

Government 371J: The Politics of Voter Suppression (38620)

Department of Government
University of Texas at Austin
Fall 2022

TTH 2:00-3:30; GAR 3.116

Instructor: Bryan Jones

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Class Assistant: Megan Dias; Office Hours:

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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)

Eric Holder, *Our Unfinished March*

Michael Waldman, *The Fight to Vote*

Jesse Wegman, *Let the People Pick the President*

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.

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 21st**; 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 9th**.

As you work toward the final paper, we require that you submit the following:

- 1) A short *feasibility proposal*; essentially a description of the topic you plan to research showing that it is feasible;
- 2) A *full proposal* of your topic, including a review of the existing research and a research plan;
- 3) The *paper draft*; and
- 4) 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 feasibility proposal

20% Research proposal and literature summary

20% Draft Research Paper

30% Final Research Paper

Paper: Three Routes

We have three guiding standards for the paper, and for our discussions as well:

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*

That is, your task is to analyze, and that means you should not cherry-pick facts or narrative to support your position. I also welcome studies of voter fraud, the common justification for making voting harder. It would be a flawed electoral system that did not have mechanisms for detecting fraud and, for that matter, mistakes. The claim of fraud is not always fraudulent—the question is the empirical evidence.

Standard 2: Rawls' Veil of Ignorance

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.

Standard 3: Universal Franchise and Popular Sovereignty (and a note on my perspectives on these principles)

As a political scientist and as a citizen I have bedrock principles that are shared most, but not all, political scientists and students of democracy. I support universal franchise—all above the age of 18 should be eligible to participate. But all do not—or we would not have a course on voter suppression, because there would not be any such suppression. I also support popular sovereignty in elections, as do most political scientists—majority (sometime plurality) winners should occupy the office they are competing for. That means I do not support the allocation of Senate seats in the U.S. Constitution nor do I support the indirect election of the president, as is the case for the Electoral College. Others claim that states are sovereign and deserve such representation as quasi-independent units. These arguments deserve serious consideration, and we will do so in this course.

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 Megan Dias, 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 23rd: Course Introduction; how we got here.

PART 1: A Sweeping Overview of the Problem

Thursday, August 25th

Holder, Introduction, Note, and Part 1

Tuesday, August 30th

Holder, Part II

Thursday, September 1st

Holder, Part III

Tuesday, September 6th

Assignment Due: Write a review of Holder, *Our Unfinished March*, in which you briefly summarize his main argument. Then critique the points made that are most convincing AND those that are least convincing. Cite specific evidence. Overall, do you think Holder supported his thesis? What convinces you?

Part 2: How Institutions Can Suppress Votes

Thursday, September 8th: The Constitutional Foundations of the Electoral College; and Constructing a Persuasive Argument and Supporting it.

Wegman, Chapters 1-3

Tuesday, September 13th: Democratization of America and Electoral College Myths; Institutional Voter Suppression in France.

Wegman, Chapters 4-6

Thursday, September 15th: Institutional Reform

Wegman, Chapters 7-9

Due: Assignment 1: Write a short essay (2-3 pages) summarizing Wegman's argument. Then critique his solution, assessing any weaknesses and make suggestions on how to improve it.

Tuesday, September 20th: Is there a Right to Vote in America?

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

PART 2: Historical Perspectives: The First Great Arc

Thursday September 22nd: The First Arc of Voter Expansion and Suppression

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

Due: Assignment 2: Write a short essay (2-3 pages) on why there is no 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.

Tuesday September 27th: 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)

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.

Thursday, September 29th: History and Suppression: Still fighting it.

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

Special Guest: Katya Ehresman, Voting Rights Activist and UT Government grad.

Tuesday, October 4th: "The Past Is Never Dead. It Is Not Even Past";

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

Brennan Center, Voter Purge Rates. CANVAS

Due: Assignment 3: List three potential research questions you might want to pursue. Justify each in a sentence or two.

Thursday, October 6th: 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)

Tuesday, October 11th: Research Design

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/>

Thursday, October 13th: Voter Suppression in Texas: Where did we start? Where do we end?

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

Gerrymandering in Texas
[<https://tagtx.org/about-gerrymandering/gerrymandering-in-texas/>]

Alfredo Valenzuela, Texas' Countywide Polling Place Program: A Replication Study
[CANVAS]

Diego Salazar, Trans Voters Will Be Disenfranchised in 2020 [CANVAS]

Special Guests: Jim Henson and Josh Blank of the Texas Project

PART 3: The Second Great Arc

Tuesday, October 18th: Progressivism and Woman Suffrage

DUE: Feasibility proposal

Michael Waldman, *The Fight to Vote*, Chapters 7 and 8.

Corrine McConaughy, Forget Susan B. Anthony (CANVAS)

Elizabeth Taylor, Woman Suffrage Texas State Historical Association
[\[https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/viw01\]](https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/viw01)

Thursday, October 20th: Cracks in the Southern Suppression Edifice

Michael Waldman, *The Fight to Vote*, Chapter 9.

Greenberg, White Primary [https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/white-primary] and CANVAS

Tuesday, October 25th: Selma and the Voting Rights Act

Michael Waldman, *The Fight to Vote*, Chapter 10, 11&12.

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

Part 4: Voter Suppression Today

Thursday, October 27th: Do Voter ID Requirements Suppress Votes?

Justin Grimmer, Voter ID. CANVAS

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

Tuesday, November 1st: Purging Voter Rolls

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

Thursday, November 3rd: Vote Dilution and Gerrymandering

Fred Dews. A Primer on Gerrymandering and Political Polarization. CANVAS

Tuesday, November 8th: Misinformation

Brennan Center, Information Gaps and Misinformation in the 2022 Election.
CANVAS

DUE: Full research plan with literature review

Thursday, November 10th: Research: Graphs and Statistics in Excel; Start Review and Discussion Session

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 15th: Does Turnout Matter?; Cumulative voting restrictions and post election suppression.

Daron Shaw and John Petrocik, The Turnout Myth (On Canvas)

Thursday, November 17th: The Supreme Court as Anti-Democratic Enabler

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

Ari Berman, Inside John Roberts' Decades Long Crusade Against the Voting Rights Act. *Politico* CANVAS

Monday, November 21st

Draft of Research Paper due. Submission by email is acceptable.

Tuesday, November 22nd: No Class, Fall Break

Thursday, November 24th: No Class; Thanksgiving

Tuesday, November 29th: Discussion: Why has America Never Embraced the Universal Franchise?

**Thursday, December 1st: Drafts Returned
Discussion of Class Projects**

Tuesday, December 2nd: Discussion of Class Projects

Thursday December 2nd: Return of Paper Drafts and Discussion of Class Projects

Thursday, December 8th: Final paper due