

Athabasca University

POLI 309: Canadian Government and Politics

Detailed Syllabus

Welcome to Political Science 309: Canadian Government and Politics. The course is designed to provide a general introduction to the subject of Canadian government and politics. It includes concepts that are relevant to the study of political science and a general overview of the key institutions, issues, processes, and people that demand and produce decisions on behalf of the Canadian state. As you work through the course, you will acquire critical, analytical, and practical skills that will serve you well in this and other courses.

Course Outcomes

When you have completed POLI 309, you should be able to

- describe how the Canadian political system (i.e., government) relates to the broader societal environment;
- discuss how conflict is generated in Canadian society, and describe the role of the political system in alleviating this conflict;
- describe how Canadians differ from Americans and from one another in their basic political values and beliefs;
- describe how the Canadian political system is organized to make decisions, and specify the key players in the process; and
- discuss various ways in which Canadians may participate in the political process.

Course Materials

Bickerton, J., & Gagnon, A-G. (Eds.). (2019). *Canadian politics* (7th ed.). University of Toronto Press.

Cochrane, C., Blidook, K., & Dyck, R. (2017). *Canadian politics: Critical approaches* (8th ed.). Nelson. (eText)

Course Outline

Part 1: Introduction

Unit 1: Studying Canadian Government and Politics

Learning Outcomes

When you have completed Unit 1, you should be able to

- analyze Canadian politics in terms of the role of government in modern societies;
- describe what is meant by the Canadian political system;
- define the concept of the nation-state;
- describe what is meant by the Canadian political system;
- list the different approaches to the study of Canadian politics;
- describe the fundamental principles of the Canadian Constitution and how they differ from those of Great Britain and the United States; and
- describe the Westminster model of parliamentary government.

Readings

- Unit 1 commentary

From *Canadian Politics: Critical Approaches*, by Cochrane, Blidook, and Dyck:

- Chapter 1, “Approaching the Study of Politics”
- Chapter 2, “Institutional Foundations and the Evolution of the State”

From *Canadian Politics*, edited by Bickerton and Gagnon:

- “Understanding Canada’s Origins: Federalism, Multiculturalism, and the Will to Live Together,” by Samuel V. LaSelva

Unit 2: Setting the Context: Governing in a Global World

Learning Outcomes

When you have completed Unit 2, you should be able to

- identify and discuss the reasons why Canada enjoys a close relationship with the United States;
- identify the economic and cultural conflicts that have arisen out of Canada-US trade relations and the policies promoted by Canada in these fields;
- identify the international organizations to which Canada belongs, and assess their influence on Canada;
- assess the argument that the Canadian nation-state is in a state of decline;
- articulate what you think to be the significance of “globalization” for Canada; and
- assess the extent to which Canada’s institutions are able to meet the needs of its citizens in this era of global governance.

Readings

- Unit 2 commentary

From *Canadian Politics: Critical Approaches*, by Cochrane, Blidook, and Dyck:

- Chapter 10, “Canada’s External Environment: The United States and the World”

From *Canadian Politics*, edited by Bickerton and Gagnon:

- “Canada in the World,” by Mark R. Brawley

Part 2: The Societal Context

Unit 3: Political Culture, Political Socialization, and Canadian Political Identity

Learning Outcomes

When you have completed Unit 3, you should be able to

- define political culture, and identify how it differs from political ideology;
- identify those values that distinguish Canadian political culture from American political culture;
- identify and discuss the significance of the Hartz-Horowitz thesis;
- assess the extent to which Canadian political culture is in danger of becoming Americanized;
- define *political socialization*, and identify the main agents of political socialization in Canadian society;
- identify the main political subcultures within Canada and the different processes of political socialization that help to shape and sustain them; and
- identify the main social, demographic, technological, and other factors shaping Canada’s identity and political culture moving forward.

Readings

- Unit 3 commentary

From *Canadian Politics: Critical Approaches*, by Cochrane, Blidook, and Dyck:

- Chapter 11, “The Canadian Political Culture”
- Chapter 12, “Political Socialization, the Mass Media, and Public Opinion Polls”

From *Canadian Politics*, edited by Bickerton and Gagnon:

- “Public Opinion and Political Cleavages in Canada,” by Allison Harell, Laura Stephenson, and Lyne Deschatelêts

Unit 4: Regional, Economic, and Class Cleavages

Learning Outcomes

When you have completed Unit 4, you should be able to

- identify the ways in which Canada's geography and population distribution have affected the structure and operation of its central institutions;
- identify the main regional divisions in Canada;
- identify the key economic factors that distinguish regions;
- evaluate the significance of Canada's historical development on the politics of regionalism;
- identify the main arguments that express the central grievances of the different regions in Canada;
- evaluate the impact of regionalism on the operation and function of Canada's political system;
- describe the main problems facing the middle class and the working class in Canada, and how this impacts Canadian politics; and
- describe some of the ways in which Canadian politics responds, and fails to respond, to socioeconomic inequality and class divisions.

