

POLS 3045: Public Opinion and Political Behavior, Fall 2025

Section 1, CRN 83625: Fully Online

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Walk-In Hours (Macon, SOAL 115): Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 12:20–2:00 p.m.; Thursdays, 12:20–5:00 p.m.

Or, schedule appointments on Calendly: <https://calendly.com/dr-lawrence-mga/meeting>.

Welcome to the course! This class is designed to be an in-depth exploration of the related concepts of public opinion and mass political behavior, with a focus on the role of the individual voter in governing in a representative democracy, and whether the average citizen is equipped to decide political issues. The main emphasis in this course is on public opinion and political behavior in the United States, but much of the material applies to democratic publics throughout the world.

Catalog Description: This course provides an overview of the study of public opinion and mass political behavior, with particular attention to the contemporary United States. Includes analysis of data from public opinion surveys.

Prerequisite: POLS 1101/1101H with a C or higher.

Expected Learning Outcomes: Students will be expected to achieve the following learning outcomes to pass the course:

1. Identify and explain the contested meanings of the concept of public opinion.
2. Describe the processes by which social scientists study public opinion and political behavior.
3. Identify and distinguish the different forms of political behavior citizens engage in.
4. Examine how external influences affect individuals' political beliefs, values, opinions, and political actions.
5. Describe the role of beliefs and values in forming opinions.
6. Identify and describe how individual characteristics and group identities influence public opinion and political behavior.
7. Explain why some citizens are more likely to participate in politics than others.
8. Explain the choices made by citizens when voting for individual political candidates or political parties.
9. Evaluate the extent to which members of the public meet the criteria of the "ideal" democratic citizen.

These outcomes will be assessed in various assignments throughout the course.

- Identify and use appropriate methodologies for collecting, analyzing, and presenting data and evidence in written, oral, and graphical form, within the context of political science. (Program-level SLO.)

The preceding program-level student learning outcome will be assessed using the final paper in the course.

Intellectual Property Notice: Course content provided either in-class or online that is the original, creative work of the professor is copyrighted by the professor and licensed only for your own, personal use, unless otherwise specified.

Audio and audiovisual recordings of lectures may not be uploaded, emailed, or otherwise shared over the Internet or otherwise with persons or entities who are not enrolled in the class without the explicit, written permission of the professor and any other individual(s) whose likenesses or voices are present in the recording. Violations of this class policy will be considered to be student misconduct.

Required Materials: There are two textbooks required for the course:

- ▷ Rosalee A. Clawson and Zoe M. Oxley. 2020. *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*, 4th ed. Washington: CQ Press. ISBN 978-1-5443-9020-8.
- ▷ Elizabeth A. Theiss-Morse and Michael W. Wagner. 2022. *Political Behavior of the American Electorate*, 15th ed. Washington: CQ Press. ISBN 978-1-0718-2217-3.

These textbooks should be available, new or used, at the bookstore in the Student Life Center on the Macon campus; you may also be able to buy or rent them on-line at a discount. Print or electronic copies are acceptable.

Additional readings may be assigned at the discretion of the professor and will be provided for you at the library reserve desk or on the course Brightspace (D2L) site.

Note: You are required to own, or have access to, a copy of the textbooks for the duration of the course (through the final examination).

Technology Requirements: You are required to have access to Brightspace for the duration of the course. You will also need access to a computer, tablet, or smartphone that can read Portable Document Format (Adobe PDF) files and supports HTML5 technologies for browsing the Internet.

You will need a backup plan in the event that technology fails. For example, if you lose Internet connectivity or your computer crashes, you must have alternative means of accessing the learning management system. Assignments are generally not accepted late due to a failure of technology or an interruption to Internet service.

Assignments and Grading: Your grade in this course will be based on the following elements:

Exams	45%	Article/Chapter Summaries/Discussions	15%
Research Paper	25%	Discussions/Participation	15%

Your final grade in the course will be assigned based on this scale:

Final Average	≥ 90.0	≥ 80.0	≥ 70.0	≥ 60.0	< 60.0
Grade	A	B	C	D	F
Grade Points	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	0.0

Exams: The midterm and final exams will be administered online in an essay format. More details on the exam content and requirements will be provided later in the semester.

