etc.).

C) Explain why your key concepts and analytic framework/theoretical perspective are needed to understand your topic.

Length: no more than three pages.

Due on February 5, in class, hard copy and uploaded to Brightspace by February 5, 9:30 am.

On February 5, each student will lead a 10-minute class discussion on what they have prepared for this assignment.

Weight: 25% of the final grade (based on the written part only).

Assignment 3

A) Provide a thesis statement that summarizes what you anticipate the main point or argument of your paper will be. The thesis statement guides the direction of the research and writing, and is closely related to the purpose of the paper. It foreshadows the presentation of evidence and the analysis that will form the final step of your research (Assignment 4).

B) Write a literature review that outlines for the reader the research that already exists on your topic. It must discuss at least six peer-reviewed journal articles or book chapters.

Length: no more than four pages.

Due on March 5, in class, hard copy and uploaded to Brightspace by March 5, 9:30 am.

On March 5, each student will lead a 10-minute class discussion on what they have prepared for Part A for this assignment.

Weight: 30% of the final grade (based on the written part only).

Assignment 4

Full paper, including final analysis. Re-present what you have produced for Assignments 1, 2, and 3 above, revised as needed. Then add a section "Analysis" where key information relevant to the thesis statement is presented. Follow up with a "Conclusions" section, and a final section, "Implications for Further Research." The full paper must incorporate some concepts and/or theories discussed in class or in the readings.

Length: no more than ten pages (which includes the re-presentation of what you produced for Assignments 1, 2, and 3).

Due on March 26, in class, hard copy and uploaded to Brightspace by April 2, 9:30 am.

Weight: 33% of the final grade (based on the written part only).

Final assessment: Every student will share their work on their full paper by offering a 10-minute verbal summary of their paper to the class, which will be followed by a 5-minute question/answer and comment session. **You will receive a grade of 2/2 upon completion of this requirement.**

A sign-up sheet will be distributed in class that lists the dates on which the sharing will take place.

Weight: 2% of the final grade.

Note:

- 1) You are expected to submit each assignment by the deadline listed. Should illness or extenuating circumstances arise, students are permitted to submit their assignments up to 72 hours past the deadline without academic penalty. Should students submit an assignment more than 72 hours past the deadline, a late penalty of 10% of the value of the assignment per day will be subtracted from the assessed grade.

Because the submission deadline for the assignments already includes flexibility in the form of a 72-hour submission window, the instructor reserves the right to deny academic consideration for assignments that are submitted after the end of the 72-hour period.

- 2) Instructors are permitted to designate one assessment per course per term as requiring supporting documentation to receive academic consideration. **For this course, Assignment 4 has been designated as requiring supporting documentation for academic consideration.**

Course Schedule and Readings:

Note: the schedule of class activities may be revised as we progress through the course.

Module 1: INTRODUCTION TO PROTEST, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, AND OTHER FORMS OF CONTENTIOUS POLITICAL ACTION

Week 1: January 8 First Class

- Introductions and icebreaker
- Course overview and objectives
- Importance of studying protest, social movements, and other forms of contentious political action
- Discussion of key concepts: collective behaviour, contentious political behaviour, protest, social movements

Module 2: CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Week 2: January 15 Classical approaches to protest, social movements, and other forms of contentious political action, Part 1

- The Marxian perspective
- The Durkheimian perspective

Readings:

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, excerpt from *The Communist Manifesto*. Chapter 1, pp. 13 – 16, in Vincenzo Ruggiero and Nicola Montagna, eds. (2008). *Social Movements: A Reader*. London and New York: Routledge. Available at the UWO Libraries *Course Readings* website: <https://coursereadings.lib.uwo.ca/ares/>.

Karl Marx, excerpt from *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Chapter 2, pp. 17 – 18, in Ruggiero and Montagna, eds., *Social Movements: A Reader*. Available at the UWO Libraries *Course Readings* website: <https://coursereadings.lib.uwo.ca/ares/>.

Emile Durkheim, excerpt from *The Division of Labour in Society*. Chapter 4, pp. 21 – 24, in Ruggiero and Montagna, eds., *Social Movements: A Reader*. Available at the UWO Libraries *Course Readings* website: <https://coursereadings.lib.uwo.ca/ares/>.

Tarrow (2022), *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics. Fourth Edition*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. "Introduction," pp. 1 – 21.

Week 3: January 22

*****Assignment 1 due*****

Classical approaches to protest, social movements, and other forms of contentious political action, Part 2

Part of this class will be devoted to students sharing, with the rest of the class, what they prepared for Assignment 1.

- Contagion Theory
- Relative Deprivation Theory
- Emergent Norm Theory
- Rational Choice Theory

Readings

Gustav Le Bon, excerpt from *The Crowd*. Chapter 7, pp. 34 – 39, in Ruggiero and Montagna, eds., *Social Movements: A Reader*. Available at the UWO Libraries *Course Readings* website: <https://coursereadings.lib.uwo.ca/ares/>.

