Drawing Democracies

Redistricting and Elections in America

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Office Hours:

- Wednesday 2-4pm, sign up with Calendly.
- By appointment, scheduled by email or Slack.

Federal, state, and local governments are often built from geographic districts. In redistricting, the districts are drawn for a decade at a time. Commissions, legislatures, and courts draw those geographic districts for future elections. The process of redistricting can be done in as little as a few days, but the maps define constituencies for the next decade. We will study the fundamental building blocks of American democracy. Congress is entirely dependent on how its districts are drawn. Who wins when lines are the drawn? Do district-based systems empower or weaken minority communities? How do we distinguish between effects on race and party? Should we protect incumbents when there are different benefits to accountability and experience? Is it better to have non-partisan groups draw the lines? At the end of the day, how can we say if a map is good or bad?

In this course, we'll explore the many aspects of how districts are drawn in America and their effects on our many geographic democracies. We'll start by building a baseline understanding of how laws and rules from local, state, and federal entities come together to regulate mapmaking. We'll explore the ways that we can describe maps quantitatively and qualitatively. We'll learn from court decisions and recent research into redistricting. All the while, we will draw maps for local, state, and federal districts to better understand the tradeoffs and the high stakes in mapmaking. As new members of the Government department, we will develop your research skills, with an emphasis on how to measure and think about measuring some of the many, often-fuzzy concepts in political science.

Course readings draw on legal authorities, law review articles, expert reports, and empirical political science to explore the field. With a diverse set of readings it is important to realize that redistricting is partisan in many ways. We will engage with writers (and researchers) from

the left and right. Disagreement is encouraged, as it is vital to advancement of knowledge, but we will make all efforts to ensure that disagreement is both substantive and polite.

Course Components

Course Meetings:

This course will meet once a week for 2 hours from 12 to 2pm on Monday or on Tuesday, depending on your section.

This course begins the first week. Students are expected to attend all sessions and actively participate in all class discussions and activities. Students are also expected to substantively engage with the readings.

In addition to in-depth exploration of the material from the readings, this class includes training in social science research skills, including writing as a social scientist. Some portion of this research skills training will occur asynchronously. Students are expected to complete all assigned skills training activities.

Written Assignments:

1. **Readings and Discussion Posts:** Starting during Week 2, you must post a short reaction to the readings on the course **Slack** by 9pm the night before your class meeting. Your post should be 1 or 2 substantial paragraphs and should bring up one or two questions, critiques, or ideas with explicit reference to the readings assigned for that week's class. Other students in the course can see your postings. You can respond to each other but are not required to do so. While these need not make a formal argument, they should have a coherent point that is grounded in the readings; it should be evident that you have done the readings. The posts should not simply be about your personal experience or about current events, although you can tie anecdotal ideas in with a discussion about the readings. Your instructor will use your questions and critiques from the online forum in class discussion. After the first week, there are twelve class meetings with assigned readings. You must post discussions for *at least* ten of the twelve, but you are encouraged to post something every week in order to collect and synthesize your thoughts before class.

2. Writing as a Social Scientist: In this course, students will learn how to write like a social scientist, which is an essential part of social science research. To that end, students will write a series of short papers that will accumulate toward a work product central to social science: a research paper. The purpose of the assignments is to make you a skilled consumer of social science claims and evidence and to prepare you to undertake more social science research. Writing these papers is an interactive process and you will meet with your instructor throughout the process.

For the research prospectus, you will compose a research question that speaks to a topic covered in the course. You will then draw on literature from the course, in addition to literature from outside the course, to consider possible answers to your question. You will propose data sources and analysis to answer your question. Qualitative or quantitative research proposals are permitted.

a. **Pre-Prospectus::** The pre-prospectus paper will propose a research question and review the literature related to that question. It will allow you to make a first attempt at writing a compelling introduction and will provide practice with tying a specific research question to a broader theory in the surrounding social science literature. In the pre-prospectus, you will also build from the literature to articulate preliminary hypotheses about the answer to your research question. The pre-prospectus will be 4 to 5 pages in length. You will meet with your Teaching Fellow at some point in this process, before the due date of the pre-prospectus. You will upload the completed assignment on 2024-02-27.

b. **Analysis Reflection Paper:** The analysis reflection paper will allow you to explore the strengths and drawbacks of various methodological approaches to answering your proposed research question. In the reflection paper, you will propose two potential methodological approaches to answering your research question. You will identify potential data sources and describe preliminary plans for using them to generate evidence for your hypotheses. You will then discuss the limitations of each approach. This assignment will be 3 to 4 pages in length. You will upload the completed assignment on 2024-03-26.

