



The Taft Institute

FOR GOVERNMENT & CIVIC EDUCATION

Making Democracy Work

EXPANDING AND IMPROVING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE U.S. SINCE 1961

The Taft Institute for Government & Civic Education

Annual Seminar for Teachers

Teaching Elections:
2023 and the prospects for 2024
December 19, 2023

Other Resources—Election Simulations

- ❖ Election simulation manuals
- ❖ Uniquely rigorous, comprehensive, realistic, and fun
- ❖ Posted each year on the Taft web site
- ❖ Single classroom or whole school
- ❖ Presidential election (2020)
- ❖ New York City elections (2021)
- ❖ NY State elections plus Congressional midterms (2022)
- ❖ Presidential nominations (2023)

Overview

- ❖ First hour—presentation/discussion
- ❖ Second hour—breakout groups—
- ❖ Lesson preparation
- ❖ Lesson presentations

Presentation--outline

❖ **Part one—Elections in General**

- ❖ What is an election?
- ❖ Contending Answers to this question
- ❖ Applying these ideas
- ❖ The How of Elections
- ❖ The What of Elections

❖ **Part two—Analyzing 2023 and 2024**

- ❖ How to analyze the elections of 2023 using these ideas
- ❖ What are the prospects for 2024, again using these ideas

WHAT IS AN ELECTION?

- ❖ What are elections supposed to do?

Small “d” Democratic

- ❖ Elections give the people a way to control the government
- ❖ A way for the majority to get what it wants
- ❖ A way for the people to make the government responsive to the people

Elite Theory

- ❖ Elections are a way for a small, very rich group (elite) to control the government
- ❖ A way for this small group to get what it wants
- ❖ A way to fool the people into thinking they have power when the elite really has power
- ❖ A ritual that reinforces the false idea that the majority is ruling

HOW TO TELL...

- ❖ How can we tell if an election serves the majority or serves the elite?

THE HOW OF ELECTIONS

❖ HOW ARE ELECTIONS CONDUCTED?

❖ VOTER SUPPRESSION

❖ ELECTION NULLIFICATION

VOTER SUPPRESSION

- ❖ Is it easy or difficult to register and vote?
- ❖ Are large numbers of people disenfranchised (prevented from voting)? For example, felony disenfranchisement
- ❖ Is there sufficient time to vote? (Early voting)
- ❖ Are there sufficient places to vote in person?
- ❖ Is it hard or easy to vote by mail?
- ❖ Are there sufficient drop boxes (places to return absentee votes)?

A LITTLE HISTORY

- ❖ Republican state legislatures and officials have made it harder for people to vote, especially low income people, people of color, and students. WHY?
- ❖ Speaker of the New Hampshire State House, justifying barriers for students to register—called the students, “foolish,” said they, “just vote their feelings” and “vote as a liberal.”
- ❖ President Trump, responding to proposals for same day registration and vote by mail in a Covid relief bill, “levels of voting that if you’d ever agreed to it, you’d never have a Republican elected in this country again,”

RECENTLY

- ❖ Republican State Legislature in Georgia passes laws that
- ❖ Tighter rules for voter ID,
- ❖ Limit number of polling places
- ❖ Limit number of drop boxes for absentee ballots
- ❖ Make it a felony to give food or water to people waiting on line to vote
- ❖ Create heavy penalties for groups registering voters
- ❖ Similar laws in many other states—Texas, Arizona, Florida

ELECTION INTERFERENCE

- ❖ INTIMIDATING NON PARTISAN ELECTION OFFICIALS TO OPEN PLACES FOR PARTISANS
- ❖ GIVING THE POWER TO THE STATE LEGISLATURE OR SOME OTHER PARTISAN BODY
- ❖ TO OVERTURN THE RESULTS OF AN ELECTION--
- ❖ PRESIDENTIAL, U.S. SENATE, OR HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, OR STATE OFFICIALS—GOVERNOR, ETC.

INTIMIDATING ELECTION OFFICIALS

- ❖ Top election official Maricopa County, Arizona (biggest)
- ❖ Forced into hiding with family—2022
- ❖ Giuliani liable for \$148 million for attacks on Georgia officials
- ❖ National Survey results:
 - ❖ One in three election officials has faced harassment
 - ❖ One in five fears violence
 - ❖ One in five plan to leave by 2024
 - ❖ If replaced by partisans, could corrupt the way elections are run

GIVING ELECTION POWER TO PARTISANS

- ❖ Republican state legislatures consider laws giving themselves or others they control
- ❖ The power to overturn the results of an election, federal or state.
- ❖ None passed as yet, but legislatures do take direct control of election administrators so
- ❖ Stay tuned.

