The purpose of this class is to explore the social science literature across a variety of legal, administrative, and technological topics related to voting in the United States. The topics chosen are ones that loom large in the history of voting rights in the United States. Most, but not all, are currently hot topics in the news.

I am especially interested in the influence of social science on the development of voting rights and election administration in the U.S. Therefore, the approach of the readings is more applied than most classes on elections and representation. The administration of elections, broadly considered, is one of the few areas of public policy where political science actually is the primary repository of subject-matter expertise. (We share this pride of place with law, which is why we will also be reading important legal decisions and law review articles, to see how the competition thinks about these things.) Thus, it is important to understand the theoretical and empirical foundations on which we rest our knowledge about topics such as whether voter registration suppresses turnout or whether the drawing of legislative districts diminishes the representational force of minority populations. But once we have done that, we also need to understand how the empirical literature either does or should influence the evolution of policy and the law in these areas.

The class is divided into five major topics: (1) the evolving right to vote, (2) reform efforts and their effects on behavior, (3) redistricting and apportionment, (4) campaign finance, and (5) voting technology and election administration. We will cover each topic over a period of two or three class meetings. Each week’s reading covers a lot of ground. However, this is an exploratory seminar, so I am more than willing to adjust the readings to suite and interests of those taking the class.

Finally, this is the fall semester. Despite the fact that this is an odd-numbered year, there will be a couple of major elections this fall, among them are gubernatorial elections in New Jersey and Virginia, a mayoral election in Boston, and a city council election in Cambridge. The Boston preliminary election on September 24 and the various general elections on November 5 will provide us opportunities to observe the conduct of elections up close. We will not hold class meetings on those days. Instead, we will do some observation of local election polling places. Details to come.

We will read seven books more-or-less in their entirety. Therefore, you should buy them (usually used and cheap), rather than just check them out of the library. Here are the books you should get:

Assignments

There are three assignments:

1. Attend all classes, with all the reading done, ready to discuss. I will assign class members to take responsibility for keeping the discussion going, on a rotating basis.

2. Discussion agenda memos. You will write brief, one-page memos, circulated by 5pm on the Monday before each class meeting, about the points you want to discuss at the next day’s seminar. A list of bullet points is fine. The goal is to get us thinking ahead of time about the topics that interest people.

3. Seminar paper. You will write an empirical paper on one of the topics covered by the syllabus. This should be the first draft of a paper you might want to present at a conference or submit to a journal for publication. You must get my approval of the topic no later than Columbus Day. The paper is due at the end of the semester.

Reading Schedule

Organizing meeting: September 10

The evolving right to vote, I. September 17

Alex Keyssar, The Right to Vote (all). Skim the empirical appendices at the end.

No class (observe the Boston preliminary election): September 24

(One request: please get paper copies of these books, not the Kindle editions, because of the difficulty in referencing pages.)
The evolving right to vote, II: October 1


Shelby County, Alabama v. Holder, 570 U.S. _____ (2013). Download the slip opinion from the case page at the Election Law @ Moritz web site, moritzlaw.osu.edu/electionlaw/. Click on “major pending cases,” and then search for the link to the Selby County case.


Reform efforts and their effects on behavior, I: October 8

Reform generally


Southern disfranchisement


Columbus Day Holiday: October 15

Reform efforts and their effects on behavior, II: October 22

Progressive reforms


**National Voter Registration Act**


**Election Day Registration**


**Vote-by-mail**


Alan S. Gerber, Gregory A. Huber, and Seth J. Hill. 2012. Identifying the effects of elections held all-mail on turnout: Staggered reform in the Evergreen State. (mimeo)

**Redistricting and reapportionment, I: October 29**


**November 5. No class. Observe polling places**
Redistricting and reapportionment, II: November 12


Campaign finance, I: November 19

*Buckley v Valeo* 424 U.S. 1 (1976)

Campaign finance, II: November 26

Voting technology and election administration I: December 3


Voting technology and election administration II: December 10 (may be rescheduled)