

Congressional and Political Reforms LGAF6240

**M.P.S. in Legislative Affairs**

Fall 2021

30 August – December 6, 2021

**Congressional and Political Reforms**

LGAF6240

Credits: 3

Mondays/6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Hall of States, 400 North Capitol Street, N.W.

**BASIC INFORMATION AND RESOURCES**

**Instructor**

Maresa Strano

Mobile (607) 759-3425

maresa.strano@gmail.com

**Communication**

The best way to contact me is via e-mail. You can normally expect a response within 24 hours or less. I am available to meet with you by appointment – send an e-mail to request a meeting.

**Blackboard Site**

A Blackboard course site has been set up for this course. Each student is expected to check the site throughout the semester, as Blackboard will be the primary venue for outside classroom communications between the instructor and the students. Students can access the course site at <https://blackboard.gwu.edu>. Support for Blackboard is available at 202-994-4948 or [helpdesk.gwu.edu](http://helpdesk.gwu.edu).

**Academic Integrity**

Academic Integrity

All members of the university community are expected to exhibit honesty and competence in their academic work. Students have a special responsibility to acquaint themselves with, and make use of, all proper procedures for doing research, writing papers, and taking exams. Members of the community will be presumed to be familiar with the proper academic procedures and will be held responsible for applying them. Deliberate failure to act in accordance with such procedures will be considered academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty is defined as “cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one’s own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.” Acts of academic dishonesty are a legal, moral, and intellectual offense against the community and will be prosecuted through the proper university channels. The University Code of Academic Integrity can be found at <http://studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity>.

### **University Policy on Observance of Religious Holidays**

- Students should notify faculty during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance.
- Faculty should extend to these students the courtesy of absence without penalty on such occasions, including permission to make up examinations.
- Faculty who intend to observe a religious holiday should arrange at the beginning of the semester to reschedule missed classes or to make other provisions for their course-related activities

### **Support for Students with Disabilities**

GW's Disability Support Services (DSS) provides and coordinates accommodations and other services for students with a wide variety of disabilities, as well as those temporarily disabled by injury or illness. Accommodations are available through DSS to facilitate academic access for students with disabilities. Please notify your instructor if you require accommodations. Additional information is available at <http://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/>.

### **Title IX: Confidentiality and Responsible Employee Statement**

The George Washington University (GWU) and its faculty are committed to helping create a safe and open learning environment for all students. If you (or someone you know) have experienced any form of sexual misconduct, including sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking, know that help and support are available. GWU strongly encourages all members of the community to take action, seek support and report incidents of sexual misconduct to the Title IX Office. Please be aware that under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, faculty members are required to disclose information about such misconduct to the Title IX Office.

If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can contact Mental Health Services through Colonial Health (counselors are available 24/7 at 202-994-5300 or you can make an appointment to see a counselor in person.). For more information about reporting options and resources at GWU and the community, please visit <https://haven.gwu.edu/>.

### **In the Event of an Emergency or Crisis during Class**

If we experience an emergency during class time, we will try to stay at this location until we hear that we can move about safely. If we have to leave here, we will meet at Union Station in order to account for everyone and to make certain that everyone is safe. Please refer to Campus Advisories for the latest information on the University's operating status: <http://www.campusadvisories.gwu.edu/>.

### **Attendance Policy**

You are expected to attend all the classes. If for some reason you are to be late or miss a class, please let me know via e-mail prior to the class starting. Multiple missed classes will have an impact on your final grade.

### **Course Evaluation**

At the end of the semester, students will be given the opportunity to evaluate the course through GW's online course evaluation system. It is very important that you take the time to complete an evaluation. Students are also encouraged to provide feedback throughout the course of the semester by contacting any/all of the following:

Dr. Casey Burgat  
Director, Legislative Affairs Program [cburgat@gwu.edu](mailto:cburgat@gwu.edu) | 202-994-2272

Suzanne Farrand  
Director of Academic Administration, GSPM  
[sfarrand@gwu.edu](mailto:sfarrand@gwu.edu) | 202-994-9309

### **The Course**

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#### **Legislative Affairs Program Objectives**

Upon completion of the Master's degree in Legislative Affairs, students will:

1. Gain both theoretical and practical knowledge related to the U.S. Congress, general issues in the legislative arena, and how to effectively advance legislation;
2. Hone their oral and written communication skills in both theoretical and technical aspects of legislative affairs;
3. Be able to conduct cutting-edge research and engage in effective problem solving by learning critical thinking skills;
4. Learn how to work effectively with others, the value of collaborative work, and will understand ethical issues involved in the legislative arena.