THE WHAT OF ELECTIONS? DECISIONS

- ❖ WHAT IS ON THE AGENDA?
- ❖ WHAT IS BEING DECIDED?
- ❖ WHAT ARE THE ISSUES BEING DEBATED?
- ❖ BUT ALSO
- ❖ WHAT ARE THE ISSUES THAT ARE LEFT OUT?
 - ❖ NON-DECISIONS

NON-DECISIONS

❖ THE ISSUES THAT ARE LEFT OUT

❖ EXAMPLES—2020 PRESIDENTIAL

- ❖ Single payer health care (Medicare for all)
- ❖ Minimum wage of \$15.00 per hour
- ❖ The Green New Deal—Shifting quickly away from fossil fuels to renewables, reducing inequality, increasing worker safety and environmental protection

NOT ON AGENDA, NOT DEBATED

- ❖ NOT IN EITHER PARTY'S PLATFORM
- ❖ NOT DEBATED TRUMP VS. BIDEN

- ❖ THEREFORE—NON-ISSUES
- ❖ THEREFORE---NON-DECISIONS

- ❖ If the issue isn't on the agenda and isn't debated, it can't be decided.

POINT TO NOTICE

- ❖ The Non-Decisions
- ❖ The Suppressed Issues

- ❖ Threaten the interests of the big money elite

- ❖ So one way to evaluate an election is to see what issues are being suppressed

Case Study—2023 in Virginia

- ❖ Apply some of these ideas to a particular case
- ❖ The What of Elections
- ❖ State elections in Virginia—2023
- ❖ Just state legislature
- ❖ Governor elected previously—2022

Governor, Virginia--Glenn Youngkin

- ❖ Republican
- ❖ “Trump Lite?”
- ❖ Similar Policies
- ❖ Less Aggressive, less Crude, less Vulgar (Smoother)
- ❖ Seen as possible presidential alternative 2024

Virginia Campaign 2023

- ❖ Youngkin wants to enhance his national credentials
- ❖ Pass his program through state legislature
- ❖ “Parents’ Rights”
- ❖ Abortion “moderate compromise”—15 week ban
- ❖ Republicans already control State House of Delegates
- ❖ Democrats control the State Senate
- ❖ Youngkin needs to defeat Democrats, gain control of both houses

Campaign

- ❖ Big Money
- ❖ \$175 million total
- ❖ Youngkin puts in his own money
- ❖ Other Republican billionaires contribute
- ❖ Democrats counter
- ❖ Billionaires of their own
- ❖ Plus Democrats have grassroots organizing--abortion

RESULTS

- ❖ Democrats hold the House of Delegates and
- ❖ Take control of the State Senate
- ❖ Youngkin defeated
- ❖ National ambitions quashed

THE WHAT IN VIRGINIA--2023

- ❖ For the issue on the agenda—abortion
- ❖ Clear indications that majorities opposed the 15 week plan
- ❖ Support the Roe v. Wade standards overturned by the Court in the Dobbs decision
- ❖ So in terms of the issue raised and debated, this seems to be a small “d” democratic victory
- ❖ Majority got what it wanted
- ❖ But

WHAT KIND OF ISSUE IS ABORTION?

- ❖ Obviously, very, very important
- ❖ Crucial for women's rights
- ❖ Therefore, crucial for human rights
- ❖ But
- ❖ Does it affect the big money elite?

Does the elite care?

- ❖ Does this issue threaten elite political power?
- ❖ Does this issue threaten elite economic power?
- ❖ Would Jeff Bezos or Warren Buffett or Bill Gates care about this issue in the same way they would care about
 - ❖ Virginia increasing taxes on rich people or big companies?
 - ❖ Virginia passing stricter environmental laws?
 - ❖ Virginia revoking its "right-to-work" law to make union organizing easier?

Non-issues Virginia 2023

- ❖ These are the non-issues in Virginia in 2023
- ❖ These are the issues that did not come up
- ❖ Were not debated
- ❖ Were not decided
- ❖ They are the non-decisions.

Non-decisions, Virginia, 2023

- ❖ In terms of non-decisions, Virginia in 2023
- ❖ Very good election for the elites
- ❖ Didn't even have to defend their interests
- ❖ There weren't even any threats to them.

