

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

Department of Government
University of Texas at Austin
Fall 2023

TTH 2:00-3:30; GAR 3.116

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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, *How Democracies Die*

Michael Waldman, *The Fight to Vote*

Steve Bickerstaff, *Gerrymandering in Texas*

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 (similarly for 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 20th**; 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 **December 7th**.

We require that you submit the following:

- 1) A *series of six* writing and research assignments.
- 2) A *full proposal* of your topic, including a review of the existing research and a research plan;
- 3) A 3-minute short *presentation* on your work;
- 4) The *paper draft*; and
- 5) The *final paper*.

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:

Special Needs: 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](#).

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 Chris Cassella, 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) *Electorate Construction:* 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 22nd: Course Introduction; how we got here.

U.S. v. Donald J. Trump (DoJ Indictment)

PART 1: A Sweeping Overview of the Problem

Thursday, August 24th

Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*

Tuesday, August 29th

Levitsky and Ziblatt

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

Thursday, August 31st: 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

Due: Assignment 1: Write a review of *How Democracies Die*, in which you briefly summarize the main argument. Then critique the points made that are most convincing AND those that are least convincing. Cite specific evidence. Overall, do you think the authors supported their thesis? Have things changed since the book was written?

Tuesday, September 5th : The First Arc of Voter Expansion and Suppression

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

Thursday, September 7th: The Lasting Horror of Reconstruction and “Redemption”

Brad Epperly, Today's Voter Suppression. (CANVAS)

Brad Epperly, et.al., Rule by Violence, Rule by Law. (CANVAS)

Keele, Cubbison, and White. Suppressing Black Votes. CANVAS

Tuesday, September 13th: “The Past Is Never Dead. It Is Not Even Past”

TPM Today's Voter Suppression Tactics Have a 150-Year History
[<https://talkingpointsmemo.com/feature/todays-voter-suppression-tactics-have-a-150-year-history>] Also CANVAS.

Bickerstaff, *Gerrymandering in Texas*, Chapters 1-3

Due: Assignment 2: Write a short essay (2-3 pages) 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.

PART 3: The Second Great Arc

Thursday, September 15th: 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>]]

Tuesday, September 19th: Apportionment

Waldman, Chapters 9&10

Bickerstaff, Chapters 4-6

Thursday September 21nd: Voting Rights and Citizen Action

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

Voting Rights Panel

Kayta Ehresman, Common Cause Texas

Andrew Henderickson, ACLU Texas

Emily Eby French, Texas Civil Rights Project

Tuesday September 26th: Research Questions, Research Feasibility, and Literature Reviews

Due: Assignment 3: 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

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

Brooke Shannon, Research Questions and Feasibility (Canvas)

Brooke Shannon, Literature Reviews (Canvas)

Thursday, September 28th: Gerrymandering

Bickerstaff, Introduction, Chapters 1-3

De Leon, "Civil Rights", Texas State Historical Association
[<https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/pkclf>] and CANVAS

Tuesday, October 3rd:

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.

Thursday, October 5th:

Bickerstaff Chapters 7-9

Assignment 4: Literature Review due.

Bickerstaff, Chapter 10

Tuesday, October 10th: Voter Suppression in Texas

Texas Politics Project

Jim Henson
Josh Blank

Thursday, October 12th: Quantitative and qualitative research. Inferring causation from either. Confounding variables and ruling them out.

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

The ice cream and crime problem.

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

Tuesday, October 17th: High Point of the Second Arc: Selma and the Voting Rights Act

Michael Waldman, *The Fight to Vote*, Chapter 10

Chandler Davidson, The Voting Rights Act: A Brief History (CANVAS)

DUE Assignment 5: Feasibility proposal due

Thursday, October 19th: The Conservative Backlash

Waldman, Chapter 11&12

Part 4: Voter Suppression Today

Tuesday, October 24th : Reinstating the Ability to Suppress Votes

Michael Waldman, *The Fight to Vote*, Chapter 13, Chapter 14, Conclusion&Afterward.

Thursday, October 26th: Administrative Burdens and Disincentives to Vote

Jennifer Salin, "The Best-Laid Plans"

<https://scholarship.law.missouri.edu/mlr/vol84/iss4/6/> Also CANVAS

Justin Grimmer, Voter ID. CANVAS

Cantoni and Ponds_ Strict ID Laws Don't Stop Voters. CANVAS

Tuesday, October 1st: Purging Voter Rolls

Brennan Center for Justice, Voter Purge Rates Remain High

[\[Brennan Center, Voter Purge Rates Remain High\]](#)

Thursday, November 2nd: Election Denial: January 6, 2021, the Electoral Count Act and Beyond

Find and read relevant material on January 6th, the Electoral Count Act, Its Reform you chose to consult.

Here is the best source, but the summary is 154 pages long....

<https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/jan-6-committee-report-executive-summary/4d449a67cd79e131/full.pdf>

Tuesday, November 7th: Misinformation

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

Assignment 6: Full research plan with literature review due

Thursday, November 9th: Research: Graphs and Statistics in Excel.

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]

Tuesday, November 13th: Does Turnout Matter?

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

Thursday, November 15th: The Supreme Court as Anti-Democratic Enabler

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>]

Monday, November 20th

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

Tuesday, November 21st: No Class, Fall Break

Thursday, November 23th: No Class; Thanksgiving

Tuesday, November 28th: Discussion on the extent of modern voting suppression

Thursday, November 30th: Drafts Returned

Discussion of Class Projects

Thursday, December 7th:

Assignment: Final paper due