
POLI 320 – Issues in Canadian Democracy

Lecturer: Mathieu Lavigne

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Office: Leacock 315

Lecture: Tuesdays and Thursdays

8:35 AM-9:55

McDonald Engineering Building 280

Office hours: Wednesday 12:30-2:00 pm or by appointment

TA: Rupinder Liddar

Overview

Critical analysis of selected issues and debates in Canadian politics, including citizen participation, electoral system effects, office-seeking, approaches to representation, direct democracy and non-party alternatives, polarization, and misinformation. Topics are examined from both the perspective of the general population and the specific experience of women and ethno-racial minorities.

This course will enable students to gain an empirical and analytical understanding of some of the important democratic challenges in Canada today, where they come from, and what could be done to improve the situation.

Prerequisites: At least one other course in Canadian or Comparative Government and Politics or permission of the instructor.

Attendance

You are expected to attend all lecture and conference sessions. Lectures or conferences will not be recorded.

Conferences

There will be five mandatory TA-led conferences throughout the semester:

1. Week of January 16
2. Week of January 30
3. Week of February 13
4. Week of March 13
5. Week of March 27

Each student must register for one conference section on Minerva.

Required texts

This course uses a combination of journal articles and book chapters. All the course readings will be posted on MyCourses. Journal articles and book chapters are also accessible through the McGill Library. Required readings should be completed before attending course lectures.

Slides

The slides will be made available on MyCourses at the beginning of each class. **Please note:** The slides only provide supporting material and should not prevent you from doing the readings or taking good notes.

Communication

You can contact me by email or during my office hours. I take the responsibility to answer your emails within two business days. Larger discussions and more substantive questions should be reserved for office hours.

Deadlines and assignment submission

All evaluated work must be submitted before the deadline. Deadlines will be strictly followed. Unless otherwise specified, assignments are to be submitted as Word documents in the Assignment tab on MyCourses by 11:59 pm (Montreal time zone). A doctor's note (or other usual university-approved documentation) is required to support absence from exams and late submission. Special consideration does not extend to last-minute technology trouble (e.g., slow internet connection, trouble with MyCourses, etc.). Please back up your assignments and do not wait until the last minute to submit your work.

For your final project only, late work will be accepted with a penalty of 5% per day (including weekends and holidays). Extensions are available only for serious and documented reasons, and they must be requested ahead of time.

Evaluation

1) Participation: 10%

Grades will be determined by the TA based on the following criteria:

- Attendance: Has the student attended the conference? Please note that you will lose the entire 10% if you miss three conferences or more without proper justification.
- Quantity and quality of your contribution: You must contribute to discussions by asking and answering questions, suggesting themes for discussion, and/or offering original analysis and comments. Your contribution must show that you have made and understand the readings.

2) Closed book midterm exam: 25%

There will be an in-class midterm exam on **Thursday, February 23**. The exam will consist of two essay questions. Answers are expected to draw on the assigned readings and on the material covered in class.

3) Final take-home exam: 30%

To be scheduled during the final exam period in April. Questions will be posted on MyCourses. The exam will be in essay format. Students will have 72 hours to complete the exam. Answers are expected to draw on the assigned readings and on the material covered in class. More details will be provided in class.

4) Research project: 35%

You must choose one of the two options listed below. Whichever option you choose, you need to submit a proposal by **February 16** and your research project by **April 6**. You may consult with me or the TA when choosing your topic or reviewing the literature. The proposal is worth 5% of your final grade, while the research paper is worth 30%.

Option 1: Research paper

For this option, you will write a research paper on a chosen issue in Canadian democracy. Your paper should address a clear research question, synthesize the academic literature on the topic, develop a well-reasoned answer to your question, and discuss some of the limitations of existing research (or questions that remain unanswered). Your paper can focus on Canada or compare Canada with another country.

You may work alone or in teams of two. In doing your literature review, you are expected to go beyond the assigned readings (i.e., do additional research). You need to provide citations to all sources that you have used. Please include the citations in the text using the author-date format, as well as complete references in the Bibliography section. The expected length is 10-15 pages if you are working alone and 15-20 pages if you are working in teams of two, double-spaced, excluding the bibliography.

A proposal that includes your name(s), your research question, one or two paragraphs explaining the problem and how you intend to answer your research question (e.g., what could be the sections of the body of your paper), and a preliminary bibliography (at least five academic references) is due on **February 16**.

