

FOR THE PEOPLE: FEDERALISM AND DEMOCRACY

The issue of voting rights in the US has become only more fraught since the 2020 elections. In the fall of 2020, this course examined the history of voting rights in this country, focusing on the role of the Electoral College and the then current problems facing potential voters, such as the battle over voting by mail, restrictions on polling places, and other voter suppression tactics. In doing so, the class learned about the wide disparity among the states on how, where, and when voters could cast their ballots, and the waves of litigation that controversies over state or local decisions frequently engendered. In the aftermath of President Biden's election and the unprecedented events of January 6, 2021, attention has turned even more to the role of states in determining voters' rights, as a large number of them have introduced or enacted laws that, in the view of many people, will make voting more difficult, especially for people of color and the disadvantaged.

Our system of government divides power between the federal government and the states. This federalist system is not unique among democracies, but certain elements of it, such as the role of the Electoral College, are unique. In this course, we will begin with the Constitution and American history, focusing on the philosophy, politics, and economic factors that created federalism and continued to play roles in its development, as the country grew and changed. Most important, we will confront and debate the following questions: is American federalism an anti-democratic system? Does it have advantages that outweigh its deficits? Can the system be changed to ensure that all citizens' votes count? Can we effectuate such change and how: through the courts, federal legislation, constitutional amendment, or other means?

This class will thrive on active involvement of class members.

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 in a syllabus to be provided before classes begin.

LEADER: Elaine Jacoby is a retired attorney who leads courses on civil rights and politics.

WEDNESDAYS: 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., 8 weeks beginning September 29 through November 17

MAXIMUM: 36