

University of Western Ontario: Department of Political Science

POLITICAL SCIENCE 4209G

Political Strategy and Communication

Winter 2026

Mondays 9:30-11:30 am, 7210 SSC

Course Director

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Office Hours: Mondays 12-1 am or by appointment

Course Description

This course provides an advanced introduction to some of the practical skills involved in political campaigns including lobbying/advocacy campaigns by businesses and NGOs and election campaigns. It focuses on developing specific skills related to strategy, tactics, and communications using case studies and practically oriented assignments.

Course Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to: identify and apply key concepts related to political marketing; acquire and apply knowledge of political marketing research methods; and acquire and apply knowledge in various practically oriented media and communications skills.

Course Structure

The course consists of 13 sessions of approximately 2 hours each. Weekly classes are structured as two-hour interactive lectures as well as some class and group discussions and practical exercises.

PPT Notes

To assist with note taking, PPT notes sheets will be posted by afternoon on the day before the class in the PPT Notes folder.

Required Readings

All course readings are posted on the course BrightSpace OWL site on the Home page in the 'Readings' folder and then under the specific weekly topic.

Evaluation

Attendance/Participation	20%	In scheduled classes
Homework Submissions (3)	15%	Due Sundays 11 Jan, 25 Jan, 8 Feb
Briefing Report Essay	30%	Due Thursday 26 February
In-Class Exam	35%	16 March

Attendance/Participation

Each student can miss one class without supporting documentation. After that, they must apply for an accommodation with academic advising using either supporting documentation or an undocumented absence (both must be applied for and approved). Participation will be graded based on attendance, overall participation, and participation in the key weeks identified below in the weekly schedule under the Readings/Homework sections.

Homework Submissions

Each student will complete 3 one-page, typed single spaced homework submissions. They must be submitted on the course website by 11:59 pm on the Sundays before the relevant class. The due dates are 11 Jan, 25 Jan, and 8 Feb. Late assignments will be penalized by 2/100 from the overall grade. The 3 submissions will be graded as a whole receiving a single grade and comments. For the third submission, all three submissions must be submitted, in order, as a single document. Homework will be graded as a whole based on: demonstrated engagement with the readings including strong use of citations and relevant quotes (not short phrases) and showing good understanding of and/or application of course concepts. Don't overthink the homework: just answer the homework questions and show that you've done and engaged with the readings and course concepts as relevant.

Briefing Report Essay

Each student will complete one briefing report essay. Students also have the option of writing a double-length report with a partner with both partners receiving one overall grade. Briefing report essays must be 8-10 typed double-spaced pages of text plus a title page, endnotes, and bibliography as per the Citation Guide. Briefing report essays must be submitted on the course website (through Turnitin) by 11:59 pm on the due date. Late essays will be penalized at a rate of 3% per day - including weekends, holidays, and reading week - to a maximum of 10%. The Briefing Report Essay is designated as 'not eligible' for an Undocumented Absence.

Students can choose one of the following options for the content of their essays:

1. Election Campaign Report: Write a detailed report on why one of the parties achieved the outcome they did in the 2025 election and what you think they need to do going forward. This is a larger version of the second homework submission. If you choose this option, the briefing report must be on a different party than the one chosen for your homework submission. You can use the readings on the 2025 election, but this option will require more primary research of media articles. This option will be graded based on: the quantity and variety of research sources; the strong use of citations and relevant quotes (not short phrases) from the research; the strength of the analysis and recommendations; and the systematic organization and overall professionalism of the report. The specific format is up to you but imagine you are writing a report for the party in question.
2. Influence Operations Report: Write a detailed report on the current state of influence/information (not cyber) operations by either China or Russia against Canada, the US, and/or key allies. Imagine you are writing the briefing report for the Canadian government. The report should summarize the key techniques being used in recent influence operations from the country in question and about how they are being and can be

countered. This option will require more research drawing on academic, think tank, government, and/or media reports. This option will be graded based on: the quantity and variety of research sources; the strong use of citations and relevant quotes (not short phrases) from the research; the strength of the analysis and recommendations; and the systematic organization and overall professionalism of the report. The specific format is up to you but, again, imagine you are writing a report for the Canadian government.

