

PSCI 3100: Voting Rights and Election Law

Spring 2026

TuTh, 9:30-10:50 AM
Wooten Hall 215

Professor Brian Hamel
Email: Brian.Hamel@unt.edu
Office Hours: TuTh, 2:00-3:00 PM
Office: Wooten Hall 157

Description

In the United States, elections are both a routine feature of democratic life and a recurring source of controversy. The 2000 presidential election highlighted how ballot design and recount law can determine election outcomes. Twenty years later, allegations of voter fraud and disputes over certification refocused public attention on election integrity. Together, these episodes underscore a central reality of contemporary American democracy: political conflict plays out not only through elections, but over the *rules* that govern them.

This course examines those rules — and how they affect who votes, who wins elections, and who is represented. We'll cover a wide range of topics: the right to vote; election timing; electoral systems (e.g., at-large vs. ward-based elections); partisan and racial gerrymandering; ballot design and voting technology; voter identification laws; convenience voting reforms (e.g., early and mail voting); voter fraud; ranked choice voting; referendums and initiatives; ballot access and party nomination processes; and campaign finance regulation. Throughout, we'll pay particular attention to how election laws can either reflect or come into tension with core democratic principles.

Because this is an upper-division course, there is a significant amount of reading. Students will critically engage with primary case law and evidence-based academic research. Active participation in class is expected. Students will also take part in a redistricting simulation in which they design and defend district maps, as well as a class debate on the Supreme Court's 2010 *Citizens United v. FEC* decision. By the end of the semester, students will have an in-depth understanding of how American elections are administered and will be prepared for further study or professional work in the field.

Materials

Students are required to rent or purchase the following textbook:

Tokaji, Daniel P., and Robert Yablon. 2024. *Election Law in a Nutshell*. 3rd Edition. Eagan: West Academic Publishing.

While you may use a previous edition of the book, you are responsible for all material in the 3rd Edition. Use earlier editions at your own risk — the older the edition, the greater the risk.

Students must also join the iClicker class page. If you already have an iClicker account, you will be automatically added to the class page; if not, instructions will be emailed to you on the first day of class. Students who choose to use their smartphone to answer iClicker questions must also download the iClicker app for iOS or Android.

All other materials are provided on Canvas or linked in the course schedule below.

Assignments and Grades

Your final grade will be based on the following:

- iClicker Questions (5%): During class sessions, students will periodically respond to questions about course material on iClicker. Students earn 0.5 points for participation and an additional 0.5 points for correct responses. iClicker questions must be completed during class; there are no make-ups. Students may participate using a laptop or smartphone. Students who miss class on a day when iClicker questions are asked *and* provide a valid, documented excuse will not lose any points.
- *Citizens United* Case Brief (20%): Students will prepare a case brief analyzing the Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United v. FEC*. The brief should identify the relevant facts, the constitutional question presented, the Court's holding, the majority's reasoning, and any concurring or dissenting opinions. Students should also briefly discuss the broader implications of the decision for campaigns and elections. It is due on **April 23**. On April 28, students will participate in a structured in-class debate on whether *Citizens United v. FEC* should be overturned. Students will be randomly assigned to argue for or against the decision or to serve as a justice. 25% of the case brief grade will be based on active participation in the debate.
- Redistricting Memo (25%): Students will design a set of congressional districts for the state of Texas using population and geographic data. The districts must comply with basic legal and normative criteria. Alongside their map, students will submit a memo describing their choices and the tradeoffs involved. A redistricting workshop will be held on February 19. The map and memo are due on **February 26**.
- Exams (50%). There will be two in-person exams, each consisting of short essay questions drawn from the lectures and readings. The exam dates are **March 5** and

May 7. Neither exam is cumulative. Both are closed note. A study guide will be provided one week prior to each exam. A review session will be held during the class period immediately preceding each exam.

Final grades will be assigned as follows:

Letter Grade	Percentage Grade
A	90-100%
B	80-89%
C	70-79%
D	60-69%
F	0-59%

Policies and Resources

Contacting Me

The fastest way to reach me is via email. I will typically respond within 24 hours. When emailing me, please include “PSCI 3100” followed by a brief description of your question or concern in the subject line of the email. Your email should be professional and should include a greeting such as “Dear Professor Hamel” or “Hello Dr. Hamel.” You are also encouraged to visit during my office hours. If you are unavailable during my office hours, please email me to schedule an appointment, either in-person or on Zoom. I welcome the opportunity to meet you, learn about your background and interests, and help in any way that I can. If you read this before class on January 13, please email me what you are hoping to learn from this course and your favorite Taylor Swift song. Doing so will earn you two extra credit points on your final grade.

