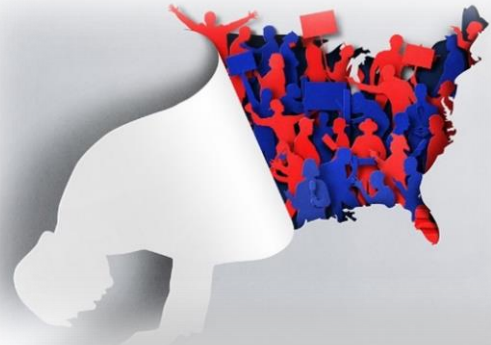


Progressive Politics in the Midterms and Beyond

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Humanities Seminars Program
Mondays, 9:30-12:00, 10/3-11/21
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COURSE OVERVIEW

In the five weeks leading up to election, we will focus on the issues that [recent polls](#) have identified as top concerns: inflation, the economy, voting laws, “threats to our democracy,” abortion, crime, immigration, and climate change ([Quinnipiac 7/20/22](#); [NBC 8/21/22](#)). We will expand or narrow our historical focus in response to the feedback you provide and developments in the campaigns. The campaigns are “[getting weirder](#)” in ways that you may find more compelling than the broader historical focus that I had envisioned for the course.

In our first class, we will discuss your responses to two anonymous surveys of your political viewpoints. The survey I created also includes questions on how much history you want to include in our seminar. The second survey will give us a sense of how the views of everyone in the class line up with national trends. The Pew survey categories break down traditional distinctions between liberals and conservatives to include populist and progressive viewpoints.

In our second class, we will discuss how Republicans have sought to deepen anxieties about inflation and taxes, while Democrats have responded by focusing on their efforts to improve the economy, most notably with the Inflation Reduction Act (which [most commentators agree](#) will do little to reduce inflation). We will look past these competing campaign appeals to explore the historical shift of white working-class voters to the Republican party, particularly voters without college degrees and those who live in rural areas and in the South and Midwest. This educational and cultural divide has deepened with populist attacks on cosmopolitan elites, immigration, and gender and racial issues.

In our third class, we will examine the competing concerns for voting “fraud” and voting rights, particularly the Stop the Steal movement that refused to accept the outcome of the 2020 election and is seeking to take control of how votes will be counted. As in our other discussions, we will look past campaign debates to explore broader historical developments, particularly the civil rights movements that have claimed voting rights for women and people of color and the white-nationalist movements that have been willing to use violence to defend the homeland against perceived threats.

In our fourth class, we will follow up to examine how our country became a majoritarian democracy in 1920 when the majority of Americans first won the right to vote. As we will discuss, women have not voted as a block, but they have been decisive swing voters. We will examine how independents and other swing voters impact elections in ways that moderate the efforts of progressives and populists to mobilize traditionally marginalized voting groups.

In our last class before the election, we will follow up on our discussions of class, race, and gender politics to explore how differing campaigns have tried to mobilize their base and swing independents. We will build on our discussions of efforts to expand and restrict voting to explore the campaigns of election-deniers, including those seeking to play decisive roles in future elections in our own state. We will also examine how immigration has factored into the election—both as a campaign theme and as a campaign constituency with the increase of immigrant and children of immigrant voters.

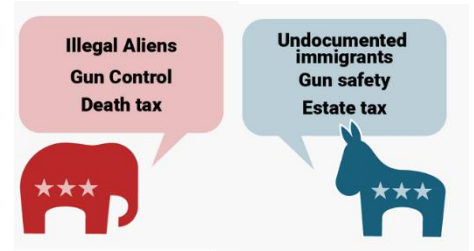
Our three classes after the election on November 1 are only broadly sketched out in the following outline because those classes provide us with the most flexibility to address your interests and reflect upon the historical implications of the election. We will use the 11/7 class to examine the election results, and then we may use the last two classes to compare our historical situation to the Progressive Era, including how economic changes and mass migration fueled the rise of fascism in Europe and progressive programs in the US. Examining these historic movements can help us reflect on the need to do more than cheer or complain about the outcomes of the election. As we will discuss, democracy is not a spectator sport. When democracy is threatened in the ways we are witnessing, we all need to step up get involved. A functioning democracy depends on an engaged citizenry—a theme that we will examine at several points in our classes.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

The Class Readings are in our [HSP Course Folder](#). You will access most Optional Readings through the links below. Optional readings that may not be accessible are included in our HSP Folder. Readings for our last classes will be finalized later. I have suggested some questions for our concluding discussion segments. While we will discuss varied topics, these questions may help you consider what you want to discuss in the last thirty-minute segment of classes.

