

POLS 3120: Introduction to Political Behavior

Dr. Murat Abus

Spring 2026

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🕒 WF: 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

🏠 Office: Room Number

🌐 muratabus.com

🕒 MW: 01:00–01:50 p.m. | R: 09:00–09:50 a.m.

📍 Class: Room Number

Course Description

Political behavior encompasses the study of individuals and groups as they interact with the processes and institutions in a political system. The topics that correspond to a comprehensive look at political behavior include but are not limited to **attitudes, ideologies, partisanship, political parties, political views, public opinion, political knowledge, political responsibility, electoral accountability, polarization, social context, economic context, economic voting, mobilization, psychological processes like motivated reasoning and cognitive dissonance, race, ethnicity, gender, conventional political participation, and unconventional political participation**. This is an introductory course and it will focus on a connected subset of these topics after a brief overview of the field. Students interested in specialization can consider the follow-up selective course of political behavior after this introductory course. The main goal of this course is to help you broadly understand the contours of American political behavior in the context of a changing world. We will accomplish that by reading, analyzing and discussing:

- individual actors and organized groups;
- some of the institutions involved in political behavior;
- the interaction of actors and these institutions and processes;
- and a more detailed look at political participation.

General Education Goal

- **Developing a solid foundation in the social sciences:** Students should be well versed in critical thinking and be able to formulate written and oral reasoned argumentation supported by evidence. This foundation will prepare students for roles in various sectors they will choose in a democratic America and in a global society. These skills they internalize as part of a social science education will make students effective thinkers, communicators and life-long learners in a changing world.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Have a working knowledge of some of the components of political behavior in the United States
2. Explain general determinants of political behavior in recent American political history
3. Understand the relationships between the actors and processes
4. Outline the different contexts that condition outcomes (like attitudes toward a party and a leader)
5. Define different types of political participation and place these within the study of political behavior
6. Improve skills to use reasoned argumentation while presenting ideas on the subject in a written and oral format.

Course Requirements

Textbook

The following book will be our textbook and is required. You can search for it online, order through the bookstore and check the publisher's website using the ISBN: [978-1506367743](#).

- Theiss-Morse, Elizabeth A. and Michael W. Wagner. 2022. *Political Behavior of the American Electorate*, 15th Edition. CQ Press.

We will read extensively from the following book. Cheaper used copies are readily available. You are recommended to have a copy of the book. You can search for an extensive listing of used copies by using the ISBN 9780321121868 on [Thriftbooks](#), [Biblio](#), [AbeBooks](#), or [Amazon](#).

- Rosenstone, Steven J. and John Mark Hansen. 2002. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America (Longman Classics in Political Science)*. Pearson Longman.

Other Material

There will be additional required and/or recommended readings. These material can be chapters from separate books, articles in magazines, newspaper articles, reports published online, parts of websites, or videos. I will post links to online sources under class schedule and provide the other reading material through Blackboard/Canvas as well. Please note that lectures and readings will complement each other. There will be material in lectures that might not be covered in the readings and vice versa. Watch for updated class schedule and course related communication for additional material.

Technology

You will need to use your university email and have access to Canvas/Blackboard. If there is any issue with these items you should let me know as soon as possible, and latest by the end of the second week of classes.

Class Dynamics & Expectations

The class will depend heavily on interaction and conversation. I will ask many questions to motivate discussion and in order to participate, you will need to read the assigned readings before class. We will spend time to improve your critical thinking and reasoning skills through exercises using our subject. There will be two written assignments, and you are expected to show improvement in the way you present an idea based on the feedback I will provide for the first assignment (the first assignment will not be graded). The class will provide many opportunities for the students to exercise essential skills in oral argumentation and are expected to participate and show improvement. I will keep track of your engagement in class based on your questions and answers during classes and office hours. I will encourage wide participation. However, if there is any reason that prevents you from participating in a social setting, let me know and be sure to make use of office hours.

Exams & Assignments

There will be two exams. They will both be multiple-choice exams that will be administered via Canvas/Blackboard (make sure you can access Canvas/Blackboard as early as possible, not later than the end of second week of classes). The exams will consist of 40 questions taken from the lectures and readings. The final exam is not comprehensive. Note that lectures and readings will complement each other, so there will be material in lectures that might not be covered in the readings and vice versa. There will be two written assignments. The first will not be graded and will be used to give you feedback. The second one will be graded. Most of your grade on the second assignment will be based on the extent you make an improvement on your writing based on the feedback I will provide for the first assignment. Therefore, failure to submit first assignment might negatively affect your score for the second assignment. Please label your written assignments properly. For instance, if your name is Jane Doe, you should label your second assignment as "jane_doe_assignment2.docx". You can submit assignments in any text format, including plain text.

Course Policies

These course policies are subject to change, but assume they are in effect unless you hear otherwise from me.

Academic Freedom

As we carry out our conversation and discussion in class, there will be various ideas with which some of us will not agree. You will be expected to respect each other's opinions as they are expressed as difference in opinions and the presence of deliberation are an important part of our political system. However, I will not tolerate any personal attacks, insults, and hateful speech.

Office Hours

You are encouraged to use the posted office hours for any inquiry that is related to the course in any way. These can include questions about the content we covered in class, content in the readings, some recent development you want to make better sense of, feedback request on your writing, practicing argumentation, asking for and discussing further material in case you are interested. If the posted hours conflict with your schedule, email me to set up an alternative time.