Option 2: Policy Recommendation

For this option, you will prepare a short report that draws on the course materials and the academic literature to analyze an important challenge that faces Canadian democracy and discuss a policy solution that could help address this challenge. You can write the report alone or in teams of two. Your report will need to include the following sections:

1. Short introduction: Briefly introduce the topic and content of the report.
2. Context: Describe the challenge, some of its potential causes, and how it negatively impacts Canadian democracy.
3. Solution: Present **one** solution to the chosen democratic challenge. Building on the literature, explain how the solution helps address the challenge and what the expected positive consequences are.
4. Limitations and feasibility: Discuss some of the limitations of this solution. For example, are there some aspects of the democratic challenge that remain unaddressed? Could your solution have unintended negative consequences? What political/social/economic/judicial considerations could make the implementation of your solution more difficult?
5. Short conclusion: Briefly summarize the most important points of your report.
6. Bibliography

In writing each section of the report, you are expected to draw on the course material (readings, lectures) AND additional academic research. Make sure to include evidence for the claims you are making about the democratic challenge (e.g., its scope and impacts) and your solution (e.g., its effectiveness and feasibility). You need to provide citations to all sources that you have used. Please include the citations in the text using the author-date format, as well as complete references in the Bibliography. The expected length is 10-15 pages if you are working alone and 15-20 pages if you are working in teams of two, double-spaced, excluding the bibliography.

A proposal that includes your name(s), one or two paragraphs describing the democratic issue and the solution you are interested in studying, and a preliminary bibliography (at least five academic references) is due on **February 16**.

Course Outline

Week 1 Introduction and organization (January 5)
Read the syllabus

Week 2 Electoral participation (January 10-12)

Blais, André, and Jean-François Daoust. 2020. [*The Motivation to Vote: Explaining Electoral Participation*](#). UBC Press, p.1-15.

Blais, André, Elisabeth Gidengil, and Neil Nevitte. 2004. "[Where Does Turnout Decline Come From?](#)" *European Journal of Political Research* 43 (2): 221–36.

Prior, Markus. 2005. "[News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout.](#)" *American Journal of Political Science* 49 (3): 577–92.

Milner, Henry. 2017. "[Participation, Mobilization, and the Political Engagement of the Internet Generation.](#)" In *Canadian Parties in Transition*, edited by Alain-G. Gagnon and A. Brian Tanguay, Fourth Edition, 421–27. University of Toronto Press.

Week 3 Democratic competence (January 17-19)
(Conference this week)

Achen, Christopher H., and Larry M. Bartels. 2017. "The Elusive Mandate: Elections and the Mirage of Popular Control." In [Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government](#), 21–51. Princeton University Press.

Gidengil, Elisabeth, André Blais, Neil Nevitte, and Richard Nadeau. 2004. "[What Do Canadians Know About Politics?](#)" In *Citizens*, 41–71. UBC Press.

Cutler, Fred. 2008. "[Whodunnit? Voters and Responsibility in Canadian Federalism.](#)" *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* 41 (3): 627–54.

Stolle, Dietlind, and Elisabeth Gidengil. 2010. "[What Do Women Really Know? A Gendered Analysis of Varieties of Political Knowledge.](#)" *Perspectives on Politics* 8 (1): 93–109.

Week 4 Political campaigns (January 24-26)

Marland, Alex, Anna Lennox Esselment, and Thierry Giasson. 2017. "[1 Welcome to Non-Stop Campaigning.](#)" In *Permanent Campaigning in Canada*, 3–27. UBC Press.

Marland, Alex, and Thierry Giasson. 2016. "[From Brokerage to Boutique Politics: Political Marketing and the Changing Nature of Party Politics in Canada.](#)" In *Canadian Parties in Transition, Fourth Edition*, edited by Alain-G. Gagnon and A. Brian Tanguay, 343–65. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Lavigne, Mathieu. 2022. "Microtargeting." In *Edward Encyclopedia of Technology and Politics*, edited by Andrea Ceron, 231–35. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Fournier, Patrick, Richard Nadeau, André Blais, Elisabeth Gidengil, and Neil Nevitte. 2004. "[Time-of-Voting Decision and Susceptibility to Campaign Effects.](#)" *Electoral Studies* 23 (4): 661–81.