1. Who's progressive and whose conservative? (10/3)

In GOP primaries such as that of Representative Liz Cheney, Republicans did not select the traditional conservative. For their part Democrats have nominated [both moderates and progressives](#). To help you position yourself on this [political landscape](#), please complete two short questionnaires: a five-item one that I created to help you briefly reflect on your views and a twenty-item "quiz" created by Pew Research that I set up to report our collective responses. Your anonymous responses to these surveys will help us get an initial sense of our differing viewpoints. In this and subsequent classes, we will step back from the campaign to consider progressive and populist movements as polar reference points for reflecting upon the limitations of our bipolar politics. I encourage you to complete the readings in the numbered order so that you will not be biased by the categorizations in the Pew survey before reflecting on how you define your own political views.



Class Readings (These readings are not in our HSP folder because most are interactive and have lots of graphics):

1. Please complete [our short HSP questionnaire](#) before reading the following articles.
2. Then [start the Pew Research Quiz here](#).
3. After completing the two polls, read "[Beyond Red vs. Blue... Political Typology](#)," Pew Research Center, 11/9/21.
4. Also, "[Progressives Should Read Progressive History](#)," Joshua Zeitz, *Politico Magazine* 6/1/19.

Optional Readings are included in case you want to read further on related issues:

- [Brennan Center Resources for the 2022 Midterm Elections](#).
- "[How America Changed During Donald Trump's Presidency](#)," Dimock and Gramlich, Pew Research, 1/29/21.
- [The Progressive Intellectual Tradition in America](#), John Halpin and Conor P. Williams, April 2010.
- "[Quiz: If America Had Six Parties, Which Would You Belong to?](#)" Lee Drutman, *NYT*, 9/8/21. This survey provides a map of our political differences similar to the Pew Research "quiz" but with more attention to specific issues.

Suggested Discussion Starters: Here are [strategies we will use](#) to reduce the [stress of discussing politics with others](#).

- How have your political attitudes changed with your life experiences?
- How have your attitudes to other political groups been shaped by the groups with which you identify?
- What are your concerns and interests in this seminar?
- What do you hope to learn?

2. It's the economy, stupid! (10/10)

This class will focus on the top election issue. We will look past concerns over inflation to explore the economic and cultural anxieties that have contributed to the shift of working-class whites without college degrees to the Republican Party. This populist movement has been fueled by the economic uncertainties that have deepened since the Great Recession along with cultural anxieties about rising immigration, antiracism, and violent crime. Democrats have struggled to respond to these anxieties, as with the Biden administration's transparent attempt to give populist appeal to progressive priorities in the "[Green New Deal](#)" and the [Inflation Reduction Act](#).



Class Readings in our [HSP Course Folder](#):

- “Beyond Economics: Fears of Cultural Displacement...,” Cox, Lienesch, and Jones, *Atlantic*, 05/09/17.
- “Black and Hispanic Americans, those with less education, are more likely to fall out of the middle class each year,” Rakesh Kochhar and Stella Sechopoulos, Pew Research, 5/10/22.
- “Why Democratic Appeals to the ‘Working Class Are Unlikely to Work,” Monica Potts, *FiveThirtyEight*, 7/6/22.
- “MSNBC, ABC, CNN realize Inflation Reduction Act doesn’t reduce inflation after bill is passed: ‘Marketing,’” Nikolas Lanum, *Fox News*, 8/18/22.
- “It’s the Monopoly, Stupid,” Philip Longman, *Washington Monthly*, 6/20/22.

Optional Readings: (Highlighted readings may require subscriptions, so I included them in our HSP Course Folder)

- [“How Educational Differences Are Widening America’s Political Rift,”](#) Nate Cohn, *NYT*, 9/8/21.
- [“Biden’s Climate Law is Ending 40 years of Hands-Off Government,”](#) Robinson Meyer, *Atlantic*, 8/18/22.
- [“The ‘Transformational’ Inflation Reduction Act is Really Just More Green Stimulus,”](#) Matt Weidinger, American Enterprise Institute, 8/8/22.
- [“Most Americans Say There Is Too Much Economic Inequality...,”](#) Horowitz et al, Pew Research, 1/9/20.
- [“The State of Gig Work in 2021,”](#) Monica Anderson et al., Pew Research, 12/8/21.
- [“Is ‘Greedflation’ Rewriting Economics, or do the Old Rules Still Apply?”](#) Lydia DePillis, *NYT*, 6/3/22.