3. Oil Lobbying Report: Write a detailed report on either the Energy East pipeline campaign by Edelman Public Relations or the Energy Citizens grassroots mobilization efforts by the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers. Imagine you are writing the briefing report for a coalition of key environmental groups. The report should summarize the key techniques being used by the pro-pipeline or pro-oil campaigns and what you think the Canadian environmental movement could do to counter these campaigns. You can mostly rely on the readings/leaked documents provided in the Oil Lobbying folder in the Essay folder. If you choose the Energy Citizens option, you should also check the energycitizens.org website for updates on some of their recent activities. This option will be graded based on: the strong use of citations and relevant quotes (not short phrases) from the documents and/or extra research; the strength of the analysis and recommendations; and the systematic organization and overall professionalism of the report. The specific format is up to you but, again, imagine you are writing a report for a coalition of key environmental groups.
4. Advocacy Campaign Report: Write a detailed report on a recent and specific advocacy campaign of your choice for which there are sufficient research sources available (given this issue, you must get your specific choice approved by the course instructor). Imagine you are writing the briefing report from the perspective of the advocacy group's key opponent. The report should summarize the key techniques being used in the advocacy campaign and about how they could be countered. This option will require more research drawing on primary documents from the advocacy group's website, reports by other groups on the advocacy group's activities, media reports, etc. This option will be graded based on: the quantity and variety of research sources; the strong use of citations and relevant quotes (not short phrases) from the research; the strength of the analysis and recommendations; and the systematic organization and overall professionalism of the report. The specific format is up to you but, again, imagine you are writing a report for one of the advocacy group's main opponents.
5. New Techniques Report: Write a detailed report on a new campaign technique being used in one or more recent elections in Canada or the US. Examples could include: Poilievre's long form videos; Jamil Javani's Restore the North campus tours; the growing use of podcasters and influencers by specific politicians; the innovative use of social media, Tik Tok, etc. by specific politicians; new fundraising or GOTV techniques, etc., etc. Imagine you are writing the briefing report for a Canadian political party other than any you are covering to advise them on how the technique is being used by others and how they could use it. This option will require more research drawing on academic articles, media reports, primary documents from party websites, etc. This option will be graded based on: the quantity and variety of research sources; the strong use of citations and relevant quotes (not

short phrases) from the research; the strength of the analysis and recommendations; and the systematic organization and overall professionalism of the report. The specific format is up to you but, again, imagine you are writing a report for a Canadian political party other than any you are covering to advise them.

In-Class Exam

The exam will occur in-person during the scheduled class time. Students with a formal accommodation to write the exam separately and/or with longer time must register with Accessible Education as soon as possible. If you miss their registration deadline, you will have to write the exam with the rest of the class.

It will be a 1 hour exam with 50 multiple choice questions based on all the PPT slides before the exam date. You do NOT need to study any readings, videos, or material from class discussions. Exam questions will focus on concepts and techniques, key examples of concepts and techniques, parties and factions, and key elections (i.e. those where only one election is covered on the slide). A brief study guide with example questions will be posted one week before the exam.

Accessibility Accommodations

- Students with a formal accommodation to write the exam separately and/or with longer time etc. must be registered with Accessible Education.
- You will write the exam with them and not with the rest of the class. They will tell you where you write. If you have not heard from them, make sure you contact them.
- I am not able to provide extra time or other accommodations in the main exam.
- Having the ‘flexibility with assignment deadlines’ accommodation does not apply to the date you write the exam.
- If you miss the exam, you must register again with Accessible Education for the make-up exam.

Make-Up Exam

- Exams cannot be written early under any circumstances.
 - All requests for medical or compassionate accommodations must go through student counselling’s absence/academic consideration portal. The course instructor will not grant any accommodations.
 - Any students using their one Undocumented Absence must also go through the absence/academic consideration portal and fill out the signed self-attestation and accompanying rationale. The only difference is you don’t have to provide documentation.
 - Any students missing the exam will be required to write a make-up exam at a time and date agreed upon with the course instructor.
 - The format for the make-up exam is exactly the same as for the main exam and it will cover the exact same material as the main exam and no more.
 - If you miss the make-up exam without further accommodation, you will receive a grade of zero.
 - Under no circumstances will you be allowed to miss the midterm and have your other grades reweighted.
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WEEKLY COURSE SCHEDULE

Jan. 5 Introduction and the Components of an Election Campaign

The first part of the class will be used to introduce the general subject matter of the course and to outline the course structure, readings, and requirements. The remainder will be a lecture on the different components of the 'air war' and 'ground war' in election campaigns.

Readings/Homework

- The PPT Notes sheet is posted on the course website in the Readings folder. Skim the PPT and course outline in advance. There are no other readings for this week.

Jan. 12 Election Campaign Strategy

Using the PPT, this class examines key concepts related to election campaign strategy including: strategy vs tactics, campaign goals, the segmentation and targeting of voters, minimum winning coalitions, and how segmentation influences resource allocation related to the different components of the air and ground wars.

