

Description of Assignment:

Write a 3-4 page essay in which you explore and critically assess the topic of election reform in the United States and/or California. The essay must address at least one proposed or alternative electoral reform that would change current election and/or voting practices.

In deciding what reform you choose to write on, you should explore the websites of various policy think tanks, organizations, political parties, interest groups, and/or news sources that address the topic of election/voting reform. Select at least one proposed electoral reform policy and write a 3-4 page essay analyzing the main points of the policy (or policies). Compare the proposed policy to current US or state election policy. Critically analyze and discuss how the new policy will change current election practices. Provide arguments as to whether the new policies will enhance or hinder current election/voting practices, such as the level of democracy or citizen representation.

Assignment Requirements:

1. The essay must be between three to four pages, but no more than four.
2. The essay must analyze at least one election/voting reform and include an argument supporting or opposing the reform(s).
3. The argument of the essay must be based upon research and evidence. The essay must include references to at least five sources in its analysis.
4. All secondary sources must be cited, including the proper formatting for website sources.
5. The essay must follow the “Essay Requirements” below.
6. That you cite all secondary sources, even if you paraphrase them
7. That you consider all the evidence of a particular issue and not just that which favors your own reading or opinion.

Possible Topics:

- H.R. 1 “For the People Act of 2021” (passed by House of Representatives on March 3, 2021)
- Changes in redistricting practices (gerrymandering)
- Same Day Voter Registration or automatic voter registration.
- Changes in FCC (Federal Communications Commission) policy
- Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) or Ranked Choice Voting
- Proportional representation
- Electoral college reform
- Campaign finance reform
- No-fault absentee voting
- Early voting
- Mail-in voting
- Election Day as a holiday or time off for voting
- Voter's Bill of Rights
- Changes in Presidential Debates to allow third parties.
- Increase the size of the U.S. Senate or the House of Representatives

Possible points to include in your analysis:

- How will such electoral reforms improve the level of democracy, representation or citizen participation?
- What issues will such reforms resolve?
- How will such reforms be put into practice?
- What laws need to change? Will it be necessary to change either the California Constitution or the U.S. Constitution?
- Compare U.S. voting practices with the practices of other countries.
- Will the implementation of a particular reform likely improve voter turnout? (compare with other countries or voting systems)
- Will such electoral reforms provide more or less democracy, equality, justice, freedom, and/or representation? (provide reasons why this would be the case)
- What politicians support and/or oppose the election reforms and why?
- What political parties support and/or oppose election reform and why?
- What interest groups support and/or oppose election reform and why?

Organization of paper:

There are several ways to organize the paper, and you are free to organize it the way you wish as long as it is coherent.

Here is one brief example of how to organize this type of paper:

Paragraph 1: Introduction: a brief summary of the flaws in the current electoral system, a summary of the reform, its purpose, and how it will improve current election/voting practices.

Paragraph 2: A description of how the current system functions. Evidence that the current system distorts, misrepresents, and/or under-represents election outcomes and/or the votes and political views of the people.

Paragraph 3: A detailed description of the reform and evidence of how it will change current election/voting practices. A description of the arguments and views of those supporting the reform.

Paragraph 4: (a) A description of the arguments and views of those opposing the reform.

(b) Your critical analysis of both sides of the debate and of the evidence presented. Here you may point out the inconsistencies in the different sides of the debate, points that have not been raised, or ways to view the reform that have not been discussed, among other things.

Paragraph 5: A summary of the arguments and evidence you have presented, and your view of the proposed reform based upon the evidence and your analysis.

Sources worth exploring:

a. Organizations

Ballotpedia, <https://ballotpedia.org/>

Californians for Electoral Reform, <http://www.cfer.org/> × California IRV Coalition, <http://www.calirv.org/> × Common Cause, <http://www.commoncause.org/>

Democracy Works, <https://www.democracy.works>

Fair Vote, <http://www.fairvote.org/>

Freedom House, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/>

Instant Runoff Voting, <http://www.instantrunoff.com/>

Represent Us, <https://represent.us/>

b. News Sources

Los Angeles Times

New York Times

Orange County Register

Sacramento Bee

San Francisco Chronicle

Washington Post

Vox, <https://www.vox.com/>

Google News is also a useful search tool: <http://news.google.com>