

Government 371J: The Politics of Voter Suppression (38415)

Department of Government
University of Texas at Austin
Fall 2024

TTH 2:00-3:30; GAR 3.116

Instructor: Bryan Jones

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Flags: The course carries writing and independent research flags. Requirements include producing a major paper on the subject; participating in class, and completing weekly thematic summaries of the material covered.

Class Materials (on order from the University CO-OP)

Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *Tyranny of the Minority*

Michael Waldman, *The Fight to Vote*

Joshua Douglas, *The Court v. The Voters*

Course Guidelines

Missed and Late Work

Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day listed for the syllabus unless otherwise noted. To discourage late work, we have adopted the following policy:

Assignments lose a letter grade for every 24-hour period they are late. This penalty includes Saturdays and Sundays. We reserve the right to make an exception to the late policy in the case of an extreme (and documentable) illness or other emergency.

Attendance

Attendance will be monitored throughout the semester and will be counted toward your participation grade for this course. Please let us know if you must miss class, beforehand if possible.

Plagiarism

Make sure you understand what plagiarism is and avoid it. If you are not sure about how to represent another person's work in an assignment, contact the course TA or the University Writing Center for advice before submitting. Penalties for plagiarism or collusion with other students can be severe.

Illness

Don't attend class sick or if you have symptoms (for Covid, flu or other illnesses)! We trust your word on this, but if you go to the doctor, please get a note. Don't forget the readings in your misery.

Class Requirements and Grades

Class Project: This is a writing course, and the course format will reflect that. The central assignment is a research paper, which can take any one of three forms as noted below. A draft of that paper will be due on **Monday November 25th**; the paper will be returned to you with corrections and suggestions for improvement. Then you will re-submit a final copy that will be graded with a due date of **Thursday December 9th**.

We strongly suggest that you work with another class member or another person you trust, and let them review your paper for form, content, and clarity. In addition, UT provides a Writing Center (<http://uwc.utexas.edu/>) to aid in the development of your writing skills.

Writing Assignments: Several short writing assignments that we will grade for writing and content, including organization, coherence of argument, use of evidence, and style.

Grades: We will grade using + and -. Grades will be determined according to the following formula:

10% Class Participation. We will take attendance every class meeting.

Please let us know if you have a reason to be absent, and we will generally be lenient in interpreting these.

20% Writing assignments, including the components of your research project.

15% Research proposal and literature summary

20% Draft Research Paper

5% Brief presentation

30% Final Research Paper

Paper: Two Standards, Three Routes

We have two guiding standards for analysis:

Standard 1: Adams' Dictum:

“Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.”

-John Adams, *Argument in Defense of the Soldiers in the Boston Massacre Trials, December 1770*

In your paper, your task is to analyze, not proselytize, and that means you should not cherry-pick facts or narrative to support your position. In class discussions, it is ok to proselytize, but your class colleagues may rebut your normative position.

Standard 2: Rawls' Veil of Ignorance

Rawls asks what kind of political system we would favor if we did not know whether or not you'd be benefited or harmed by the system. Our use of Rawls' veil is this: Don't make any recommendations about possible solutions to the problems we will discuss without assuming you don't know whether you'd benefit or be harmed by the measure. If you support universal suffrage because you think Democrats will benefit, you not only might be wrong but you also have no grounding in the principle outside of who wins.

Possible Paper Topics:

Route 1: Quantitative or graphical analysis of an aspect of voting suppression

Route 2: Case Study of a particular device used, explicitly or not, to suppress votes. This can be historically oriented, or more contemporaneous analysis.

Route 3: Idiographic Study. Interview and specific case material on experiences with voter suppression or voter fraud.

Notices:

Students with Disabilities: Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259, [Division of Diversity and Student Engagement](#).

TITLE IX REPORTING

Title IX is a federal law that protects against sex and gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual misconduct, dating/domestic violence and stalking at federally funded educational institutions. UT Austin is committed to fostering a learning and working environment free from discrimination in all its forms. When sexual misconduct occurs in our community, the university can:

1. Intervene to prevent harmful behavior from continuing or escalating.
2. Provide support and remedies to students and employees who have experienced harm or have become involved in a Title IX investigation.
3. Investigate and discipline violations of the university's [relevant policies](#)

[Links to an external site.](#)

Faculty members and certain staff members are considered "Responsible Employees" or "Mandatory Reporters," which means that they are required to report violations of Title IX to the Title IX Coordinator. **We are Responsible Employees and must report any Title IX related incidents** that are disclosed in writing, discussion, or one-on-one. Before talking with us, or with any faculty or staff member about a Title IX related incident, be sure to ask whether they are a responsible employee. If you want to speak with someone for support or remedies without making an official report to the university, email advocate@austin.utexas.edu. For more information about reporting options and resources, visit [titleix.utexas.edu](#)

[Links to an external site.](#)

or contact the Title IX Office at titleix@austin.utexas.edu.