Article/Chapter Summaries and Discussions: Each student will be assigned three articles and/or book chapters from various scholarly works related to public opinion and political behavior to summarize for the class and lead a discussion about. Specific expectations for the presentations will be provided in a separate document. The specific articles/chapters will be assigned as the term progresses. For the discussions, similar rules will apply

Research Paper: There will be one public opinion research paper, approximately ten pages in length; further details on this paper assignment will be posted on Brightspace.

Reading/Lecture Discussions: An integral part of the course is participation in reading/lecture discussions. These discussions will consist of prompts that will be available for your response for a period of several days. You must respond to each of the discussions for a chapter to receive full credit.

For full credit in response to each discussion question, you will need to post your own response and *at least* two responses, each to *different* classmates. Your initial response should be at least 150 words long and should be no more than 400 words or so, and should be posted *at least 36 hours before the deadline*. Followup responses to classmates should be 75–200 words in length and not simply duplicate or repeat your initial response to the prompt.

Also, you should follow the following guidelines for participation in discussions, which are also posted in Brightspace; these are based on those suggested by the Center for Research on Teaching and Learning at the University of Michigan:

- Respect others’ rights to hold opinions and beliefs that differ from your own. When you disagree, challenge or criticize the idea, not the person.
- Listen carefully to what others are saying even when you disagree with what is being said. Comments that you make (asking for clarification, sharing critiques, expanding on a point, etc.) should reflect that you have paid attention to the speaker’s comments.
- Be courteous.
- Support your statements. Use evidence and provide a rationale for your points.
- Share responsibility for including all voices in the discussion. If you have much to say, try to hold back a bit; if you are hesitant to speak, look for opportunities to contribute to the discussion.
- Recognize that we are all still learning. Be willing to change your perspective, and make space for others to do the same.

You should also bear in mind the university's student conduct policies.

General Rules for Written Assignments: Your papers must reflect your own, individual effort; you may consult with me, the Writing Center and tutors, other faculty members, or other students, but the writing and research must be substantially your own work.

The body of your paper should be double-spaced and written using a proportional typeface (either 11 point or 12 point), with one-inch margins and including page numbers.¹ The first page of your paper should include your name, the date, and an appropriate title for the assignment; a separate title page is acceptable, but not necessary.

Papers must consistently use a widely-accepted citation style in the social and behavioral sciences; examples of acceptable styles include those included in the style manuals of the American Political Science Association (APSA), the American Sociological Association (ASA), the American Psychological Association (APA), or the Modern Language Association (MLA); "Chicago" or "Turabian" style is also acceptable. All papers that make use of sources must include a list of works cited and include properly cited quotations or paraphrases of the material used. Papers should also be written in standard English with coherent use of prose and grammar.

Copies of all out-of-class written assignments must be submitted to the appropriate "drop box" on the Brightspace website. In the event that the timeliness of an assignment is in question, the time submitted to Brightspace will be used as the definitive record of when the assignment was received.

Contacting the Professor: My regularly-scheduled office hours are listed at the beginning of the syllabus. During those times, I generally do not schedule appointments; rather, meetings are "first come, first serve." When I am not busy with a student in-person, I will also be available "virtually" at these times by phone or web chat. If you wish to make a confirmed appointment to see me *outside* my scheduled hours, please do so at least one business day in advance.

If you do contact me outside my office hours, please bear in mind that my other work and personal obligations may be on a different schedule than what is convenient for you; for example, I may be in class, in the midst of research, or at a meeting. Except under extraordinary circumstances, if your email includes a question or otherwise requires a response, I will always get back to you within one business day, and frequently sooner; messages that merely inform me of a class absence may not be acknowledged.

If you call my office outside my office hours, please avoid leaving voice mail or messages with university staff; it is an incredibly unproductive and inefficient means of communication. You will usually receive a much quicker response by email.

To protect the privacy of your educational records, all discussion regarding grades or other confidential information must be conducted in person, via Brightspace, or via your official *mga.edu* email address; I will not discuss confidential information over the phone or via any non-school email address. If you have not yet activated your official university email address, please see <https://www.mga.edu/technology/services/email.php>

When contacting me outside of class, please be sure to specify both the course and section you are in, as it will allow me to respond more quickly to you.

Class Policies: The primary expectations of all Middle Georgia State University students are integrity and civility. Each student should approach his/her academic endeavors, relationships and personal responsibilities with a strong commitment to personal integrity and interpersonal civility.

Extra credit: To be fair to all students, I do not offer individualized extra-credit opportunities. If you believe you might benefit from extra credit, I strongly advise you take advantage of any opportunities offered to the whole class as they are announced during the term.