#### **Graduate School Expectations**

Students enrolled in a graduate program should take their academic responsibilities seriously and be prepared to meet the following expectations:

1. Utilize effective time management skills so as to complete and submit their assignments on their required due dates and times.
2. Have attained a mastery of written communication skills including proper sentence structure, grammar, spelling, and word usage.
3. Understand how to properly format in-text citations and references for resources and information integrated into their written assignments.

#### **Course Description and Overview**

This course will be a practitioner-focused deep dive into contemporary political reform in the United States by examining a range of reform proposals that have gained salience in recent

years alongside a steep rise in polarization, distrust in government, and general democratic dysfunction. Each session will examine a specific reform or set of related reforms through a variety of lenses, and leverage a variety of analytical and strategy frameworks to give students a better sense of what it takes to work on these issues. We will consider questions such as: what are the trade-offs of a particular reform; where should reformers direct their resources and efforts; who are the movement's key stakeholders; when is the right (and wrong) time to push for change; and most importantly, how can individuals and groups inside and outside of Washington come together to pass, implement, and defend reforms? Students should come away from this course with a working knowledge of the political reform landscape—including current efforts to “fix” Congress, reduce hyperpartisanship, empower citizens to engage more fully in civic life—and a new set of tools for communicating about and researching these issues, as well as crafting future change strategies.

### Learning objectives

1. Gain a deeper understanding of the current political reform landscape, inside and outside of Congress.
2. Explore solutions to the country's most urgent and/or intractable governance challenges.
3. Evaluate and apply lessons from successful and failed reform efforts.
4. Develop skills to build effective reform coalitions and sustainable policy.

### **Document Citations**

We will use the APA Style for essays, citations and bibliographies. A sample of the style can be found on the GW website at: <https://guides.himmelfarb.gwu.edu/c.php?g=27779&p=170369>. PLEASE NOTE: You can lose points for failure to footnote accurately or for grammatical and spelling errors. This is a graduate course, and graduate level work requires that your work is proofread and presented in an acceptable manner. Also, use footnotes instead of endnotes!

### **Course Requirements**

#### **Attendance and deadlines**

You are expected to attend all classes. A reduction of one half letter grade will be taken for students missing more than two (2) classes and additional one half letter grade reductions will be imposed for missing each class after that (exceptions will apply to emergencies situations only). If a student must miss a class, the student must email the professor prior to the beginning of class.

Written assignments will be due on Fridays. Due dates are listed within the syllabus, and late assignments will receive a maximum of 85% of the total grade.

#### **Participation (20% of grade)**

Any graduate seminar discussion is enlivened by the thoughtful contributions of all the students in class. You are expected to be prepared and participate in class discussions. Our discussions will be keyed, in large part, off of the readings that students are required to read prior to each class period.

In order to stimulate discussion (and make sure the readings are being read), students should have a minimum of two (2) discussion questions for the class ready in case being called on. The questions can stem from implications of the topic; or more general takeaways that may lead to deeper understanding when discussed. If it becomes clear students don't have discussion questions ready, I reserve the right to make them due on discussion boards.

### Current Events

At the beginning of each class period we will review current events & issues related to our course subject matter. Keep up with current events as they pertain to the topics of this course.

### Evaluation and Grading

Assignment	Due Date	Weight
Introductory biography	August 27	5%
Group "events"	TBD	15%
Research memo	September 24	10%
Policy brief + 5-minute recorded presentation	October 22	Written brief - 20% Presentation - 5%
Op-ed pitch / draft	Pitch - November 12 Draft - December 3	Pitch - 5% Draft - 20%
Class participation		20%
Total		100%

Following is the grade scale for all GSPM classes:

Grade*	Grading Standard
A 94-100	Your work is outstanding and ready for submission in a professional environment. Your material, effort, research, and writing demonstrate superior work.
A- 90-93	Represents solid work with minor errors. Overall, excellent work.
B+ 87-89	Very good. Represents well-written material, research, and presentation, but needs some minor work.