Week 5 **Electoral system** (January 31-February 2)
(Conference this week)

Blais, André, and André Blais, eds. 2008. "[Introduction](#)." In *To Keep or To Change First Past The Post?: The Politics of Electoral Reform*, 1-6. Oxford University Press.

Thomas, Paul E. J., Peter John Loewen, and Michael K. MacKenzie. 2013. "[Fair Isn't Always Equal: Constituency Population and the Quality of Representation in Canada](#)." *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* 46 (2): 273–93.

Wagner, Angelia, and Elisabeth Gidengil. 2017. "[Addressing Representational Deficits in Canadian Legislatures](#)." In *Should We Change How We Vote?: Evaluating Canada's Electoral System*, edited by Andrew Potter, Daniel M. Weinstock, and Peter Loewen, 139–52. McGill-Queen's University Press.

Fournier, Patrick, Henk van der Kolk, R. Kenneth Carty, André Blais, and Jonathan Rose. 2011. "[9 Should We Let Citizens Decide?](#)" In *When Citizens Decide: Lessons from Citizen Assemblies on Electoral Reform*, 145-58. Oxford University Press.

Week 6 **Representation** (February 7-9)

Sevi, Semra, Vincent Arel-Bundock, and André Blais. 2019. "[Do Women Get Fewer Votes? No](#)." *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* 52 (1): 201–10.

Tolley, Erin. 2019. "[Who You Know: Local Party Presidents and Minority Candidate Emergence](#)." *Electoral Studies* 58 (April): 70–79.

Everitt, Joanna. 2017. "[Where Are the Women in Canadian Political Parties?](#)" In *Canadian Parties in Transition*, edited by Alain-G. Gagnon and A. Brian Tanguay, Fourth Edition, 296–315. University of Toronto Press.

Standing Committee on the Status of Women. 2019. "[Elect Her: A Roadmap for Improving the Representation of Women in Canadian Politics](#)." (pg. 23-61).

Week 7 **Regionalism** (February 14-16)

(Conference this week)
February 16: Proposal due on MyCourses

Blanchard, Maxime. 2023. "[Reassessing Provincial Political Cultures: Evidence from Five Decades of Canadian Public Opinion Surveys \(1974–2019\)](#)." *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique* 56(2): 279–99.

Salée, Daniel. 2022. "[The New Face of Quebec Nationalism: Reconsidering the Nationalism/Democracy Nexus](#)." *American Review of Canadian Studies* 52 (2): 119–38.

Berdahl, Loleen, and Roger Gibbins. 2014. "[The West Outside In](#)." In *Looking West: Regional Transformation and the Future of Canada*, 1–35. University of Toronto Press.

Breton, Charles, Olivier Jacques, and Andrew Parkin. 2022. "[Resentment in the Canadian Federation](#)." Centre of Excellence on the Canadian Federation.

Week 8 Non-electoral forms of participation (February 21-23)
February 23: In-class mid-term exam

Stolle, Dietlind, and Michele Micheletti. 2013. "[Reconfiguring Political Participation](#)." In *Political Consumerism: Global Responsibility in Action*, 31–58. Cambridge University Press.

Vissers, Sara, and Dietlind Stolle. 2014. "[The Internet and New Modes of Political Participation: Online versus Offline Participation](#)." *Information, Communication & Society* 17 (8): 937–55.

Week 9 Reading week

Week 10 The changing media environment (March 7-9)

Van Aelst, Peter, Jesper Strömbäck, Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, Claes de Vreese, Jörg Matthes, David Hopmann, et al. 2017. "[Political Communication in a High-Choice Media Environment: A Challenge for Democracy?](#)" *Annals of the International Communication Association* 41 (1): 3–27.

Public Policy Forum. 2017. *The Shattered Mirror: News, Democracy, and Trust in the Digital Age*. pp. 38-69 (you are allowed to skip sections iii and v).

Public Policy Forum. 2022. [Canadian Commission on Democratic Expression: How to Make Online Platforms More Transparent and Accountable to Canadian Users](#). p.17-28.

Brin, Colette, and Sébastien Charlton. 2022. [Canadians' trust in the news media hits a new low](#). *The Conversation*.

Week 11 Polarization (March 14-16)
(Conference this week)

Iyengar, Shanto, Yphtach Lelkes, Matthew Levendusky, Neil Malhotra, and Sean J. Westwood. 2019. "[The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States](#)." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22: 129–46.