Revisions to the syllabus: While I will make every effort to follow the syllabus as-written, if unforeseen circumstances arise during the semester I reserve the right to amend any policy in this syllabus.

Make-ups: Make-up examinations must be scheduled in advance in the case of an unavoidable planned or reasonably-foreseeable absence; otherwise, make-ups will be given only in the case of an illness or other emergency that is prop-

¹ Proportional typefaces include Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri, etc. "Typewriter-style" (constant-width) typefaces such as Courier New are **not acceptable**.

erly documented, after the fact. To be fair to all students, make-up exams must be completed within two weeks of the originally scheduled exam date; also, make-up exams may be administered in a different format than the original exam offered to the rest of the class, at my sole discretion. Per university policy, I have sole discretion to decide whether or not a make-up exam is warranted under the circumstances.

To be fair to all students in the class, students are responsible for *all assignments*, regardless of their date of initial enrollment in the course.

Late Assignments: A late penalty of 10 percentage points per day will apply to work turned in after the deadline for the assignment to be completed. Notwithstanding this policy, any work received after the scheduled final examination may not be graded, resulting in a zero (0) on any assignments outstanding at that point in the semester.

Grade Appeals: Like everyone else, I am fallible and sometimes make mistakes. If I simply misrecorded a grade (for example, if I enter “70” in the gradebook when you earned an “80”) or made an arithmetic error, please bring me the returned assignment, and I will immediately correct the error.

If you believe you received an *unjust* grade, I am happy to discuss the grading of the assignment with you, in-person during regular office hours or at a scheduled appointment; please bring the graded assignment with you so we can have a productive conversation. If you remain unsatisfied with my explanation of the grade, to give us both ample time to consider the dispute, you will need to type a brief (one-page) explanation of your position and turn it in, along with the original graded assignment, *at least one week after* the assignment was originally returned to you. I will then consider your appeal and make a determination. Appeals must be submitted in hard copy format; no appeals submitted via email will be considered. Please refer to the Student Handbook and Catalog for policies regarding appeals of *final letter grades*.

Academic Misconduct: I take academic misconduct (including, but not limited to, cheating on exams and plagiarism of written work) very seriously. So does Middle Georgia State University. In this course the *minimum* penalty for academic misconduct is a grade of zero (0) on the assignment in question, with no opportunity to repeat the assignment, along with referral to the testing center to complete an examination on plagiarism, cheating, and the Student Code of Conduct. Second or subsequent violations, or egregious misconduct (for example, an organized effort to cheat involving multiple students, or academic misconduct that causes harm to other students), will automatically be referred to the Office of Student Affairs for a university-level resolution which may include a failing grade in the course, disciplinary probation, and/or academic suspension.

I offer some free advice, drawn from past experience as both a student and a professor: do not turn in plagiarized work because you have run out of time and feel as if you need to turn in *something*—taking the late penalty is better than the sanctions for academic misconduct. Similarly, if you forgot to study, it's better to get a low grade on the exam than the zero you'll get if you cheat.

One of the early computer programmers, Admiral Grace Hopper, is reported to have said that “[i]t’s easier to ask forgiveness than it is to get permission.” That advice *does not* apply in this situation. If you have the slightest doubt about whether something is academic misconduct, *ask me before handing in the assignment for grading*.

Generative Artificial Intelligence: While you are welcome to make use of generative artificial intelligence software (including, but not limited to, “large language models” like ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, etc.) to assist in written work in this course, you are strongly encouraged to ensure that content produced by this software is grammatically, factually, and logically correct. In particular, you should take care that factual assertions made in text are supported by *real* evidence; current LLMs are known to frequently “hallucinate” or fabricate supporting evidence such as citations to nonexistent sources. In many cases it will be easier to write your own responses rather than verifying the accuracy and correctness of LLM output and ensuring it does not fail to quote or cite necessary supporting evidence.

University Policies: Students are responsible for reading, understanding, and adhering to all Middle Georgia State University student policies, including those linked on the Syllabus Policy pages at <https://www.mga.edu/faculty-affairs/syllabus-policy.php> and <https://www.mga.edu/center-excellence-teaching-learning/syllabi-policies.php>. Any policy listed therein is incorporated in this syllabus by reference, even if not explicitly called out below. Note that some listed policies may not apply fully or at all to online courses like this one.