B	83-86	Satisfactory work, but needs reworking and more effort. Note that although not a failing grade, at the graduate level, anything below a “B” is viewed as unacceptable.
B-	80-82	You’ve completed the assignment, but you are not meeting all of the requirements.
C+	77-79	Needs improvement in content and in effort. Shows some motivation and concern.
C	73-76	Needs reworking, improved effort, and additional research. Shows minimal motivation and concern.
C-	70-72 (lowest grade to pass)	Poor performance. Major errors, too many misspellings, problems with accuracy, etc.
F	Below 70	Unacceptable performance or inability to submit the assignment.

**\*Please note that you may be penalized for late submission of assignment(s).**

### Assignments

1. Introductory biography
  - To make the course content as relevant as possible and to facilitate classroom discussion and the sharing of professional information, each student will submit a two-to-three paragraph bio describing their educational background, work experience in and around politics and policy, and career goals.
2. Group “event”
  - Each student will at some point in the semester plan and lead an in-class “event,” involving the entire class, for at least 45 minutes. Creativity, role playing, and small group breakouts are encouraged.
3. Research memo
  - Each student will write a ~1,500 word memo on a reform movement (past or present) of their choice, in the format and style of their choice. All memos should address historical context and milestones, arguments for and against, prominent sources and experts, key stakeholders, role of the media, and major successes and failures.
4. Policy brief + presentation
  - Each student will write a 1,500 word policy brief on a topic of their choice, and record a 5-minute presentation on the brief. Briefs should be written for a general audience and should include the following:
    - Sections

- **Introduction** (why this problem matters, preview of recommendations)
  - **Short overview of the landscape**
  - **Three recommendations** (each supported by a combination of qualitative and quantitative research from reliable sources/leaders in the field as well as relevant media content if appropriate)
  - **Enactment plan and success criteria** (realistically, what would it take--money, leadership, public support, complementary legislation--to bring these recommendations to fruition?)
  - **Conclusion**
  - Elements
    - Infobox** with topline findings and recommendations
    - **Infographic**
  - Promotional copy
    - Two sample tweets
    - Brief email announcement
5. Op-ed
- To better understand what goes into placing and publishing an op-ed, each student will email me a story pitch two weeks prior to the draft deadline. The pitch will include the target outlet (e.g. national or regional newspaper, blog, trade publication) and will explain why it is the right fit for the piece. It will also establish the student's authority on the subject, the core argument of the piece, and why it matters. The topic can be the same as the one used for the policy brief (recommended), or something else. The pitch should be 2-3 paragraphs. The op-ed draft itself will be 800-1,000 words. Resource: <https://www.theopedproject.org/oped-basics>

### Required text and learning materials

- *Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop: The Case for Multiparty Democracy in America* - Lee Drutman (Oxford University Press, 2020)
- *Our Common Purpose* - American Academy of Arts & Sciences, [pdf download](#)
- *Governing in a Polarized America: A Bipartisan Blueprint to Strengthen our Democracy* - Bipartisan Policy Center, [pdf download](#)

Except for *Doom Loop* all materials will be made available for free, either on Blackboard class website or via links within this syllabus.

### Tentative Course Calendar\*

\*The instructor reserves the right to alter course content and/or adjust the pace to accommodate class progress. Students are responsible for keeping up with all adjustments to the course calendar. The topical order may have to be switched to fit the availability of the speakers.

### Week 1: August 30 - Introductions

## READINGS

- Syllabus
- PODCAST: “An inspiring conversation about democracy” - Danielle Allen and Ezra Klein, *The Ezra Klein Show (Vox Conversations)*, 2019, available [here](#) or wherever you get your podcasts

## ASSIGNMENTS DUE

Introductory bio

[Subscribe](#) to the Fulcrum newsletter

## **Week 2: September 6 (no class for Labor Day) - Institutions, ideals, and interests of political reform**

### READINGS

- *Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop* - Chapters 2, 4-5
- EXCERPT: *Democracy More or Less: America's Political Reform Quandary* - Bruce Cain, Chapter 1, ([pdf download](#))
- *Two Pathways to Congressional Reform* - Daniel Stid, Hewlett Foundation, ([pdf download](#))
- “Democratic Romanticism and Its Critics,” Mark Schmitt, *Democracy Journal*, Spring 2015, ([link](#))