Suggested Discussion Starters:

- How do you select candidates? Many people claim they vote for individuals not parties, but most people actually vote consistently or mostly for a party. So how do we end up identifying with one or the other?
- How are we to assess which economic policies work better, and for whom they work?
- If voters are driven primarily by economic self-interest, why don’t lower-income voters support the party that promises to tax the rich and expand programs for working people?
- Imagine a group you are not part of: what experiences and aspirations shape that group’s voting decisions? Few demographic groups vote as a block, so what factors shape how that group votes?

3. Stopping the steal of our democracy (10/17)

[Both parties have been sued for gerrymandering](#), but Republicans have been much more effective at using the 2020 census to [leverage their positions in swing states](#) as part of a national effort to control access to voting and establish provisions for intervening in future elections. This effort is justified by claims that the 2020 election was stolen. We will examine how such voter-suppression efforts are being resisted by grassroots organizing that continues the tradition of progressive activism that reaches back over a century to the era of Jim Crow and the suffragist movement. We will also discuss how redistricting efforts may swing the House of Representatives even if Democrats are able to hold onto the Senate.



Class Readings in our [HSP Course Folder](#):

- “Voting and Elections Divide Republicans and Democrats Like Little Else,” Philip Ewing, *NPR*, 6/12/22.
- “Conservative Legal Luminaries Release Report Entitled ‘Lost, Not Stolen. . .’” Ilya Somin, *Reason*, 7/15/22.
- “How ‘Stop the Steal’ Captured the American Right,” Charles Homans, *NYT Magazine*, 7/19/22.
- “The Populist Challenge to Liberal Democracy,” William Gaston, *The Journal of Democracy*, 4/17/18.

Optional Readings:

- [“Lost, Not Stolen: The Conservative Case that Trump Lost...,”](#) July 2022 [the report cited in the above article].
- [“From Embrace to ‘Replace,’”](#) Susan Milligan, *US News*, 5/22/22.
- [“America has a long history of resisting multiracial democracy,”](#) Brandon Tensley, *CNN*, 2022.
- [“Has Your State Made it Harder to Vote?”](#) Elena Mejia and Alex Samuels, *FiveThirtyEight*, 6/16/22.
- [“Arizona Is the Epicenter of the Fight for Voting Rights Today,”](#) Will Wilder, *Brennan Center for Justice*, 6/2/22.
- [“A Sampling of Recent Election Fraud Cases,”](#) *Election Integrity*, The Heritage Foundation, nd.
- [“Heritage Foundation’s Database Undermines Claims of Recent Voter Fraud,”](#) *Brennan Center for Justice*, 2017.

Suggested Discussion Starters:

- How are to understand the challenges facing our democracy?
- What can we do about them?
- What are the possibilities of building coalitions to strengthen our democracy?



4. How will women swing this election? (10/24)

As we will discuss, much of the work of democracy falls to women. Women often swing elections, as in 2016 when Hillary Clinton lost in part because [she failed to earn the support of most white women](#). As that example shows, the women vote is shaped by racial, education, class, and religious differences. Those differences explain why women vote differently on abortion, which could be a decisive factor in the election—or not. Many women tend to be most concerned with paying their bills. Women have historically played a decisive role in elections because they are more likely to vote, and also to get involved in campaigning and working on elections. In the upcoming election, getting out the vote and monitoring the polls will be crucial. Much of that work falls to women. In mundane and decisive ways, our democracy has depended on women’s activism to secure and defend voting rights.

Class Readings in our [HSP Course Folder](#):

- “Men and women in the US continue to differ in voter turnout rate, party identification,” Ruth Igielnik, Pew Research, 8-18-20.
- “YWomenVote 2022 Findings,” YMCA and Finn Partners, nd.
- “AARP Poll: The Votes of 50-Plus Women Could Decide the Midterms,” Dena Bunis, AARP, 4/6/22.
- “One Voting Group Holds Key to Midterms after Abortion Leak: Suburban Women,” Ryan Teague Beckwith and Gregory Korte, *Bloomberg*, 5/3/22.
- “Key facts about the abortion debate in America,” Carrie Blazina, Pew Research, 7/15/22.
- “Women Have and Will Continue to Be a Driving Force in Protecting Voting Rights,” Andrea Marta, *Ms. Magazine*, 2/2/22.