c. **Prospectus:** The prospectus will be 6 to 7 pages, and will lay out your research question, review the relevant literature, describe your planned methodology to answer the question, and address any limitations with this methodology. You will essentially combine an edited version of the pre-prospectus and a portion of the analysis reflection paper to generate the prospectus. The prospectus will allow you to refine your presentation of the research question and literature review based on your TF's feedback and your growing knowledge of the topic. You will also propose a refined version of one of the methodological approaches described in your analysis reflection paper and broaden your discussion of the limitations of your chosen methodology. You will meet with your Teaching Fellow at some point in this process, before the due date of the prospectus. You will upload the completed assignment on 2024-04-30.

Grading

These assignments are to be submitted via Canvas at the times noted. *To reduce potential bias, assignments are graded using a standardized rubric.*

Assignment Due Dates and Contribution to Final Grade

Assignment	Percent of Final Grade	Due Date
(Class participation)	(35%)	
Discussion section participation	15%	
Reading discussion posts	15%	Night before class (9pm)
Skill building activities	5%	
(Written assignments)	(65%)	
Pre-prospectus	15%	2024-02-27 (11:59pm)
Analysis reflection paper	15%	2024-03-26 (11:59pm)
Prospectus	35%	2024-04-30 (11:59pm)

Other Policies:

Laptop Policy:

Please bring your laptop to class for every class meeting. We will make use of tools online, like Dave's Redistricting App or RPV Near Me, for a few minutes each week. In the first week of class, we will discuss strategies for note taking that will encourage type-written notes, during prep for the class and during class.

While laptops are allowed, I maintain an expectation that they will be used for class-related activities, not for X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, Bluesky, Mastodon, Threads, or other distractions.

Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to attend all classes. Appropriate excuses for missing class (e.g., health or family emergencies) will be permitted with documentation from HUHS or your Dean.

Late Assignments:

Assignments turned in after the due date will receive a point deduction. All students receive a grace period of 15 minutes. Assignments turned in up to 12 hours late will lose 3 points. Assignments turned in between 12 hours and 24 hours late lose 6 points. After the first day, any additional partial day results in a loss of 8 more points per partial day in addition to the 6 points lost for the first day. In the extraordinary event of an unforeseen and unavoidable circumstance that prevents you from turning in an assignment on time, you must provide documentation to your Teaching Fellow.

Students who have technological issues submitting an assignment should send an email to me with a short explanation of the issue you had and copy of the assignment attached (or included in the body of the email if there is no document) within 15 minutes of the deadline. For example, if you try to submit an assignment at 8:59pm for a 9pm deadline (not encouraged) and the upload or submission does not work, you must email me a copy by 9:15pm with a short explanation of the issue.

Collaboration Policy:

The exchange of ideas is essential to strong academic research. You may find it useful to share sources or discuss your thinking for any of these papers with peers, particularly if you are working on similar topics. You may even read you classmates' drafts and provide feedback. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own thinking and approach to the topic. You must be sure to cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that you draw on. Furthermore, while you may seek the advice or help of your peers, your data analysis must be performed on your own and you should consult with your Teaching Fellow to make sure you are not duplicating the analysis of any other student in your section.

Accessibility:

Please let me know as soon as possible and not later than the 3rd week if you are registered with the Accessible Education Office so we can work together to make any and all alterations necessary.

Use of "AI", specifically Language Models (LMs):

In this course, we follow the Office of Undergraduate Education's suggested "maximally restrictive policy", found here.

> We expect that all work students submit for this course will be their own. In instances when collaborative work is assigned, we expect for the assignment to list all team members who participated. We specifically forbid the use of ChatGPT

or any other generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools at all stages of the work process, including preliminary ones. Violations of this policy will be considered academic misconduct. We draw your attention to the fact that different classes at Harvard could implement different AI policies, and it is the student's responsibility to conform to expectations for each course.

Note that Harvard does not have a uniform policy on the use of LMs. Some of these are more advanced and try to pass as human writers, such as GPT-3 models. Other LMs provide coaching on grammar, like Grammarly, and provide smaller checks on your work. To ensure that you get the most out of this class, you should never pass off any writing from a LM as your own. Any services that offer a wholesale writing or rewriting should not be used, including tools like ChatGPT, OpenAI playground, or GitHub Copilot. Tools like Grammarly are acceptable and are frequently used in the production of academic work. If you are unsure if a tool should be used or not, please discuss it with me prior to using it.