Boxell, Levi, Matthew Gentzkow, and Jesse M. Shapiro. 2022. "[Cross-Country Trends in Affective Polarization](#)." *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 1–60.

Keavins, Anthony, and Stuart N. Soroka. 2018. "[Growing Apart? Partisan Sorting in Canada, 1992–2015](#)." *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* 51 (1): 103–33.

Amsalem, Eran, Eric Merkley, and Peter John Loewen. 2022. "[Does Talking to the Other Side Reduce Inter-Party Hostility? Evidence from Three Studies](#)." *Political Communication* 39 (1): 61–78.

Week 12 Populism and trust (March 21-23)

Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. 2017. "[Causes and Responses](#)." In *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, 97–118. Oxford University Press.

Medeiros, Mike. 2021. "[Demand without Supply: Populist Attitudes without Salient Supply-Side Factors of Populism](#)." *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique*, September, 1–21.

Banack, Clark. 2021. "[Ethnography and Political Opinion: Identity, Alienation and Anti-Establishmentarianism in Rural Alberta](#)." *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* 54 (1): 1–22.

Merkley, Eric. 2020. "[Anti-Intellectualism, Populism, and Motivated Resistance to Expert Consensus](#)." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 84 (1): 24–48.

Week 13 Mis- and disinformation (March 28-30)
(Conference this week)

Nyhan, Brendan. 2020. "[Facts and Myths about Misperceptions](#)." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 34 (3): 220–36.

Humprecht, Edda, Frank Esser, and Peter Van Aelst. 2020. "[Resilience to Online Disinformation: A Framework for Cross-National Comparative Research](#)." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 25 (3): 493–516.

Bridgman, Aengus, Eric Merkley, Oleg Zhilin, Peter John Loewen, Taylor Owen, and Derek Ruths. 2021. "[Infodemic Pathways: Evaluating the Role That Traditional and Social Media Play in Cross-National Information Transfer](#)." *Frontiers in Political Science* 3.

Pickup, Mark, Dominik Stecuła, and Clifton van der Linden. 2022. "[Who Shares Conspiracy Theories and Other Misinformation about Covid-19 Online: Survey Evidence from Five Countries](#)." *Journal of Quantitative Description: Digital Media* 2 (October).

Week 14 Additional topic to be chosen by the students (April 4-6)
April 6: Research project due

Week 15 Summary and Conclusion (April 11)

April 14 to April 17: Final take-home exam

The exam will be made available on MyCourses at 9:00am on April 14.

You have until 12:00pm on April 17 to submit the exam in the Assignments/Final take-home exam folder on MyCourses.

Policies

Academic Integrity

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#)” (see [McGill’s guide to academic honesty](#) for more information).

Work submitted for evaluation as part of this course may be checked with text-matching software.

L’université McGill attache une haute importance à l’honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l’on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l’étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).

Language of submission

In accord with McGill University’s [Charter of Students’ Rights](#), students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives.

Conformément à [la Charte des droits de l’étudiant](#) de l’Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté, sauf dans le cas des cours dont l’un des objets est la maîtrise d’une langue.

Special Needs

As the instructor of this course, I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514- 398-6009. The sooner you do this, the more the OSD and I will be able to help you.

Wellness

University life can be stressful. Many students may face mental health challenges that can impact not only their academic success but also their ability to thrive in our campus community. If you find that you are unable to complete the work assigned for this course due to personal difficulties, it is better if you inform me or the teaching assistant as early as possible. Please reach out for support when you need it; [wellness resources](#) are available on campus, off campus, and online.

Policy on the use of electronic devices in class

Electronic devices are permitted in class insofar as their use does not disrupt the teaching and learning process. No audio or video recording of any kind is allowed in class without the explicit permission of the instructor.

Copyright of Lectures

All slides, lecture notes, etc. remain the instructor’s intellectual property. As such, you may use these only for your own learning (and research, with proper referencing/citation) ends. You are not permitted to disseminate or share these materials in any form or in any medium; doing so may violate the instructor’s intellectual property rights and could be cause for disciplinary action.

Course Evaluations

End-of-course evaluations are one of the ways that McGill works towards maintaining and improving the quality of courses and the student's learning experience. You will be notified by e-mail when the evaluations are available. Please note that a minimum number of responses must be received for results to be available to students.

Extraordinary circumstances

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

Land Acknowledgement

McGill University is located on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.