Student Code of Conduct: MGA students are responsible for reading, understanding, and abiding by the MGA Stu-

dent Code of Conduct: https://www.mga.edu/student-affairs/docs/MGA_Student_Handbook.pdf#page=45

Nondiscrimination and Anti-harassment Policy: MGA is committed to ensuring a safe learning environment that supports the dignity of all members of the University community. We encourage students to read more about this institutional policy: <https://policies.mga.edu/policy-manual/section-6-campus-affairs/6-5-nondiscrimination/index.php>

Attendance Policy: MGA students should attend all class sessions, be they face-to-face or online. Class attendance and participation is an individual student responsibility. Learn more about attendance expectations by asking each of your instructors and through this web resource: <https://mga.smartcatalogiq.com/en/2024-2025/undergraduate-catalog/academic-policy-and-information/course-policies/attendance-policy/>

Withdrawing from a Course: Before withdrawing from or dropping a course, students should check the last date for withdrawing before considering their options and the consequences of their choices: <https://mga.smartcatalogiq.com/en/2024-2025/undergraduate-catalog/academic-policy-and-information/withdrawal/>

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity/Honesty: MGA uses a plagiarism prevention service to evaluate written work that students submit for this course. The papers will be retained by the service for the sole purpose of checking for plagiarized content in future student submissions. MGA's Code of Conduct prohibits the use of any unauthorized assistance in completing any work for any course. The Code of Conduct is available at this webpage: <https://www.mga.edu/student-conduct/index.php>

Academic Mindset: The purpose of a university education is not just to teach you knowledge and skills but also to expand the ways you use your mind and handle challenges. A positive academic mindset provides an effective framework that will guide you through this course and also throughout your life as you adapt to a changing world. In this spirit, MGA seeks to encourage students to strengthen their positive academic mindset. This course promotes a positive academic mindset by highlighting the following:

- Knowing that you can strengthen your abilities through effort and a positive attitude;
- Believing in your own ability to learn and continue to improve;
- Recognizing that the work in this course has value and purpose for you;
- Fostering your willingness to embrace new experiences and challenges;
- Acknowledging that your effort and attitude affect your performance.

Mental and Emotional Health Support: Counseling Services is proud to be a part of BeWell@MGA, which provides students 24/7 access to counselors and mental health resources to help cope with minor issues to major concerns. More information is available on this webpage: <https://www.mga.edu/student-affairs/bewell/index.php>

Accessibility Services: Students with a documented disability must work with MGA's Accessibility Services to arrange essential services relating to their disability. All entitlements to accommodations are based on documentation and USG Board of Regents standards.

If a student is considering requesting accommodations, they should first contact Accessibility Services to discuss the process: <https://www.mga.edu/accessibility-services/index.php>

If a student needs course adaptations or accommodations because of a documented disability or chronic illness, the student should notify their instructor in writing and provide a copy of a current Student Accommodations Report (SAR), which is available only from Accessibility Services. Faculty cannot offer accommodations to any student without timely receipt of the official SAR document.

Student Success Centers (SSC): Tutoring is available free of charge on all MGA campuses for currently enrolled students. SSC tutoring sessions may be scheduled online and face-to-face through the "Book an Appointment" link on the SSC website. Other services at the SSC include online academic workshops and a robust website with resources for academic assistance. The SSC locations also have computer workstations, printing, and Internet access. To view contact information, subjects tutored, and tutor availability, go to the SSC website at <http://www.mga.edu/student-success-center/>

Writing Center: The MGA Writing Center is a free service that provides one-on-one consultations to assist students with all types of writing. Either in-person or via Teams, our consultants provide feedback and use different strategies to help students improve their writing. Writing Center locations are open on the Macon and Cochran campuses.

Mathematics Academic Resource Center (MARC): The MARC offers free tutoring for most math courses. Tutoring

can be in person or online, by appointment or walk-in. We are equipped with computers, textbooks, whiteboards, calculators, and study notes to provide students with a space to study. For hours, locations, and booking a session, please visit <https://www.mga.edu/MARC>.

Center for Career and Leadership Development: Students have free access to career and professional development services through the CCLD. Virtual and in-person appointments can be scheduled in Macon, Cochran, or Eastman at mga.joinhandshake.com. College-to-career resources include career exploration/assessments, job/internship/graduate school search assistance, career fairs, resume/interview prep, and professional/leadership development. Contact them at careerservices@mga.edu or visit <https://www.mga.edu/center-career-leadership-development/index.php>.