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## ASSIGNMENTS DUE

None

## I. Reforming Congress

## **Week 3: September 13 - A decade of debate on earmark reform**

### READINGS

- Background
  - *The Rise and (Relative) Fall of Earmarks: Congress and Reform, 2006–2010* - Richard B. Doyle, *Public Budgeting & Finance*, 2011, ([link](#))
  - *Lifting the Earmark Moratorium: Frequently Asked Questions* - CRS, Updated December 3, 2020, ([link](#))
  - *Restoring the Power of the Purse* - Zachary Courser and Kevin R. Kosar, AEI, February 2021, ([pdf](#))
  - PETITION: “Statement Supporting Re-Empowering Legislators’ Authority to Direct Spending,” February 25, 2021, ([link](#))
  - “Senate Republicans agree to keep a symbolic ban on earmarks, but may use them anyway,” Emily Cochrane, *New York Times*, April 21, 2021, ([link](#))
- **Perspectives over time** (read as many as you can)

- “Don’t Get Rid of Earmarks” - Rahm Emanuel, *New York Times*, August 24, 2007, available at [\(link\)](#)
- “Taxpayer Groups: Don’t End The Earmark Moratorium” - Taxpayers for Common Sense & National Taxpayers Union, November 14, 2018, [\(link\)](#)
- *Renew the Earmark Ban* - The Heritage Foundation, December 13, 2018, [\(link\)](#)
- “Congress in 2019: Why the first branch should bring back earmarks” - John Hudak, Brookings Institution, December 27, 2018, [\(link\)](#)
- George Will, “Congress Needs to Curb Presidential Power. Here’s How It Can Start to.,” *Washington Post*, December 16, 2020, [\(link\)](#)
- “The dead earmarks society,” Kate Ackley, Roll Call, February 15, 2021, [\(link\)](#)
- “My Fellow Democrats, Let Earmarks Stay in the Dustbin of History,” Katie Porter, *Wall Street Journal*, March 12, 2021, [\(link\)](#)

## ASSIGNMENTS DUE

- Come to class with an example of an earmarked appropriation that went to your home district (at any time in history) and provide some context and insights into the motivations and consequences of the appropriation.
- Choose a political reform topic to research for your memo

## Week 4: September 20 - Risks and rewards of filibuster reform

### READINGS

- VIDEO CLIP: “Politics or Principle” - CSPAN Interview with Sarah Binder, February 2, 2010, [\(link\)](#).
- What is the Senate filibuster, and what would it take to eliminate it? - Molly E. Reynolds, Brookings Institution, September 9, 2020, [\(link\)](#)
- *PODCAST*: “Should We Put the Filibuster Out of Its Misery?” - *The Argument*, February 24, 2021, available [here](#) or wherever you find your podcasts.
- “The Smart Way to Fix the Filibuster,” Norm Ornstein, *The Atlantic*, September 3, 2020, [\(link\)](#)
- “We Will Miss the Filibuster” - Kevin D. Williamson, *National Review*, July 5, 2020 [\(link\)](#)
- “Scorched-earth Senate filibuster threat from McConnell needs to be tested” - Lee Drutman, NBC Think, March 16, 2021, [\(link\)](#) (make sure to watch the embedded Stacey Abrams interview on Meet the Press)
- “Opinion: Joe Manchin: I will not to eliminate or weaken the filibuster, *Washington Post*, April 2021, [\(link\)](#)
- “Americans for Prosperity launches campaign targeting six Democrats to oppose ending filibuster,” *The Hill*, April 30, 2021, [\(link\)](#)
- **Skim**: “The Untold Story of the State Filibuster” - Kyle Grossman, Southern California Law Review Vol. 88:413, [\(pdf\)](#)
- **Browse**: filibuster reform/elimination campaign websites e.g. <https://www.nofilibuster.org/>, <https://www.commoncause.org/our-work/constitution-courts-and-democracy-issues/fix-the-filibuster/>