Optional Readings: (The highlighted reading may require a subscription, so I included it in our HSP Course Folder)

- [“She’s the Difference: The Power of Older Women Voters,”](#) AARP [includes full survey discussed above]
- [“‘It’s Become Real’: Abortion Decision Roils Midterms, Sending Fight to States,”](#) Katie Glueck, *NYT*, 6/24/22.
- [“What the data says about abortion in the US,”](#) Jeff Diamant and Besheer Mohamed, Pew Research, 6/24/22.
- [“The Fight for Women’s Rights and Equality: 1920-2020,”](#) DCP, 7/7/20.
- [“Women’s Suffrage in the United States,”](#) Susan Goodier, *The Inclusive Historian’s Handbook*, 6/1/22.

Suggested Discussion Starters:

- What aspects of women’s experiences make them more likely than men to vote Democratic?
- How can women leverage their political impact?
- How can each of us become more politically active, even if we have mobility or other limitations”?

5. How can we hope for democracy if we have lost our faith in voting? (10/31)

In our final class before the election, we will follow up on our discussions of the politics of class, race, and gender to examine demographic polls of campaigns. We will examine how candidates used populist and progressive frames to address issues, and what we can expect from the candidates. We will focus on campaigns and controversies that seem most historically significant. One controversy of significance is the potential election of candidates who seek to play decisive roles in future elections and yet [deny the outcome of the last one](#). About [70% of Republicans](#) do not believe the last election was “free and fair.” At least [120 Republican “election deniers”](#) have been nominated. The Democratic party has also been divided, with some commentators arguing that Democrats [“must moderate or die”](#) and that the [identity politics of “woke” progressives](#) are alienating the minority voters whom white progressives often claim to represent.

Possible Readings: (The highlighted reading may require a subscription, so I included it in our HSP Course Folder)

- “2020 Elections,” Politico
- “Americans at the ends of the ideological spectrum are the most active in national politics,” Carrie Blazina, Pew Research, 1/5/22,
- “Election Demographics and Voter Turnout,” Bloomberg Government, 7/13/22.
- “2020 election reveals two broad voting coalitions fundamentally at odds,” Dean and Gramlich, Pew, 11/6/20.
- “What the Primaries Reveal about the Future of Trumpism,” Ronald Brownstein, *The Atlantic*, 5/18/22.
- “Black Women and the Voting Rights Backlash,” Jasmine Hilton, Politico, 4/9/21

Suggested Discussion Starters:

- What campaigns do you want to discuss?
- What commentary and media sources should we consider to expand our perspective beyond?
- Please [email me](#) links, ideally from sources other than those included here.

6. What did we vote for, and against? (11/7)

We will discuss the results of the midterm election on 11/1 and consider whether the election has left us with a working government, or left us too divided to do much.

Readings will be selected from campaign analyses. We will use this class to pivot from the elections to reflect upon how incapacitated our democracy has become and how local and global movements are giving rise to new forms of democratic activism that combine traditional community work in churches and nonprofits with global networks that are transforming how we understand the problems we face and our relations to others.



Possible Readings: (The highlighted reading may require a subscription, so I included it in our HSP Course Folder)

Please email me analyses of the elections that you want to share with class. I encourage you to search for and read opposing views to help you expand your perspective on the election and its significance. While we will devote most of our attention in this class to analyses of the midterms, we will also set up a pivot to our concluding classes with readings such as these:

- “6 demographic trends shaping the US and world in 2019,” Anthony Cilluffo and D’Vera Cohn, Pew, 4/11/19
- “The generation gap in American politics,” Pew Research, 3/1/18.
- “Key findings about US immigrants,” Abby Budiman, Pew Research, 8/20/20.
- “Global public opinion in an Era of Democratic Anxiety,” Richard Wike & Janell Fetterolf, Pew Research, 12/7/21.
- “American Democracy Was Never Designed to Be Democratic,” Louis Menand, *The New Yorker*, 8/15/22.

7. How can we ever make progress with the global problems facing our country (11/14)

As an exercise to help you step back from the politics of the day and collect your thoughts, you might try to sketch out the global problems we face. You’d probably end up with a scribbled page with clusters of issues connected by related facts and factors. If you mapped out the clusters, you might start seeing all the interconnections among the problems. Your map of global challenges would likely look different from the one on the next page, but it provides a sense of the benefits of this sort of concept mapping. The sketch on the next page highlights the interrelated dimensions of wicked problems: systemic problems that are so interconnected, global, evolving, and divisive that they can seem unsolvable. When we map out systemic problems, we are likely to be left feeling overwhelmed. What can we really hope to do to solve class-immigration-race-globalization-climate crises? When we recognize they are all connected, how can we do anything more than just throw up our hands, turn the page, and resign ourselves to the technological and economic changes that are rewiring how we think, live, and work.