Use of Work: We use examples from work by earlier students in this course. If you prefer that your work not be shared, let us know by the end of the semester.

Office Hours: You may come to office hours, or schedule meetings with me or with Jonwong Oh, our course TA, over Zoom.

Course Description

This course focuses on the history and current status of attempts of political actors (political parties, groups, individual actors) to design an electorate more favorable to them. This may be done by three means:

- 1) *Institutional Design:* Designing rules that weight the votes of one party's supporters more than other parties. Example: gerrymandering.
- 2) *Vote Suppression/Vote Dilution:* Discouraging groups with high probabilities of voting against them. Example: Legalizing partisan poll workers.
- 3) *Election Fraud:* By intervening in the tabulation process in a manner that changes the outcome that would result from a fair count. Example: changing how elections are decided after the election has been run.

Class Topics and Readings

Tuesday, August 27th: Course Introduction; how we got here.

PART 1: American Institutions and Minority Rule

Thursday, August 29th: How Institutions Suppress Votes

Levitsky and Ziblatt, Introduction; Chs 1-3

Tuesday, September 3rd:

Levitsky and Ziblatt, Chs. 4-6.

Thursday September 5th: South Korea: Dictatorship to Democracy

Tuesday, September 10th: Is America an Outlier?

Levitsky and Ziblatt, Chs. 7-8.

Due: Assignment 1: Take one of the several arguments the authors make. Explain that argument and the evidence they present to support that argument. Have they made their case? Why or why not?

Part 2: The Long American History of the Fight to Vote

Thursday, September 12th: Is There a Right to Vote in America?

Michael Waldman, *The Fight to Vote*, Chapters 1&2

14th, 15th 17th 19th 26th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution

Tuesday, September 17th: The First Arc of Voter Expansion and Suppression

Michael Waldman, *The Fight to Vote*, Chapters 3-6.

Due: Assignment 2: Prepare a set of notes on whether you think there is a right to vote in America, and whether you think the existing situation should be remedied or left the as it is. You are free to suggest remedies.

Thursday, September 19th: The Lasting Horror of Reconstruction and “Redemption”

Gregory P. Downes 2018. “Today’s Voter Suppression Tactics Have a 150-Year History.” TPM

[<https://talkingpointsmemo.com/feature/todays-voter-suppression-tactics-have-a-150-year-history>] Also CANVAS.

Brad Epperly, “Today’s Voter Suppression.” (CANVAS)

Brad Epperly, Christopher Witko, Ryan Stricker, and Paul White. “Rule by Violence, Rule by Law.” (CANVAS)

Luke Keele, William Cubbison, and Ismail White. “Suppressing Black Votes.” *American Political Science Review* 115: 694-700. CANVAS

PART 3: The Second Great Arc

Tuesday, September 24th: Progressivism and the Age of Reform

Waldman, Chapters 7&8

Martha S. Jones, “What the 19th Amendment Meant for Black Women.” *Politico*, 8/26/2020. [<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/08/26/19th-amendment-meant-for-black-women-400995>]

Elizabeth Taylor, "Woman Suffrage," Texas State Historical Association
[<https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/viw01>

"The Woman Suffrage Movement in Texas" [[<https://twu.edu/institute-womens-leadership/the-woman-suffrage-movement/the-woman-suffrage-movement-in-texas/#:~:text=The%20Texas%20Ratification%20of%20the,South%20to%20ratify%20the%20amendment>]]

Thursday, September 26th: Apportionment and the High Point of the Second Arc; the Collapse of the Commitment to Vote.

Waldman, Chapters 9-14.

Tuesday, October 1st: Research Questions, Research Feasibility, and Literature Reviews

A Political Science Guide <https://politicalscienceguide.com/>

Brooke Shannon, "Research Questions and Feasibility" (Canvas)

Brooke Shannon, "Literature Reviews" (Canvas)

Due: Assignment 3: Look over the material we have covered and scan the topics we will pursue in the rest of this course. Focus on three topics you think you might want to pursue. Discuss briefly each of three potential research questions you might want to pursue. Why did you choose them? Briefly assess the advantages and disadvantages of your topic.