Email Policy

I will answer course related emails as quickly as I can throughout the semester. There are several easy ways to make sure that you give a positive impression and get a fast response:

1. Use your official university email address
2. Include a clear subject line
3. Use formal salutation (for example "Dear Dr. Abus") and a sign off (for example "Best", "Best Regards")
4. Be clear, polite and succinct

Grading Policy

Your grade will consist of your performance on the exams, your ability and willingness to participate in the class through discussions (including those during office hours), and your improvement in the written assignment. The evaluation breakdown will be as follows:

Item	Weight
Participation	15%
Written assignment	30%
Exam #1	25%
Exam #2	30%

The grading system will follow the University convention. Letter grades will be assigned as follows:

Letter Grade	Range
A:	89.5–100
B:	79.5–89.4
C:	69.5–79.4
D:	59.5–69.4
F:	00.0–59.4

Make-Up Exam Policy

There are no make-ups for missed exams unless there is a valid excuse.

Extra Credit/Grade Change Policy

I give extra credits when necessary only based on your general demeanor in class. If you are not satisfied with your written assignment grade, request an appointment from me within **48 hours of the grade release**. If you have a valid case, I can re-grade the assignment, but please keep in mind that you may get a lower grade as a result.

Late Assignment

Written assignment that is turned in 1 minute to 24 hours late after their due time will be penalized by 20% of the assignment score. Assignments will be marked down by an additional 20% of the assignment score for each additional 24-hour period they are late.

Attendance / Participation

Attendance is not mandatory. However, 15% of your grade in this course will consist of your participation score. I will track this through your involvement in the discussions that we will regularly have in class.

Electronic Devices

Laptops and tablets are not allowed in the classroom. The only exception to this rule is for students that have explicit CDR accommodations. These exceptions have to be documented and approved. You may take notes using pen and paper in class. Phones are also not allowed to be out during class time under any circumstances. If you have a pressing need to use your phone, you are requested to step out of the classroom to use your phone. If I see a student using their phone, they will be subject to cold calls and if this happens repeatedly, they will be asked to leave.

Academic Integrity Policy

Access and Accommodations Policy

AI Policy

Copyright & Fair Use Statement

The materials used in this course are subject to copyright laws. For those materials which neither I nor the university owns the copyright, I have either obtained a license for use or am using the materials in a manner that I reasonably believe is in compliance with the Fair Use exception to the copyright laws. The other materials used in this course are copyrighted. By this, I mean all materials generated for this class, which include but are not limited to syllabi, exams, lectures, quizzes, assignments, and any other document I post in Blackboard. Because these items are copyrighted, you do not have the right to copy and distribute any course materials unless I, or the document publishers, expressly grant permission.

Tentative Class Schedule

Important: Class readings are subject to change, contingent on unforeseen circumstances and the progress we make as a class. There might be instances where we will need to cancel class for a week due to professional conference attendance and presentation. Students are encouraged to check the Blackboard/Canvas announcements section and any e-mails from me for updates.

Week 01, 01/12 – 01/16: Course Introduction, Topic Introduction (Political Behavior)

Read:

- The Course Syllabus

Week 02, 01/19 – 01/23: Attitudes and American Democracy

Read:

- Theiss-Morse and Wagner, Chapter 1: Democratic Beliefs and American Democracy

Week 03, 01/26 – 01/30: Electoral Accountability

Read:

- No reading this week

Week 04, 02/02 – 02/06: Belief Systems and Partisanship

Read:

- Theiss-Morse and Wagner, Chapter 5: Partisanship and Party Change

Week 05, 02/09 – 02/13: Public Opinion

Read:

- Theiss-Morse and Wagner, Chapter 6: Public Opinion and Ideology

Week 06, 02/16 – 02/20: Mass Media

Read:

- Theiss-Morse and Wagner, Chapter 7: Political Communication and the Mass Media

Week 07, 02/23 – 02/27: Contextual Factors in Political Behavior

Read:

- No reading this week

Week 08, 03/02 – 03/06: Midterm Exam Week

- There will be no class this week. Class time will also be set aside for office hours for you to ask questions.
- Midterm exam will be held on at

Week 09, 03/09 – 03/13: Spring Break

Week 10, 03/16 – 03/20: Writing Advice

Activity:

- The prompt for first assignment out.

Week 11, 03/23 – 03/27: Political Knowledge

Read:

- Delli Carpini and Keeter, Chapter 2: What Americans Know About Politics

Week 12, 03/30 – 04/03: Electoral Knowledge

Read:

- No reading this week

Activity:

- Submit first written assignment.

Week 13, 04/06 – 04/10: Group in Political Behavior (Dissonance and Motivated Reasoning)

Read:

- Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter, Chapter 1: Unfulfilled Prophecies and Disappointed Messiahs
- Festinger, Chapter 8: The Role of Social Support

Activity:

- Prompt for second written assignment out.

Week 14, 04/13 – 04/17: Participation in Electoral Politics - I

Read:

- Rosenstone and Hansen, Introduction: The Puzzle of Participation in American Politics
- Rosenstone and Hansen, Chapter 1: The Political Logic of Political Participation

Week 15, 04/20 – 04/24: Participation in Electoral Politics - II

Read:

- Rosenstone and Hansen, Chapter 4: Participation in Electoral Politics
- Rosenstone and Hansen, Chapter 5: Mobilization and Participation in Electoral Politics

Activity:

- Submit second written assignment by 11:59 p.m. on Tuesday...

Week 16, 04/27 – 05/01: Unconventional Political Participation

Read:

- Theiss-Morse and Wagner, Chapter 4: Unconventional Participation and Social Identity

Week 17, 05/04 – 05/05: Final Exam

Final Exam:

- Final exam will be held on at