

VOTING RIGHTS AND THE 2020 ELECTIONS

The 2020 Presidential and Congressional elections will be unlike any other. Caught in one of the worst partisan divides in its history and literally plagued by a deadly pandemic, the campaigns will be different from any we have experienced. Moreover, these elections will significantly affect the future course of the country, its governance, the economy and foreign relations.

As in the 2018 mid-term elections, voter turnout will be crucial to the outcomes. Once again, we have to ask, despite living in a country where the right to vote tends to be taken for granted, “Who can vote?” In our 2018 voting rights course, we first examined the history of the right to vote in the US, starting with the Constitution and state laws, and then focused on then-current restrictions on voting, particularly early voting cutbacks, strict photo ID requirements and gerrymandering. In 2020, we will begin by summarizing that history (with particular attention to the role of the Electoral College) and updating the status of issues like gerrymandering and the rights of ex-felons. We will then turn to the current problems facing potential voters, such as the battle over voting by mail, restrictions on polling places and other voter suppression tactics. Recent Supreme Court cases, key decisions in state courts and ongoing litigation will be discussed in depth.

Finally, throughout the course, we’ll track the progress of the Presidential campaigns and some key Congressional races that will likely be affected by the issues we’re discussing. The active involvement of class members will be important to this process.

No text will be required for the course, but on-line sources and handouts will be provided. Recommended reading for background and discussion will also be listed on a syllabus to be provided before classes begin.

Leader: Elaine Jacoby is a retired attorney who leads courses on civil rights, women’s issues, and politics.

Fridays: 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., 8 weeks: September 25 through November 13

Maximum: 35