## ASSIGNMENTS DUE

None

### Week 5: September 27 - Is 435 enough?

\*\*\*GUEST SPEAKER\*\*\* Lee Drutman

## READINGS

- *Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop*, pp. 191-194
- *Our Common Purpose* - Strategy 1.1 pp. 22-24
- “U.S. House districts are colossal. What’s the right size?” - Kathryn Crespin, Stat Chat, University of Virginia, November 15, 2017, ([link](#))
- Commentaries and More Information on Increasing U.S. House Size (2000-2011) - Multiple authors, Fairvote, ([link](#))
- “A Bigger House Won’t Heal Congress” - Jonathan S. Tobin, *The National Review*, November 13, 2018, ([link](#))
- “Congress Needs to Be Way, Way Bigger” - David Litt, *The Atlantic*, May 5 2020, available at ([link](#))
- **Browse and critique:** [Thirty-Thousand.org](https://www.thirtythousand.org), <https://www.facebook.com/ThirtyThousand.org/>, and <https://apportionment.us/index.html>

## ASSIGNMENTS DUE

Research memo

### Week 6: October 4 - Restoring congressional capacity+reversing “congressional brain drain”

## READINGS

- *Bring in the nerds: Reviving the Office of Technology Assessment* - Zach Graves and Kevin Kosar, R Street, [pdf](#)
- *How can Congress work better for the American people?* Chapter 3, “Improve Congressional Capacity” - Final Report 116th Congress, Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, [pdf](#)
- “The Big Lobotomy: How Republicans Made Congress Stupid,” Paul Glastris and Haley Sweetland Edwards, *Washington Monthly*, August 2014, ([link](#))
- *Congressional Brain Drain: Legislative Capacity in the 21st Century* - Alexander C. Furnas, Timothy M. LaPira, *New America*, September 8, 2020, ([link](#))
- Press Release: “Hoyer, Jeffries Send Letter to Appropriators Urging Increases to House Staff Pay” - Office of Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, April 28, 2021, ([link](#))

## ASSIGNMENTS DUE

Confirm topic for policy brief

## II. Money in Politics and Governance

### Week 7: October 11 - Money in politics post-Citizens United

\*\*\*GUEST SPEAKER\*\*\* Mark Schmitt

#### READINGS

- PODCAST: “Why good people are easily corrupted” - Lawrence Lessig and Ezra Klein, *The Ezra Klein Show (Vox Conversations)*, 2019, available [here](#) or wherever you get your podcasts
- “The Real Problem with Citizens United: Campaign Finance, Dark Money, and Shadow Parties” - Heather Gerken, *Marquette Law Review*, 2014, [pdf](#)
- “Philanthropic Harm,” Mark Schmitt, *Democracy Journal*, Spring 2019, [\(link\)](#)
- “Spending Big to Fight Big Donors in Campaigns,” Nicholas Confessore, *New York Times*, July 28, 2014, [\(link\)](#)
- “It’s time for liberals to get over Citizens United,” Scot Casleton, Vox, May 7, 2028, [\(link\)](#)
- “The Movement to Overturn Citizens United is Going to Win,” *Public Citizen*, June 7, 2019, [\(link\)](#)
- “More money, less transparency: A decade under Citizens United” - *Center for Responsive Politics*, January 2020, [\(link\)](#)
- **Browse:**  
[https://endcitizensunited.org/?gclid=CjwKCAjwm7mEBhBsEiwA\\_of-TKu59Xt7F9c\\_15tWlFx8hdN2KmGn4CI54tVT6irFj1s1ho76tD7iRoCPCsQA\\_vD\\_BwE](https://endcitizensunited.org/?gclid=CjwKCAjwm7mEBhBsEiwA_of-TKu59Xt7F9c_15tWlFx8hdN2KmGn4CI54tVT6irFj1s1ho76tD7iRoCPCsQA_vD_BwE)

#### ASSIGNMENTS DUE

Select a current representative or senator with history serving in state or local elected office for an in-class research exercise.