**Readings/Homework to Submit

- *This homework submission is due on the course website by 11:59 Sunday 11 January.* Drawing on this and last week's PPTs, and examples from today's readings, submit a one page, typed, single-spaced summary/analysis on what the different readings say about how parties target specific groups of voters and how this helps them target their resources in terms of the different components of the air and ground wars. Be sure to include relevant quotes and page citations from the readings.

Jan. 19 Party Leadership Races

The first part of this class uses the PPT to apply concepts related to campaign strategy to party leadership races. This includes a more detailed focus on goals, rules analysis, party factions, and positioning/differentiation. The second part of this class will be a discussion of recent/current party leadership races.

Readings/Homework

- There are no readings or submissions this week. The homework is to conduct your own research on the basic details on one of the following leadership races: the 2022 Conservative race won by Poilievre; the 2025 race won by Carney; or the current NDP race. This will be a key week where participation in the class discussion is assessed.

Jan. 26 Canadian Elections

The first part of this class uses the PPT to examine the dynamics of recent Canadian elections and how they inform our current context. The second part of this class will be a discussion of the 2025 election and what it means for the different parties going forward.

**Readings/Homework to Submit

- *This homework submission is due on the course website by 11:59 Sunday 25 January* Drawing on today's readings and your own knowledge, submit a one page, typed, single-spaced analysis

on why one of the parties achieved the outcome they did and what you think they need to do going forward. Be sure to include relevant quotes and page citations from the readings.

Feb. 2 Political Marketing, Customization, and Targeted Voter Outreach

The first part of this class uses the PPT to examine concepts related to political marketing, market research, product customization, and targeted voter outreach. The second part of this class will be a discussion of targeted voter outreach examples based on the readings.

Readings/Homework

- Drawing on today's readings, be prepared to discuss the key cases related to voter outreach and how they employ customized policies, messages, and leader actions. This will be a key week where participation in the class discussion is assessed.

Feb. 9 Student Campaigns

This class will take the form of group and class discussion of campaign strategy in the context of student election campaigns.

**Readings/Homework to Submit

- *This homework submission is due on the course website by 11:59 Sunday 8 February. Make sure you submit all 3 homework submissions as a single document for grading. Review the first week's PPT on the air and ground war components of election campaigns and read a few articles from *The Western Gazette* on the most recent USC Presidential election (<https://westerngazette.ca/news/elections/>). Submit a one page, typed, single-spaced analysis on what you think are the most important equivalents (if any) to the different components of the 'air war' and 'ground war' in a USC student campaign.*

Feb. 16 Reading Week - No Class

Note: Essays are due in 10 days. Use reading week to complete them

Feb. 23 Message Development

This class examines key techniques related to message development including branding, narratives, and framing language.

Readings/Homework

- Drawing on today's readings, be prepared to discuss the key examples of narratives and framing language.

Feb 26 THURSDAY – BRIEFING REPORT ESSAYS DUE ON COURSE WEBSITE BY 11:59 PM

Mar. 2 Lobbying and Advocacy Campaigns

This class examines key concepts related to strategy, the air war, and the ground war in the context of a major lobbying campaign by the oil and pipeline industries.

Readings/Homework

- Drawing on the readings, be prepared to discuss examples of air war and ground war techniques in the oil sands and/or pipelines cases.

Mar. 9 Long-Term Public Opinion Campaigns

This class examines the long-term public opinion campaigns by social movements and political parties. This includes: the use of stigmatization and normalization by advocacy groups as well as targeted outreach by political parties to new voter groups.

Readings/Homework

- Drawing on the readings, be prepared to discuss examples of stigmatization and normalization techniques.

Mar. 16 In-Class Exam During Class Time

Mar. 23 Influence Operations and International Lobbying

This class examines the techniques employed by social media advocacy groups and foreign intelligence influence operators as well as the international lobbying efforts of governments.

Readings/Homework

- Drawing on the readings, be prepared to discuss examples of influence operations and international lobbying/public diplomacy.

Mar. 30 Campaign Planning Cases

This class will take the form of group and class discussion on campaign planning for various types of campaigns.

Readings/Homework

- There are no readings, homework, or PPTs this week. However, this will be a key week where participation in the class discussion is assessed.

Apl. 6 Campaign Ads

This class will take the form of group and class discussion on campaign ads for various types of election campaigns.

Readings/Homework

- There are no readings, homework, or PPTs this week. However, this will be a key week where participation in the class discussion is assessed.