Different lenses, different conclusions

- ❖ Possible to see the same election in different ways
- ❖ Get a richer picture by applying both perspectives
- ❖ On to the results in 2023 generally and the outlook for 2024

2023 in general—Democrats' Victories

- ❖ Democrats do well
- ❖ Power of abortion as a motivating issue demonstrated
- ❖ State Supreme Court elections in Wisconsin and Pennsylvania
- ❖ Both won by Democrats who stress this issue
- ❖ In Wisconsin also important for election issues, including gerrymandering and voter suppression and election interference
- ❖ Democratic Governor re-elected in Kentucky
- ❖ Democrats gain in state legislature in New Jersey
- ❖ Come close in governor's race in Mississippi

DOWN BALLOT RACES

- ❖ DEMOCRATS WIN COUNTY RACES IN PA
- ❖ AND SCHOOL BOARD RACES IN PA, VIRGINIA, MINNESOTA, KANSAS, NORTH CAROLINA AND IDAHO
- ❖ DEFEAT 1776 PROJECT AND MOMS FOR LIBERTY CANDIDATES—SUPERPACS BACKED BY RIGHT WING BILLIONAIRES
- ❖ DEFINITELY VICTORIES FOR SMALL d DEMOCRACY

OUTLOOK FOR 2024

- ❖ Democratic Optimists
 - ❖ “Dobbs and Democracy”
 - ❖ What does this slogan mean?
- ❖ How are these issues supposed to produce a win?

Pessimists

- ❖ Biden's bad poll numbers
- ❖ Disaffection among key groups—
- ❖ Young people—Student loans, Middle East
- ❖ People of Color—Police reform, Middle East
- ❖ Trump's lead in polls
- ❖ Progressive fatigue—will the grassroots come out to organize?
- ❖ Effects of voter suppression and election interference laws—
Georgia, Florida

2024--Decisions????

- ❖ Do these issues threaten the elite's interests?
- ❖ Already discussed abortion
- ❖ Does it matter to them if the U.S. is still a democracy?

Democracy and the elite

- ❖ Clearly, some individual members of the elite do care, but
- ❖ The big corporations that said after January 6th, 2021 that they would not give money to election deniers have reversed themselves.
- ❖ So in general terms, the elite doesn't seem to mind so much
- ❖ Why? What do they care about most?

P and P

- ❖ In terms of power and profits,
- ❖ The forces pushing toward an authoritarian system support elite interests.
- ❖ They favor lower taxes on the rich and corporations and less regulation and oppose unions and movements to help the poor and working class.

Non-decisions--2024

- ❖ Climate Emergency?
- ❖ Inequality?
- ❖ Environmental crisis generally—
- ❖ Ocean pollution
- ❖ Rain forest destruction
- ❖ Sixth mass extinction
- ❖ Increased Threat of Nuclear War

Issues crucial to everyone's future

- ❖ Will get scant attention
- ❖ In the 2024 elections in the United States

Bibliography

- ❖ Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, **Decisions and Nondecisions: An Analytical Framework.**
- ❖ The idea that America is a democracy, though flawed, is present in nearly every American Government textbook.
- ❖ See for example, Gary Wasserman, **The Basics of American Politics**
- ❖ For the idea that elites rule:
- ❖ G. William Dumhoff, **Who Rules America?**
- ❖ Thomas Ferguson, **The Golden Rule**

Bibliography--2

- ❖ For the idea that elite power has grown in recent years, see
- ❖ Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, **Winner-take-all Politics and Let Them Eat Tweets** and
- ❖ Jane Mayer, **Dark Money**
- ❖ For the connections to changes in the economy, see
- ❖ William K. Tabb, **Financialization and the Future of the American Economy**

Creating Lessons to teach the 2024 Election

We will split breakout rooms so participants can work in groups of 5.

Together, please discuss your ideas for a draft lesson which you would potentially teach to your current population of students.


The lesson should be based on the seminar conducted by Dr. Krasner, as well as from your own understanding of the issues which will ultimately decide the 2024 election.

THE TAFT INSTITUTE ANNUAL VIRTUAL SEMINAR FOR TEACHERS

Teaching Elections:
The Results of 2023 &
The Outlook for 2024

Tuesday, December 19 6:00-8:00PM

JOIN US FOR THIS FASCINATING SEMINAR, EXCLUSIVELY DESIGNED FOR TEACHERS, AND RECEIVE A STIPEND!



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Directions for teacher group activity

- Discuss the most important aspects of the seminar and what information you believe is important for middle or high school students to learn. Can you design a **'essential question'** and/or **'educational objective'**?
- Create an **introduction** to your lesson. What would be a good way to entice students to provide their prior knowledge on the topic?
- Design a **main lesson** whereby students will work in groups to discuss, debate, analyze and evaluate information from sources related to the 2024 elections. How will they provide their **evaluation**? What materials are you likely to use during the lesson? Please explain.
- Be prepared to discuss your ideas for a lesson with the seminar participants.



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Next Steps

- ❖ If you would like to do the next step of designing and using your own lesson plan in class, please come to a second seminar planned tentatively for March 12th
- ❖ At that seminar we will work with you to fine tune the lesson plan you have developed to make it conform to New York State Standards in preparation for using it in class.

Thank you!!!!

 The end