

Syllabus

America's Election System: Facts and Fiction

Facilitated by: Linda Edgeworth

Tuesdays – 9:00 a.m. to 10:45 a.m.

February 4 – April 14, 2020



In 2016, we went through one of the most controversial presidential elections in our lifetimes. 2018 did not give us comfort as ultra-close races, recounts, delayed results, lawsuits gave us pause. Many of us are still scratching our heads as to how well the USA is surviving in the aftermath. It seems that campaigning never ends. And, now the 2020 presidential elections loom before us with impeachment as the backdrop.

Our electoral system is complex, decentralized and administratively driven by the states and their counties, with diverse approaches to voter registration and election administration. Parties control some components of our system. Outcomes are influenced by unbridled campaign financing, broadcast, print and social media, and most recently by unprecedented infiltration by foreign actors. Our Electoral College system for the election of the President and recent disparities with the popular vote, challenge our continued acceptance. Gerrymandering threatens to dilute the votes of certain populations. After a period during which voting rights were expanded, many states are now reversing that trend.

For many, confidence in our system has been shaken. This class will take the controversies head on, AND will offer positive answers that may help to restore our faith that as voters, we can make a difference.

Class Description:

1. The purpose of this class is to explore the American Election System itself and to consider its strengths and its weaknesses.
2. We'll challenge ourselves to better understand our system so we can sort the facts from the fictional assumptions about the constitutional and legal framework, how elections actually work, and what it all means to our democracy.
3. Our approach will be to look at the election system from its evolutionary roots as envisioned by our founding fathers, and its adaptation to societal, political and technological changes over time.

What We Will Need to Keep in Mind to Get the Most Out of this Class:

- **This class will be ripe for vibrant, open discussion.** There will likely be differences of opinions among us on lots of issues surrounding our electoral process and its aftermath.
- **Controversial issues will no doubt arise.** Nonetheless, every effort will be made to keep our focus on the processes that may have influenced results, rather than our specific political differences.
- **Be willing to jump in!** Share your views and your ideas.

The Full Class Schedule Can Be Found on the Reverse Side

America's Election System: Fact and Fiction

Class Outline*

Class 1 February 4	General overview of what this course will cover, and a brief look in the rear view mirror at the 2016 presidential election “by the numbers.” We’ll also an at-a-glance overview of the 2018 midterms and asses trends that emerged and assess their potential impact on 2020.
Class 2 February 11	We’ll explore what our forefathers envisioned for elections in the Constitution and amendments over time. We’ll look the key federal laws affecting elections , their history and reasons behind them, and how they are interpreted differently by individual states. Some voting rights may simply depend on where you live.
Class 3 February 18	Where did Political Parties come from, anyway? We’ll take a look at the advantages and disadvantages of what is fundamentally a two-party system and challenges faced by alternative parties and independent candidates seeking to run. We’ll also discuss Primary vs. Caucus Elections with some details about how they’re done in Nevada.
Class 4 February 24	Voter Registration: the job that’s never finished and the product that can never be perfect! We’ll review issues related to ID requirements for registering and for voting, discuss the flaws and challenges in maintaining accurate voter registers, and facts and fiction about fraud.
Class 5 March 3	Imagine the time when there were no ballots, and no secrecy of vote in America! Innovations and inventions have changed elections dramatically. We’ll discuss the use of Voting Technologies and how they impact the accuracy of vote counting, their vulnerabilities and the threat and impact of hacking from within and from abroad.
Class 6 March 10	We’ll look at Campaigning American Style from the stump to bots and trolls, with the advent of radio and television in between. Is recent negative campaigning something new, or is it rooted in a long established history?
March 17	NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK
Class 7 March 24	Gerrymandering cannot be ignored. We can’t talk about elections without considering how the purposeful manipulation of house district boundaries impacts outcomes by diluting the voting power of targeted populations as a means of gaining and holding on to power.
Class 8 March 31	A new wave of Voter Suppression Laws is threatening fundamental voting rights. Carefully crafted, they target college students, minorities and voters based on their party affiliation. Purging of the voter rolls may affect hundreds of thousands of voters for 2020.
Class 9 April 7	Campaign Financing is still controversial and recent Supreme Court decisions have given the green light to “dark money” that need be disclosed. We’ll discuss who is influencing us, and who stands to benefit.
Class 10 April 14	The dreaded Electoral College : love it or hate it, we need to understand it, why the founding fathers saw it as a solution to some complex issues facing a new nation trying to build consensus, and its status in the future.

• **May Be Subject to Change**

About the Facilitator:

Linda Edgeworth is a senior consultant specializing in domestic and international election law and administration. She has led international observation missions, performed election analyses, and provided direct assistance to election management bodies in 39 countries. She was the Director of Elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina and rebuilt the voter rolls and elections systems after the war. She has also participated in the development of international standards for democratic elections. She was Deputy Director for elections in Alaska in charge of election operations, procedural development, federal compliance, and public information. She has also consulted in several states and counties in the United States and has been a speaker and facilitator at many election-related conferences domestically and abroad.