Readings

- Unit 4 commentary

From *Canadian Politics: Critical Approaches*, by Cochrane, Blidook, and Dyck:

- Chapter 3, "The Societal Context: Cleavages and Identities"
- Chapter 8, "Class"

Unit 5: Indigenous Peoples

Learning Outcomes

When you have completed Unit 5, you should be able to

- define *Aboriginal* (or *Indigenous*) with respect to the Canadian context;
- distinguish between the First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples;
- trace the evolution of Indigenous-Canadian relations;
- identify the major policies that have been instituted or initiated by the federal government concerning Canada's Indigenous peoples, and discuss their effects on these groups;
- define the meaning and significance of the Calder case and of Aboriginal title;
- identify the different types of land claims;
- describe the inherent right to self-government; and

- evaluate Martin Papillon’s argument that there has been a “fall” as well as a “rise” in Indigenous self-government due to the displacement of the “rights-based” agenda with an economic one.

Readings

- Unit 5 commentary

From *Canadian Politics: Critical Approaches*, by Cochrane, Blidook, and Dyck:

- Chapter 4, “Canada’s Aboriginal Peoples”

From *Canadian Politics*, edited by Bickerton and Gagnon:

- “The Rise (and Fall?) of Aboriginal Self-Government,” by Martin Papillon

Unit 6: French Canada and the Quebec Question

Learning Outcomes

When you have completed Unit 6, you should be able to

- trace the historical evolution of French-English relations and its effect on the development of Canada’s central institutions;
- identify and describe the major points of crisis in the history of French-English relations;
- discuss what is meant by the term *Quiet Revolution*;
- compare and contrast the values and attitudes of Quebec before and following the Quiet Revolution;
- identify the reasons for Quebec’s dissent from the 1982 amendment to the Canadian Constitution, and discuss the related components of the Meech Lake Accord and the Charlottetown Accord;
- discuss the significance of the Clarity Act; and
- account for the appeal, or lack thereof, of secession to Quebecers.

Readings

- Unit 6 commentary

From *Canadian Politics: Critical Approaches*, by Cochrane, Blidook, and Dyck:

- Chapter 5, “French Canada and the Quebec Question”

From *Canadian Politics*, edited by Bickerton and Gagnon:

- “Five Faces of Quebec: Shifting Small Worlds and Evolving Political Dynamics” by Alain-G. Gagnon

Unit 7: Gender, Multiculturalism, and Representation

Learning Outcomes

When you have completed Unit 7, you should be able to

- identify the historical obstacles to women’s participation in politics;
- identify the milestones in women’s political participation;
- describe the emergence of the women’s movement in Canada, its goals, and its accomplishments;
- distinguish between pre-1970 and post-1970 immigration policy;
- describe the extent to which Canada’s pluralism is reflected in its institutions; and
- articulate the current needs and concerns of women and minority ethnic groups.

Readings

- Unit 7 commentary

From *Canadian Politics: Critical Approaches*, by Cochrane, Blidook, and Dyck:

- Chapter 7, “Gender”
- Chapter 6, “Ethnocultural Minorities”

From *Canadian Politics*, edited by Bickerton and Gagnon:

- “Diversity in Canadian Politics,” by Yasmeen Abu-Laban

Part 3: Governing

Unit 8: The Constitutional Context

Learning Outcomes

When you have completed Unit 8, you should be able to

- identify the importance of a constitution and its function in the political system;
- discuss the historical events that led to Confederation;
- identify and discuss the three principles or “pillars” upon which the Canadian Constitution is based;
- identify the main reasons why the four original provinces agreed to Confederation;
- identify the main principles of the Canadian Constitution, 1867;
- identify the main provisions of the Constitution Act, 1982;

- differentiate between the Canadian Bill of Rights and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms;
- discuss the political context of the Meech Lake Accord (1987) and the Charlottetown Accord(1992);
- discuss how the secession reference and the Delgamuukw decision have affected Canada’s constitutional context; and
- evaluate the arguments in support of and in opposition to future constitutional renewal.

Readings

- Unit 8 commentary

From *Canadian Politics: Critical Approaches*, by Cochrane, Blidook, and Dyck:

- Chapter 2, “Institutional Foundations and the Evolution of the State”
- Chapter 17, “The Canadian Constitution and Constitutional Change”

Unit 9: The Parliamentary System

Learning Outcomes

When you have completed Unit 9, you should be able to

- define what parliamentary supremacy is and to what extent it still exists in Canada;
- identify what is meant by the Westminster model of government;
- compare the Parliament-centred and cabinet-centred (Westminster model) view of Parliament;
- identify and discuss the functions of the House of Commons;
- identify the different stages and types of legislation;
- differentiate between majority government and minority government;
- contrast the intended functions of the Senate with those functions it actually performs;
- outline the composition of, and the process for appointment to, the Senate;
- identify and discuss proposals for parliamentary reform; and
- differentiate between arguments in support of and against party discipline in the Canadian political system.