Course Experience Feedback Survey: Student perception surveys of a class and its instructor are administered online at the end of each term/session for all courses with five or more students. Students will receive an email containing a link to a survey for each course in which they are enrolled. All responses are anonymous.

Campus Emergencies: In the event of a closure or delayed opening of the university due to inclement weather or other emergency, you should monitor the Knight Alert system for updates; sign up for these alerts at <https://www.mga.edu/police/alert/>. You should expect communication via email and/or Brightspace regarding any assignments to be completed or revisions to the schedule while we are unable to meet.

In the event of an emergency situation on campus, call 9-1-1 and/or campus police at (478) 471-2414.

HB 280 (Campus Carry Legislation): In accordance with O.C.G.A. § 16-11-127.1, Middle Georgia State University recognizes that a lawful weapons carrier may carry concealed handguns on Middle Georgia State campuses, excluding restricted campus facilities. More information is available at this webpage: <https://policies.mga.edu/policy-manual/section-6-campus-affairs/6-10-weapons-on-campus/index.php>

Withdrawal Deadlines: The last day to drop the course without it appearing on your transcript is Tuesday, August 19th. Students may withdraw from the course and earn a grade of “W” through Wednesday, October 29th. After this point, students who withdraw will normally receive a grade of “WF,” which is calculated in the GPA as an “F.”

The MGA Withdrawal Form is available online or from the Office of the Registrar. Students are encouraged to read the withdrawal policy found at <https://www.mga.edu/registrar/registration/drop-add.php> before dropping/withdrawing from class. I encourage you to plan ahead and not try to drop or withdraw from class on the day of the deadline.

Course Outline: Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class and will be posted to the course calendar and in Brightspace. We will not necessarily read books in the order they appear the syllabus; please be sure you read the correct chapters *in advance* of the designated class dates. While I may periodically remind students of upcoming scheduled events, it is **your responsibility** to be familiar with this schedule and any changes to it.

August 13 *Introduction to the course.* Complete Start Here activities in Brightspace.

Module 1: August 14–20 *What is public opinion? What is political behavior? How are public opinion and political behavior related to democratic values?* Clawson and Oxley, chapter 1; Theiss-Morse and Wagner, chapter 1.

Module 2: August 21–24 *Methods of studying public opinion and political behavior.* Clawson and Oxley, “Appendix: Studying Public Opinion Empirically”; Theiss-Morse and Wagner, “Appendix: Survey Research Methods.”

Module 3: August 25–31 *Political socialization: how do people form their beliefs and values?* Clawson and Oxley, chapter 2.

Module 4: September 1–7 *The mass media and its effects on opinion.* Clawson and Oxley, chapter 3.

Module 5: September 8–14 *Electoral context and strategy: how do political and economic conditions influence political campaigns?* Theiss-Morse and Wagner, chapter 2.

Module 6: September 15–21 *Turnout and participation: who votes, who doesn’t vote, and why?* Theiss-Morse and Wagner, chapter 3.

Module 7: September 22–28 *Unconventional participation and social identity.* Theiss-Morse and Wagner, chapter 4.

Module 8: September 29–October 6 *Ideology, partisanship, and polarization.* Clawson and Oxley, chapter 5; Theiss-Morse and Wagner, chapters 5–6.

Midterm Due October 2, 11:59 p.m. Eastern

Module 9: October 7–13 *Are political attitudes stable?* Clawson and Oxley, chapter 4.

Module 10: October 14–20 *The pluralistic roots of public opinion, and their impact on elections.* Clawson and Oxley, chapters 6–7; Theiss-Morse and Wagner, chapter 8.

Module 11: October 21–27 *Political knowledge, interest, and attentiveness.* Clawson and Oxley, chapter 8.

Module 12: October 28–November 3 *Political campaigns and the media; vote choice and electoral decisions.* Theiss-Morse and Wagner, chapters 7–8.

Module 13 (part): November 4–10 *Public support for civil liberties.* Clawson and Oxley, chapter 9.

Module 13 (part): November 11–17 *Public support for civil rights.* Clawson and Oxley, chapter 10.

Module 14: November 18–22 *Political trust and system support.* Clawson and Oxley, chapter 11.

Module 15: November 22–December 3 *How does public opinion influence policy?* Clawson and Oxley, chapters 12–13.

Final Exam Due December 8, 11:59 p.m. Eastern