Technology in Class

You may use a laptop during class to take notes. **Know, however, that taking notes with a laptop has a negative effect on learning and course performance.** I strongly encourage that you take notes in class using a pen and paper. You will thank me later.

Late Work

You will be penalized for late assignments unless you have a valid, documented excuse. The penalty for unexcused late work is 5 percentage points per day. For example, if the quality of your work would have earned a 95, but the assignment is submitted two days late without an approved excuse, you will receive an 85. Valid excuses include illness, serious family emergencies, and religious holidays. I am generally willing to be flexible and to accommodate reasonable requests for extensions, but you must contact me in advance.

Grade Disputes

You must wait a minimum of 24 hours after receiving a graded assignment before contacting me regarding your grade. If you wish to dispute your grade, you must do so via email within one week of the date that grades are made available to the class. Grade disputes will not be considered if submitted past the one-week statute of limitations. When requesting reconsideration of a grade, you should provide a clear explanation as to why a different grade is in order. When work is reviewed for a grade dispute, the grade may be left unchanged, raised, or lowered.

Honors Option

Students wishing to take the course for Honors credit must contact me within the first two weeks of the semester. Unless an alternative arrangement is proposed and approved, Honors credit requires the completion of two reading response memos based on assigned, non-textbook readings of the student's choosing. Guidelines will be provided.

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University. All writing assignments should be written and prepared by the student. The use of generative AI, including ChatGPT, are not permitted in this course even if properly attributed. AI-generated submissions will be treated as a violation of the University's academic integrity policy.

Accommodations for Disabilities

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester. For additional information, visit the [ODA website](#).

Mental Health Services

Mental health challenges can significantly hinder learning. UNT can support you in overcoming these obstacles. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus [here](#) and [here](#).

Writing Services

UNT's Writing Center can help you with structure, grammar, punctuation, citation styles, and more on any written assignment. They offer both in-person and online appointments. To schedule an appointment, call 940-565-2563 or email WritingCenter@unt.edu. You can also find more information on their [website](#).

Schedule

Tentative and subject to change.

Tuesday, January 13: Introduction

Thursday, January 15: Reading Quantitative Political Science Research

Read:

- “How to Read (and Understand) a Social Science Journal Article”
- “Interpreting Statistical Tables in Political Science Articles”
- “10 Things to Know About Reading a Regression Table”

Tuesday, January 20: What's a Representative Democracy, Anyway?

Read:

- Tokaji and Yablon, Chapter 1
- Federalist No. 10

Thursday, January 22: Right to Vote

Read:

- Tokaji and Yablon, Chapters 2 and 3
- Morgan-Collins, Mona. 2021. “The Electoral Impact of Newly Enfranchised Groups: The Case of Women’s Suffrage in the United States.” *Journal of Politics* 83 (1): 150–165

Tuesday, January 27: Election Timing and Electoral Systems

Read:

- Abbott, Carolyn, and Asya Magazinnik. 2020. “At-Large Elections and Minority Representation in Local Government.” *American Journal of Political Science* 64 (3): 717–733
- Anzia, Sarah F. 2012. “Partisan Power Play: The Origins of Election Timing as an American Political Institution.” *Studies in American Political Development* 26 (1): 24–49

Thursday, January 29: Redistricting

Read:

- Tokaji and Yablon, Chapter 4
- *Wesberry v. Sanders*
- Henderson, John A., Brian T. Hamel, and Aaron M. Goldzimer. 2018. “Gerrymandering Incumbency: Does Nonpartisan Redistricting Increase Electoral Competition?” *Journal of Politics* 80 (3): 1011–1016
- “CA vs. TX: The Redistricting Arms Race to Control Congress | WSJ”

Tuesday, February 3: No Class — Professor Hamel at a conference

Thursday, February 5: No Class — Professor Hamel at a conference

Tuesday, February 10: Partisan Gerrymandering

Read:

- Tokaji and Yablon, Chapter 5
- *Rucho v. Common Cause*
- Chen, Jowei, and Jonathan Rodden. 2013. “Unintentional Gerrymandering: Political Geography and Electoral Bias in Legislatures.” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 8 (3): 239–269

Thursday, February 12: Racial Gerrymandering I

Read:

- Tokaji and Yablon, Chapter 6
- *Thornburg v. Gingles*

Tuesday, February 17: Racial Gerrymandering II

Read:

- Mansbridge, Jane. 1999. “Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent ‘Yes.’” *Journal of Politics* 61 (3): 628-657
- Fraga, Bernard L. 2016. “Redistricting and the Causal Impact of Race on Voter Turnout.” *Journal of Politics* 78 (1): 19-34

Thursday, February 19: Redistricting Workshop

Tuesday, February 24: Ballot Design and Voting Technology

Read:

- Tokaji and Yablon, Chapter 7 from pages 171–184
- *Bush v. Gore*
- Wand, Jonathan N., Kenneth W. Shotts, Jasjeet S. Sekhon, Walter R. Mebane, Jr., Michael C. Herron, and Henry E. Brady. 2001. “The Butterfly Did It: The Aberrant Vote for Buchanan in Palm Beach County, Florida.” *American Political Science Review* 95 (4): 793–810

Thursday, February 26: Watch *Recount*

Due:

- Redistricting Memo

Tuesday, March 3: Exam #1 Review

Thursday, March 5: Exam #1

Tuesday, March 10: No Class — Spring Break

Thursday, March 12: No Class — Spring Break

Tuesday, March 17: Convenience Voting

Read:

- Tokaji and Yablon, Chapter 7 from pages 199–220
- Berinsky, Adam J. 2005. “The Perverse Consequences of Electoral Reform in the United States.” *American Politics Research* 33 (4): 471–491
- Thompson, Daniel M., Jennifer A. Wu, Jesse Yoder, and Andrew B. Hall. 2020. “Universal Vote-by-Mail Has No Impact on Partisan Turnout or Vote Share.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117 (25): 14052–14056

Thursday, March 19: Voter ID

Read:

- Tokaji and Yablon, Chapter 7 from pages 184–190
- Fraga, Bernard L., and Michael G. Miller. 2022. “Who Does Voter ID Keep From Voting?” *Journal of Politics* 84 (2): 1091–1105
- Harden, Jeffrey J., and Alejandra Campos. 2023. “Who Benefits from Voter Identification Laws?” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 120 (7): e2217323120

Tuesday, March 24: Voter Fraud

Read:

- Eggers, Andrew C., Haritz Garro, and Justin Grimmer. 2021. “No Evidence for Systematic Voter Fraud: A Guide to Statistical Claims about the 2020 Election.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118 (45): e2103619118
- Lott, John R. 2022. “Simple Tests for the Extent of Vote Fraud with Absentee and Provisional Ballots in the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election.”

Thursday, March 26: Guest Speakers: Frank Phillips and Brandy Grimes, Denton County Election Administration office

Tuesday, March 31: Ranked Choice Voting

Read:

- Cormack, Lindsey. 2024. “More Choices, More Problems? Ranked Choice Voting Errors in New York City.” *American Politics Research* 52 (3): 306–319
- Vishwanath, Arjun. 2025. “The Effects of Ranked Choice Voting on Substantive Representation.” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 20 (3): 409–437

Thursday, April 2: Direct Democracy

Read:

- Tokaji and Yablon, Chapter 8
- Gerber, Elisabeth R. 1996. “Legislative Response to the Threat of Popular Initiatives.” *American Journal of Political Science* 40 (1): 99–128

Tuesday, April 7: Political Parties

Read:

- Tokaji and Yablon, Chapter 9
- McGhee, Eric, Seth Masket, Boris Shor, Steven Rogers, and Nolan McCarty. 2014. “A Primary Cause of Partisanship? Nomination Systems and Legislator Ideology.” *American Journal of Political Science* 58 (2): 337–351
- Reller, Cassidy. 2023. “How Ballot Access Laws Increase Primary Competition and Decrease Party Unity.” *Party Politics* 31 (1): 112–122

Thursday, April 9: Watch *Majority Rules*

Tuesday, April 14: Campaign Finance I

Read:

- Tokaji and Yablon, Chapter 10
- *Citizens United v. FEC*

Thursday, April 16: Campaign Finance II

Read:

- Kilborn, Mitchell, and Arjun Vishwanath. 2022. “Public Money Talks Too: How Public Campaign Financing Degrades Representation.” *American Journal of Political Science* 66 (3): 730–744
- Yorgason, Chenoa. 2025. “Campaign Finance Vouchers Do Not Expand the Diversity of Donors: Evidence from Seattle.” *American Political Science Review* 119 (1): 508–516

Tuesday, April 21: Does Money Matter?

Read:

- Ansolabehere, Stephen, John M. de Figueiredo, and James M. Snyder, Jr. 2003. “Why is There so Little Money in U.S. Politics?” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17 (1): 105–130
- Gilens, Martin, Shawn Patterson, Jr., and Pavielle Haines. 2021. “Campaign Finance Regulations and Public Policy.” *American Political Science Review* 115 (3): 1074–1081

Thursday, April 23: No Class — Professor Hamel at a conference

Due:

- *Citizens United* Case Brief

Tuesday, April 28: *Citizens United v. FEC* Debate

Thursday, April 30: Exam #2 Review

Thursday, May 7 from 7:30-9:30 AM: Exam #2