Thursday, October 3rd: The Speed Bump Theory of Voter Suppression: Figuring the Total Impact of Voter Suppression

Thomas Gray and Jeffrey Jenkins. 2024. "Estimating Disenfranchisement in U.S. Elections, 1870-1970." *Perspectives on Politics*, in press CANVAS

Arless Hertzog, Coryn Grage, and Kevin Morris. 2024. "Racial Gaps in Voter Turnout," *Brennan Center Report*. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/growing-racial-disparities-voter-turnout-2008-2022>

Download the full report. Examine the findings, how the authors got to them, and study the presentations of the data used. Focus on the simple graphing techniques employed.

Tuesday, October 8th: The Modern Court's Assault on Democracy

Douglas, Introduction; Chapter 1 and 2.

Josh Marshall, "The Battle for the Right to Vote Has Never Been Won" TPM
[<https://talkingpointsmemo.com/feature/the-battle-for-the-right-to-vote-has-never-been-won>] Also CANVAS

Tuesday, October 15th: Voter ID

Douglas, Chapter 3

Justin Grimmer and Jesse Yoder. 2019. "The Durable Effects of Strict Photo Voter Identification Laws". CANVAS [Note the research design: treatment is on for a term, then off.]

Thursday, October 17th: Class Presentations

Be prepared to present and defend a brief overview of your chosen topic for discussion and class feedback.

RULE: Feedback must be presented in a positive vein—how to make the project better.

Tuesday, October 22nd: Felon Disfranchisement

Douglas, Chapter 4

Jennifer Salin, "The Best-Laid Plans"
<https://scholarship.law.missouri.edu/mlr/vol84/iss4/6/> Also CANVAS

Assignment 4: Feasibility proposal due

Thursday, October 24th: Money's Expanding Grasp on Politics

Douglas, Chapter 5

Tuesday, October 29th: Causation and Graphical Presentations

Eric Bleich and Robert Pekkanen, How to Report Interview Data (on Canvas)

"Causality." A Political Science Guide.
<https://politicalscienceguide.com/research/causality/>

Kennedy Teel, The Cost of a Name: Voter ID Laws' Effect on Women Voters [Canvas]

Cole Chisum, Predicting the Effects of Ex-Felon Enfranchisement on the 2020 Presidential Election in Florida [Canvas]

Examine Graphs from earlier readings.

Thursday, October 31st: The Court Makes Up Stuff

Douglas, Chapter 6

November 5th: Why I Introduced This Course

Douglas, Chapters 7 and 8.

Ari Berman, Inside John Roberts' Decades Long Crusade Against the Voting Rights Act. *Politico* <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/08/john-roberts-voting-rights-act-121222/> Also CANVAS

Ian Millhiser, "How America Lost Its Commitment to the Right to Vote" VOX [<https://www.vox.com/22575435/voting-rights-supreme-court-john-roberts-shelby-county-constitution-brnovich-elena-kagan>]

Thursday, November 7th: Were Election Results Influenced by Voter Suppression?

Daron Shaw and John Petrocik, "Does High Voter Turnout Help One Party?" [<https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/1372769/files/folder/Readings?preview=72924705>] Also CANVAS

Tuesday, November 12th: Gerrymandering Unconstrained

Douglas, Chapters 9.

Julia Kirschenbaum and Michael Li 2023. "Gerrymandering Explained," Brennan Center
<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/gerrymandering-explained>

Look up your Congressional electoral district. Is it gerrymandered? Cracked, packed, or otherwise?

Thursday, November 14th: Election Results and Policy Outcomes.

Douglas, Chapter 10.

Tuesday, November 19th: Pre-Election Suppression: Purging Voter Rolls

Brennan Center for Justice, Voter Purge Rates Remain High

[Brennan Center, Voter Purge Rates Remain High]
<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/voter-purge-rates-remain-high-analysis-finds>

Assignment 5: Literature Review and Research Plan due. Literature review should be complete; research plan should be presented in outline form.

Thursday, November 21st: Misinformation and Post-Election Suppression

Brennan Center, Information Gaps and Misinformation in the 2022 Election. [<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/information-gaps-and-misinformation-2022-elections>]. Also CANVAS

Monday, November 25th:

Assignment 5: Draft of Research Paper due. Submission by email is acceptable (indeed, desirable).

Tuesday, November 26th: No Class; Winter Break

Thursday, November 28th: No Class; Thanksgiving

Tuesday, December 3rd: Brief Presentations of Your Work

Presentations based on three slides.

Thursday, December 5th: Brief Presentations of Your Work, Continued

Presentations based on three slides, continued.

Thursday, December 9th:

Assignment: Final paper due