Mancur Olson, excerpt from *The Logic of Collective Action*. Chapter 15, pp. 93 – 94, in Ruggiero and Montagna, eds., *Social Movements: A Reader*. Available at the UWO Libraries *Course Readings* website: <https://coursereadings.lib.uwo.ca/ares/>.

Tarrow (2022), *Power in Movement*, Chapter 1, “Where Did Movements Come From?” pp. 25 - 48.

Week 4: January 29

Contemporary theories of protest, social movements, and other forms of contentious political action, Part 1

- Resource Mobilization Theory
- Political Process Theory

Readings:

John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory." *American Journal of Sociology*, 82(6), 1977, pp.1212–1222 and 1236-1238 only.
https://www-jstor-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/stable/pdf/2777934.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3A66814b1d16a83a2964c527e080f6c916&ab_segments=&initiator=&acceptTC=1

Doug McAdam, excerpt from *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency: 1930 – 1970*, University of Chicago Press, 1999. Available at the UWO Libraries *Course Readings* website: <https://course readings.lib.uwo.ca/ares/>.

Tarrow (2022), *Power in Movement*, Chapter 2, "Capitalism, States, and Social Movements," pp. 25 - 48.

Week 5: February 5

Assignment 2 due

Contemporary theories of protest, social movements, and other forms of contentious political action, Part 2

Part of this class will be devoted to students sharing, with the rest of the class, what they prepared for Assignment 2.

- Network Theory
- Framing Theory and other cultural approaches
- New Social Movements Theory

Readings:

Tarrow (2022), *Power in Movement*, Chapter 4, "Organizations, Networks, and Hybrids," pp. 101 - 120.

David A. Snow, E. Burke Rochford, Jr., Steven K. Worden, and Robert D. Benford, "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation." *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Aug., 1986). Available at the UWO Libraries *Course Readings* website: <https://course readings.lib.uwo.ca/ares/>.

Tarrow (2022), *Power in Movement*, Chapter 5, "How Movements Make Meanings," pp. 121 - 139.

Module 3: THE DYNAMICS OF PROTESTS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Week 6: February 12

The role of leadership in protest and social movements

- Does leadership matter?
- Leaderless movements and horizontalism

Readings:

Rucht, D. (2012). "Leadership in Social and Political Movements: A Comparative Exploration." In: Helms, L. (eds) *Comparative Political Leadership*. Palgrave Studies in Political Leadership series. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137264916_5 Available at the UWO Libraries *Course Readings* website: <https://course readings.lib.uwo.ca/ares/>.

Morris, A. D., & Staggenborg, S. (2004). Leadership in Social Movements. In D. A. Snow, S. A. Soule, & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion To Social Movements*, pp. 171 – 196. Blackwell Publishing. Available at the UWO Libraries *Course Readings* website: <https://course readings.lib.uwo.ca/ares/>.

Ganz and McKenna, "Bringing Leadership Back In." Ch. 10 in *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, eds. Snow et al. 2019. Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell. Available at the UWO Libraries *Course Readings* website: <https://course readings.lib.uwo.ca/ares/>.

February 19: No class. Reading Week

Week 7: February 26

Tactics and Strategies

- Nonviolent resistance
- Civil disobedience
- Violent protest and insurgency

Readings:

Tarrow (2022), *Power in Movement*, Chapter 3, "Acting Contentiously," pp. 73 - 97.

Week 8: March 5*****Assignment 3 due*******Recruitment and Participation**

Part of this class will be devoted to students sharing, with the rest of the class, what they prepared for Part B of Assignment 3.

- Motivations for participation
- Social Networks and recruitment
- Identity and collective action

Readings:

McAdam, D. (1986). "Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer". *American Journal of Sociology*, 92(1), 64-90. Available at the UWO Libraries *Course Readings* website: <https://course readings.lib.uwo.ca/ares/>.

Week 9: March 12**State and Institutional Responses**

- State repression and policing of protests
- Co-optation
- Legal and policy responses

Readings:

Christian Davenport, "Regimes, Repertoires and State Repression." (2009). *Swiss Political Science Review*, 15(2): 377–85. Available at the UWO Libraries *Course Readings* website: <https://course readings.lib.uwo.ca/ares/>.

Week 10: March 19

Transnational contention

- The internationalization of contentious political action

Readings:

Tarrow (2022), *Power in Movement*, Chapter 11, "Transnational contention," pp. 259 - 281.

Week 11: March 26

*****Assignment 4 due*****

- Case studies: students share what they did for Assignment 4 with the rest of the class

Week 12: April 2

- Case studies: students share what they did for Assignment 4 with the rest of the class

Week 13: April 9

- Case studies: students share what they did for Assignment 4 with the rest of the class

Copyright and Intellectual Property:

Lecture slides and notes, lists of readings, in-class activities, assignment guidelines, and other components of the course materials are typically the intellectual property of the instructor.