### Week 8: October 18 - Leveling the playing field through small-donor public financing

#### READINGS

- *The Participation Interest* - Spencer Overton, [\(link\)](#)
- *Public Funding for Electoral Campaigns: How 27 States, Counties, and Municipalities Empower Small Donors and Curb the Power of Big Money in Politics* - Demos, 2017, [\(link\)](#)
- “Fight fair on Clean Elections,” Michael G. Miller, *Arizona Republic*, September 25, 2014, [\(link\)](#) and “Justices Strike Down Arizona Campaign Finance Law,” Adam Liptak, *New York Times*, June 27, 2011, [\(link\)](#)
- “Building a More Diverse Donor Coalition” - Jennifer Heerwig and Brian J. McCabe, 2020, [\(link\)](#)
- “Seattle’s Public Financing Breakthrough,” David Moore, *American Prospect*, December 25, 2020, [\(link\)](#)
- “‘Democracy dollars’ proposal looks to spread influence, participation in elections,” Chad Swiatecki, *Austin Monitor*, March 29, 2021, [\(link\)](#)

- “Democracy Dollars’: Gillibrand’s plan to give every voter \$600 to donate to campaigns,” Benjy Sarlin, NBC News, May 1, 2019, ([link](#))

## ASSIGNMENTS DUE

### Week 9: October 25 - Does More Democracy Equal Better Governance? Case of Participatory Budgeting

\*\*\*Guest Speaker\*\*\* Hollie Russon Gilman

#### READINGS

- VIDEOS:
  - “Real Money, Real Power: Participatory Budgeting” - The Participatory Budgeting Project, ([link](#))
  - “UN Sustainable Development Goals: The Power of Participatory Democracy,” Open Society Foundations, ([link](#))
- *Our Common Purpose*, Strategy 3: Ensure the Responsiveness of Political Institutions pp. 41-47
- “From the Covid-19 Crisis to Rebuilding our Public Technology Infrastructure in Local Government,” Hollie Russon Gilman, Next City, April 8, 2020, ([link](#))
- **Browse:** <https://participedia.net/>

## ASSIGNMENTS DUE

Policy brief and presentations

## III. Electoral and Voting Reforms

### Week 10: November 1 - Paths to structural election reform

#### READINGS

- *Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop*, Chapters 8-10
- *Governing in a Polarized America: A Bipartisan Blueprint to Strengthen our Democracy* - Bipartisan Policy Center, pp. 29-49
- *Comparative Structural Reform: Assessing The Impact Of 37 Structural Reforms* - FairVote, January 2016, ([link](#))
- *Our Common Purpose*, pp. 32-40
- “How Election Reforms Spread,” Avi Green, May 7, 2019, ([link](#))
- Browse: <https://represent.us/>

## ASSIGNMENTS DUE

None

### Week 11: November 8 - 2020 was a watershed year for voting reform — and backlash

#### READINGS

- *Three Pathologies of American Voting Rights Illuminated by the COVID-19 Pandemic, and How to Treat and Cure Them*, Richard L. Hasen, Election Law Journal, November 2020, ([link](#))
- “Lawmakers Push to Preserve Pandemic Voting Access,” Matt Vasilogambros, Pew Trusts, December 3, 2020, ([link](#))
- “Voting Laws Roundup: March 2021” - Brennan Center for Justice, ([link](#))
- “America’s Elections Won’t Be the Same After 2020,” Russell Berman and Elaine Godfrey, The Atlantic, April 28, 2020, ([link](#))
- “What Absentee Voting Looked Like In All 50 States,” Nathaniel Rakich and Jasmine Mithani, *FiveThirtyEight*, February 9, 2021, ([link](#))
- **Extra:** Interesting view on democratic benefits of voting in person: pp.19-20, *What, Me Vote?*, Richard Freeman, *National Bureau of Economic Research*, [pdf](#).

## ASSIGNMENTS DUE

None

**[Week 12: November 15 - Congress goes big on democracy reform - H.R.1 and H.R. 4](#)**

## READINGS

- “Annotated Guide to the For the People Act of 2021,” Brennan Center for Justice, March 2021, ([link](#)) and “A Broad Coalition for Democracy Reform” ([link](#))
- “The Bipartisan Origins & Impact of the For the People Act (H.R. 1/S. 1),” Campaign Legal Center, [pdf](#)
- “Against the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act,” Hans A. von Spakovsky, *National Review*, October 15, 2020, ([link](#))
- “Black Democrats urge party to shift its voting rights push,” Sarah Ferris, Laura Barron Lopez, and Nicholas Wu, Politico, April 22, 2021, ([link](#))
- “How This Voting Rights Bill Could Turn the Next Election Into a Clusterf\*ck,” Jessica Huseman, *The Daily Beast*, March 30, 2021, ([link](#))
- “SC voting rights advocates in several cities joining May 8 national mobilization,” Adam Parker, The Post and Courier, May 4, 2012, ([link](#))
- “Inside the Koch-Backed Effort to Block the Largest Election-Reform Bill in Half a Century,” Jane Mayer, *The New Yorker*, ([link](#))