Readings

- Unit 9 commentary

From *Canadian Politics: Critical Approaches*, by Cochrane, Blidook, and Dyck:

- Chapter 23, “Parliament”

Unit 10: The Executive

Learning Outcomes

When you have completed Unit 10, you should be able to

- identify the ways in which the monarchy is entrenched in the Canadian political system;
- list the powers and functions of the Crown;
- distinguish between the formal executive and the political executive;
- identify and discuss the powers (their sources and limitations) for the prime minister and the cabinet;
- debate the merits of “the cabinet government” versus “prime ministerial government”;
- identify and discuss the functions of the four main central agencies;
- identify the factors that influence the composition of cabinet; and
- describe the arguments both for and against the proposition that the prime minister is too powerful.

Readings

- Unit 10 commentary

From *Canadian Politics: Critical Approaches*, by Cochrane, Blidook, and Dyck:

- Chapter 21, “The Executive: Crown, Prime Minister, and Cabinet”

From *Canadian Politics*, edited by Bickerton and Gagnon:

- “The Centre Rules: Executive Dominance,” by Donald Savoie

Unit 11: The Bureaucracy

Learning Outcomes

When you have completed Unit 11, you should be able to

- identify the functions of the bureaucracy in the policy-making process;
- identify the structure of a government department, distinguishing between the roles of the minister and the deputy minister;
- assess the effectiveness of the bureaucracy in managing public interests;
- provide a critical appraisal of the relationship between the bureaucracy and the political executive; and
- identify the ways in which bureaucratic power is, or can be, controlled.

Readings

- Unit 11 commentary

From *Canadian Politics: Critical Approaches*, by Cochrane, Blidook, and Dyck:

- Chapter 22, “The Bureaucracy”

Unit 12: The Judiciary

Learning Outcomes

When you have completed Unit 12, you should be able to

- identify and explain the function of adjudication and how the courts operate;
- explain what is meant by judicial review;
- outline the judicial structure;
- describe the appointment process;
- describe the ways in which the entrenchment of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms has affected the function of the judiciary in the policy-making process; and
- define *judicial independence*.

Readings

- Unit 12 commentary

From *Canadian Politics: Critical Approaches*, by Cochrane, Blidook, and Dyck:

- Chapter 24, “The Judiciary”
- Chapter 19, “The Charter of Rights and Freedoms”

From *Canadian Politics*, edited by Bickerton and Gagnon:

- “Politics and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms,” by Raymond Bazowski

Part 4: Linking People to Government

Unit 13: Civil Society: Interest Groups, Social Movements, and the Voluntary Sector

Learning Outcomes

When you have completed Unit 13, you should be able to

- identify the different categories and types of interest groups;
- define *lobbying*, and discuss its impact on policy making;

- identify how interest groups have led to the decline of political parties;
- evaluate the extent to which parties and interest and advocacy groups enhance the practice of Canadian government; and
- understand what “new social movements” are, why they have come into being, and what impacts they are understood as having on Canadian democracy.

Readings

- Unit 13 commentary

From *Canadian Politics: Critical Approaches*, by Cochrane, Blidook, and Dyck:

- Chapter 16, “Advocacy Groups, Social Movements, and Lobbying”

From *Canadian Politics*, edited by Bickerton and Gagnon:

- “Of Pots and Pans and Radical Handmaids: Social Movements and Civil Society,” by Michael Orsini

Unit 14: Political Parties

Learning Outcomes

When you have completed Unit 14, you should be able to

- describe the functions and roles that political parties play, and discuss the extent to which they organize political life;
- distinguish among one-party, two-party, and multiparty systems, and discuss their differences;
- compare and contrast the political parties in terms of membership, leadership selection, and ideologies;
- characterize Canada’s current party system;
- describe the current methods of leadership selection for the main political parties and the principal arguments for and against them;
- describe what critics and commentators see as the weaknesses of contemporary Canadian political parties; and
- describe the three general models of voter behaviour that James Bickerton uses for explaining electoral outcomes, and assess how well they make sense of voter-party relations in Canada’s current (fourth) party system.

Readings

- Unit 14 commentary

From *Canadian Politics: Critical Approaches*, by Cochrane, Blidook, and Dyck:

- Chapter 14, “Political Parties and the Party System”

From *Canadian Politics*, edited by Bickerton and Gagnon:

- “Parties and Elections: An End to Canadian Exceptionalism,” by James Bickerton

Unit 15: Elections and the Electoral System

Learning Outcomes

When you have completed Unit 15, you should be able to

- assess how and why elections are important to Canadian democracy;
- compare and contrast the utility of a first-past-the-post (FPP) system versus a proportional representation (PR) system; and
- describe and explain the barriers to electoral reform in Canada.

Readings

- Unit 15 commentary

From *Canadian Politics: Critical Approaches*, by Cochrane, Blidook, and Dyck:

- Chapter 13, “Elections and the Electoral System”
- Chapter 15, “The Election Campaign, Voting and Political Participation”

From *Canadian Politics*, edited by Bickerton and Gagnon:

- “Democratic Reform and the Vagaries of Partisan Politics in Canada,” by Brian Tanguay