With each of the assignments, you may be asked to disclose what tools you used to write the document. For weekly and lecture responses, you should not use any "tools" besides a document editor and spell check.

If Harvard adopts a binding policy on these tools, I will revise this section of the syllabus and alert the class to the university or college's change.

Course Schedule

Except for Week 1, the prior week's class meeting will have 5-10 minutes of prep for the next week's readings. Particularly difficult readings will be accompanied by reading guides, which will be sent out the morning of the prior week's class meeting (Monday/Tuesday).

Section 1: What is redistricting?

To start the course, we'll introduce redistricting as a whole. The first week, we explore the basic processes and rules of redistricting that follow the decennial census. The second week, we'll discuss some basic ideas of democracy and its goals. The next two weeks, we will discuss threats to those goals. In the first of those, we will explore the idea of partisan gerrymandering with an academic handbook chapter written by a legal scholar. The second of those, we will introduce the primary legal bounds on the use of race and open discussions on if and how race should be used in redistricting.

Week 1: Redistricting 101

1. Lo Wang, Hansi. (2022). How The 2020 Census Data Will Shape Voting Districts For The Next Decade. NPR.
2. Persily, N. (2019). Math on Trial. Science.
3. Greenwood, R. (2019). The human cost of the partisan gerrymandering decision. Fulcrum.
4. Goldzimer, A. and Stephanopoulos, N. (2022). The Novel Strategy Blue States Can Use to Solve Partisan Gerrymandering by 2024. Slate.
5. Rakich, N. and Mejia, E. (2022). Did Redistricting Cost Democrats The House? FiveThirtyEight.

Week 2: Democratic Ideas and Ideals

1. The Federalist Papers: No. 52. The House of Representatives.
2. The Federalist Papers: No. 53. The Same Subject Continued (The House of Representatives).
3. Dahl, R. A. (2015). On Democracy. Second Edition. 83-99. New Haven: Yale University Press.
4. Achen, C. H. & Bartels, L. M. (2016). Democracy for realists: Holding up a mirror to the electorate. Juncture, 22(4), 269-275.
5. Blake, J. (2023). A group of political 'assassins' is quietly threatening American democracy, a new book says

Week 3: Partisan Gerrymandering

1. Stephanopoulos, N. (2023). Partisan Gerrymandering. Oxford Handbook of American Election Law. Eugene Mazo (Ed.). https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4294248

Week 4: Racial Gerrymandering and Vote Dilution

1. Democracy Docket. (2022). Racial Gerrymandering vs. Racial Vote Dilution, Explained. https://www.democracydocket.com/analysis/racial-gerrymandering-vs-racial-vote-dilution-explained/
2. NAACP LDF. (2022). South Carolina Passes New Redistricting Maps Following Civil Rights Legal Challenge. https://www.naacpldf.org/news/south-carolina-passes-new-redistricting-maps-following-civil-rights-legal-challenge/
3. James Piereson. (2022). The Racial Redistricting of Alabama. https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-racial-redistricting-of-alabama-merrill-v-milligan-voting-rights-act-gingles-roberts-majority-minority-dilution-11664826558

4. Canon, D. T. (2022). Race and Redistricting. Annual Review of Political Science. 25, 509-528. https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041719-102107
5. Syllabus of *Allen v. Milligan* (2023). https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/22pdf/21-1086_1co6.pdf

Section 2: Measuring a Map

In the second segment of the course, we build up where political science has an impact on redistricting. Everything needs to be *measured* in some way or another in order to evaluate how it functions.

In Week 5, we will talk about a seemingly simple, but surprisingly difficult topic: measuring malapportionment (how unequally populated districts are). In Week 6, we will dive into a theoretical basis for partisan fairness. In Week 7, we will dive into the most common measure of compactness and spend much of lecture discussing (1) other ways to think about compactness and (2) how these lessons generalize. Finally, in Week 8, we will dive into some technology being used: redistricting simulations.

Week 5: Traditional Redistricting Criteria

1. Summary of Reynolds v. Sims, 377 U.S. 533 (1964)
2. Syllabus of Reynolds v. Sims, 377 U.S. 533 (1964)
3. Syllabus of Karcher v. Daggett, 462 U.S. 725 (1983)
4. National Conference of State Legislatures. (2009). Equal Population. Redistricting Law 2010, p. 22-45. https://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/Redistricting/Redistricting_2010.pdf
5. Ansolabhere, S., & Snyder, J. M. Jr. (2008). The End of Inequality: One Person, One Vote and the Transformation of American Politics, Chapter 11: A New Order. 241-272.