## ASSIGNMENTS DUE

Op-ed pitch

**[Week 13: November 22 - Can ranked-choice voting and multi-member districts save our democracy?](#)**

\*\*\*Guest Speaker\*\*\* Unconfirmed

## READINGS

- *Historical assessment of the first state-wide passage of ranked choice voting in Maine* - Kathy Armstrong, September 2019, [pdf](#)

- *Will Ranked Choice Voting Be Adopted Nationally to Replace First Past the Post Voting?* - Peter Ackerman and Cara McCormick (first 20 pages only)
- Our Common Purpose, pp. 25-26
- “A Congress for Every American,” New York Times Editorial Board, [\(link\)](#)
- The Fair Representation Act, [\(link\)](#)
- PODCAST: “Tweak the Vote,” *Radiolab*, November 2018, [\(link\)](#) (or wherever you get your podcasts)
- “A Tried and Tested Solution: Why Fair Representation Voting Just Makes Sense,” McKayla Wenner, *Ms. Magazine*, April 27, 2021, [\(link\)](#)

## ASSIGNMENTS DUE

None

### Week 14: November 29 - Mobilizing against partisan gerrymandering

#### READINGS

- “How do you stop politicians from rigging the ballot? This woman knows,” Ashley Spencer, *The Guardian*, April 2, 2020, [\(link\)](#)
- Michigan Campaign Timeline - Represent.Us, [\(link\)](#)
- TRAILER: Slay the Dragon - [\(link\)](#)
- “5 Things Communities of Color Should Know About Redistricting” - More Equitable Democracy, [pdf](#)
- “How to Get Away With Gerrymandering,” David Daley, *Slate*, October 2, 2019, [\(link\)](#)
- “In Virginia, Democrats Urge Voters To Reject Redistricting Reform They Once Backed,” Daniella Cheslow, WAMU, October 9, 2020, [\(link\)](#)
- “In An Expensive And Partisan Missouri Redistricting Fight, Voters Get The Final Say,” Jason Rosenbaum, NPR, October 18, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/10/18/923304112/in-an-expensive-and-partisan-missouri-redistricting-fight-voters-get-the-final-s>
- PODCAST: “Black Representation in North Carolina,” The Gerrymandering Project from *FiveThirtyEight*, available [here](#) or wherever you get your podcasts
- **Browse:** Voters not Politicians <https://votersnotpoliticians.nationbuilder.com/>, the National Democratic Redistricting Committee website <https://democraticredistricting.com> and their 503(c)(4) counterpart: <https://www.allontheline.org/>
- **For fun:** Gerrymandering puzzle game: [\(link\)](#)

## ASSIGNMENTS DUE

Op-ed draft

### Week 15: December 6 - Why do we still have the Electoral College?

#### READINGS

- PODCAST: “The Electoral College Has Outlived Its Usefulness” - Intelligence Squared US, May 2020, [\(link\)](#)

- “Speeches Advocating Direct Election for President” - FairVote, [\(link\)](#)
- *Neither the red states nor the blue states but the United States: the national popular vote and American political democracy* - Jamie Raskin, *Election Law Journal*, 2008, [pdf](#)
- “The National Popular Vote (NPV) Initiative: Direct Election of the President by Interstate Compact” - CRS, Updated October 28, 2019, [pdf](#)
- “The Electoral College: An Overview and Analysis of Reform Proposals” - EveryCRSReport.com, [\(link\)](#) (start reading at “Electoral College Reform: The Fox and the Hedgehog”)
- [\(link\)](#)
- **Browse:** <https://saveourstates.com/>, <https://www.nationalpopularvote.com/>

## **ASSIGNMENTS DUE**

None