Unauthorized reproduction through audio-recording, video-recording, photographing, sharing on social media, or posting on course-sharing websites is an infringement of copyright and is prohibited. Such action may be considered a Code of Conduct violation and lead to sanctions.

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 website:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<https://www.turnitin.com/>).

Students are expected to retain all research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines, and other materials used in preparing assignments. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, your instructor may ask you to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against you.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

Copyright: Students may not record or distribute any class activity, including conversations during office hours, without written permission from the instructor, except as necessary as part of approved accommodations for students with disabilities. Any approved recordings may only be used for the student's own private use.

Absence from Course Commitments: Students must familiarize themselves with the Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

Students missing course work for medical, compassionate or extenuating circumstances can request academic consideration by completing a request using the Student Absence Portal (SAP) https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academic_considerations/index.html. Students are permitted one academic consideration request per course per term without supporting documentation. Note that supporting documentation is always required for academic consideration requests for examinations scheduled by the office of the registrar (e.g. December and April exams) and for practical laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled during the last week of the term. Students should also note that the instructor may designate one assessment per course per term that requires supporting documentation. This designated assessment is described in the course outline. Supporting documentation for academic considerations for absences due to illness must include the completed Western Student Medical Certificate (SMC) <https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/pdfs/student-medical-certificate.pdf> or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation by a health care practitioner.

Students must request academic consideration as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

Once the request and supporting documentation have been received and reviewed, appropriate academic consideration, if granted, shall be determined by the instructor in consultation with the academic advisor, in a manner consistent with the course outline. Students with an approved absence from an in-class test or exam will be required to write a makeup exam, unless otherwise specified in the course outline. The course instructor or teaching assistant(s) may not be available to respond to questions during the makeup test/exam. Students should be aware that the make-up test/exam will not necessarily be in the same format, be of the same duration, or cover the same material as the original test/exam.

Note: missed work can only be excused through one of the mechanisms above. Being asked not to attend an in-person course requirement due to potential COVID-19 symptoms is not sufficient on its own. Students should check the Western website to see what directives for Covid are to be followed. Western has been and will continue to follow directives established by the Middlesex-London Health Unit. That directive will state whether students should or should not come to campus/class and any other requirements (e.g., masks are mandatory). Please check on your own and do not email the instructor, the Department Undergraduate Advisor/Coordinator or the Faculty Academic Counselling Office.

Students who fail to write a make-up test or special examination will receive a grade of zero on that assessment. No other make-up opportunities will be provided unless further academic consideration is granted by the student's Home Faculty Academic Counselling office.

Religious Accommodation: Students should review the policy for Accommodation for Religious Holidays

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_religious.pdf.

Where a student will be unable to write examinations and term tests due to a conflicting religious holiday, they should inform their instructors as soon as possible but not later than two weeks prior to writing the examination/term test. In the case of conflict with a midterm test, students should inform their instructor as soon as possible but not later than one week prior to the midterm.

Contingency plan for an in-person class pivoting to 100% online learning: In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence or University approved emergency during the course that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, affected course content will be delivered entirely online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL Brightspace for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will not change. Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

Code of Student Conduct: It is the responsibility of every student to read the Code and familiarize him or herself with its contents. The Code is available at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/code_of_conduct.pdf. Sanctions for non-compliance range from a warning or reprimand to expulsion from the University.

Student Responsibility: Students in a degree program must select courses in accordance with the published requirements. Students are responsible for ensuring that their selection of courses is appropriate and accurately recorded, that all course prerequisites have been successfully completed, and that they are aware of any antirequisite course(s) they may have taken. Students must familiarize themselves with the Student Responsibility for Course Selection policy

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/general/academic_counselling.pdf and the Registration and Progression policy

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/registration_progression_grad/registration_progression.pdf. Students are responsible for the successful completion of the Graduation Requirements for their degree program

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/registration_progression_grad/graduation.pdf.

Support Services: Office of the Registrar Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Faculty Academic Advising - Please visit your Home Faculty Academic advising webpage for information regarding adding/dropping courses, important dates, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters https://registrar.uwo.ca/faculty_academic_counselling.html.

USC services offers information about student the health/dental plan, Bus Pass, food support services, Peer support Centre, etc. <http://westernusc.ca/services/>.

Mental health – Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Health & Wellness Services – Registered part-time and full-time students can book a physical health appointment at <https://www.uwo.ca/health/shs/index.html>. Additional on-campus services are also available <https://www.uwo.ca/health/shs/services/index.html>.

Accessible Education provides supports and services to students with disabilities at Western, in all programs and faculties. Students with disabilities or accessibility challenges should work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html, which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing.

Gender-Based and Sexual Violence – Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experience GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: http://uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html

Western Libraries – Visit the many library locations on campus. Western Libraries provide access to material in physical and digital formats <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/catalogue/index.html>. Research support is available <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/research/index.html>.

Writing support – Online writing resources, writing support and writing modules are available <https://writing.uwo.ca/undergrads/>

Bookstore: Search for Textbook availability and cost <https://bookstore.uwo.ca/textbook-search>