Week 6: Partisan Fairness

1. Cameron, D. (2017). Here's how the Supreme Court could decide whether your vote will count. https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/politics/courts-law/gerrymander/
2. Katz, J., King, G., & Rosenblatt, E. (2020). Theoretical Foundations and Empirical Evaluations of Partisan Fairness in District-Based Democracies. The American Political Science Review, 114(1), 164–178. https://doi.org/10.1017/S000305541900056X

Week 7: Compactness

1. Cox, E. P. (1927). A Method of Assigning Numerical and Percentage Values to the Degree of Roundness of Sand Grains. Journal of Paleontology, 1(3), 179–183. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1298056
2. Polsby, D. D., and Popper, R. D. (1991). The Third Criterion: Compactness as a Procedural Safeguard against Partisan Gerrymandering. Yale Law and Policy Review, 9(2), 301–353. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40239359

Week 8: Redistricting Simulation: Constructing Counterfactuals

1. Siliezar, J. (2022.) How to spot a gerrymandered district? Compare it to fair ones. The Harvard Gazette. https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2022/11/an-algorithm-to-detect-gerrymandering/
2. Expert Report of Kosuke Imai, Ph.D. (2021). SC NAACP v. Alexander.

Section 3: Institutional Design and Reform

In the third section of the course, we'll bring together the first and second section of the course to discuss how our democratic institutions are designed. In Week 9, we'll explore how redistricting plans are drawn. In Week 10, we will read two evaluations of redistricting in the 2020 cycle, which explore the effectiveness of different mapdrawing institutions. In Week 11, we'll read from a book on reform which pushes back on some of the goals from the prior weeks and discuss benefits and issues with some institutional reforms and designs.

Week 9: Institutional Design

1. Sadhwani, S. and Junn, J. (2018). Structuring Good Representation: Institutional Design and Elections in California. PS, Political Science & Politics, 51(2), 318–322. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096517002438
2. Sadhwani, S. (2022). Independent Redistricting: An Insider's View. The Forum. https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2022-2063
3. Rakich, N. (2022). The Extreme Bias of Florida's New Congressional Map. FiveThirtyEight. https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-extreme-bias-of-floridas-new-congressional-map/
4. McKinley, J. (2022). How a Mapmaker Became New York's Most Unexpected Power Broker. New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/28/nyregion/jonathan-cervas-redistricting-maps-ny.html

Week 10: Effects of Institutional Designs

1. Warshaw, C., McGhee, E., and Migurski, M. (2022). Districts for a New Decade-Partisan Outcomes and Racial Representation in the 2021-22 Redistricting Cycle. Publius, 52(3), 428–451. https://doi.org/10.1093/publius/pjac020
2. Kenny, C.T., McCartan, C., Simko, T., Kuriwaki, S., and Imai, K. (2023) Widespread partisan gerrymandering mostly cancels nationally, but reduces electoral competition. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 120(25), e2217322120. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2217322120

Week 11: Should we reform?

1. Cain, Bruce. Cambridge University Press. (2015). Democracy more or less: America's political reform quandary. Cambridge University Press. Focus on Chapters 1, 2, and 6.
2. Allen, Danielle, Heintz, S. B., and Liu, Eric P. (2020). Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century. American Academy of Arts & Sciences. https://www.amacad.org/ourcommonpurpose/report, 22-46

Section 4: The Future of Redistricting

To wrap up the course, we'll look forward to how litigation happens, as most districts will remain unchanged for the next decade, absent litigation. We'll finish with an important racial gerrymandering case, Alexander v. SC Conference of NAACP, and a brief look at a challenge to Michigan's redistricting plans where the openness of a commission hurt their court defense.

Week 12: Litigation

1. Issacharoff, S. and Karlan, P. S. (1998). Standing and Misunderstanding in Voting Rights Law. Harvard Law Review, 111(8), 2276–2292. https://doi.org/10.2307/1342459
2. Cho, W. K. T. and Cain, B. E.. (2022). AI and Redistricting: Useful Tool for the Courts or Another Source of Obfuscation? The Forum. https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2022-2061.

Week 13: The Future of Redistricting

1. Alexander v. SC Conference of NAACP Oral Argument
2. Michigan Political Map Axed in 'Seismic' Blow to Commissions