

PLAD 4430: Migration Seminar

Migration, Sorting, and Democratic Representation

Spring 2026

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Course Description

This course examines how residential sorting—driven by housing markets, public goods provision, and preferences—shapes political geography and democratic representation in the United States. We begin with foundational theories of internal migration and local public finance (Tiebout sorting), capitalization of amenities into housing prices, and the homevoter hypothesis. We then explore how housing debt and homeownership affect political behavior, followed by empirical evidence on partisan, ideological, and racial sorting. The second half analyzes political consequences: gerrymandering, malapportionment, electoral outcomes, and democratic responsiveness. Students will work extensively with migration data, housing prices, election returns, and redistricting simulations.

Learning Outcomes

- Master theoretical models of residential sorting and internal migration
- Understand the homevoter hypothesis and its empirical predictions
- Analyze how housing debt and homeownership shape political behavior
- Critically evaluate evidence on partisan, ideological, and racial sorting
- Analyze redistricting processes and their interaction with residential patterns
- Use quantitative methods to measure sorting, segregation, and electoral bias
- Connect residential geography to democratic representation and accountability
- Evaluate policy interventions affecting mobility and political geography

Assessment & Assignments

- **Problem Sets (30%):** Weekly problem sets on sorting models, data analysis, and empirical methods
- **Empirical Replication (20%):** Replicate key finding from sorting or redistricting literature
- **Research Proposal (15%):** Proposal for original research on sorting and representation
- **Final Research Paper (25%):** Original empirical analysis (15-20 pages)
- **Class Presentations & Participation (10%)**

Week 1: Introduction - The Geography of American Politics

Topics

- Course overview: Why does residential location matter for democracy?
- Red states, blue cities: Patterns and puzzles
- Data overview: IRS migration, ACS, CVAP, election returns
- Measurement challenges and identification strategies

Readings

- Cramer Walsh, Katherine. 2012. "Putting Inequality in Its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective," American Political Science Review.
- Brown, Trevor and Suzanne Mettler. 2023. "Sequential Polarization: The Development of the Rural-Urban Political Divide," Perspectives on Politics.
- Wilkinson, Will. 2019. "The Density Divide: Urbanization, Polarization, and Populist Backlash," Niskanen Center Research Paper.
- Woodard, Colin. 2025. "[Immigrants Once Avoided Some Regions of America. That's a Big Reason We're So Divided.](#)" Politico Magazine.

Assignment

Compute dissimilarity indices, exposure indices, and segregation measures using sample data.

Week 2: Internal Migration - Economics and Politics

Topics

- Why internal migration matters: trends and patterns
- Economic models of migration decisions
- Labor market outcomes and wage convergence
- Political dimensions of internal migration
- Interstate migration and political representation
- Migration networks and information flows
- Barriers to internal mobility: housing costs, occupational licensing
- Interstate competition for residents and firms

Readings

- Jia, Nan, Raven Molloy, Christopher L. Smith, and Abigail Wozniak. "The Economics of Internal Migration: Advances and Policy Questions." *Journal of Economic Literature* 61.1 (2023): 144-180.
- Molloy, Raven, Christopher L. Smith, and Abigail Wozniak. "Declining Migration within the US: The Role of the Labor Market." *NBER Working Paper* 20065 (2014).
- Modestino, Alicia and Julia Dennett. 2013. "Are American Homeowners Locked into their Houses?" *Regional Science and Urban Economics* 43:322-337.
- Jurjevich, Jason R and David A Plane. 2012. Voters on the Move: The Political Effectiveness of Migration and Its Effects on State Partisan Composition. *Political Geography* 31(7):429-443. (requested via ILL)
- Gimpel, James G and Jason E Schuknecht. 2001. Interstate Migration and Electoral Politics. *The Journal of Politics* 63(1):207-231.

Assignment

Analyze IRS county-to-county migration flows: compute net migration rates, identify major sending/receiving regions, calculate demographic composition of flows.

Week 3: The Theory and Politics of the “Homevoter”

Topics

- How local amenities capitalize into housing prices
- School quality and property values
- Proposition 13 and capitalization
- Tax capitalization and the "new view" of property taxation
- Measuring capitalization: Hedonic methods and quasi-experiments

Readings

- Tiebout, Charles M. (1956). "A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures." *Journal of Political Economy*, 64(5), 416–424.
- Black, Sandra E. (1999). "Do Better Schools Matter? Parental Valuation of Elementary Education." *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 114(2), 577–599.
- Fischel, William A. (2004). "An Economic History of Zoning and a Cure for its Exclusionary Effects." *Urban Studies*, 41(2), 317–340.
- Schragger, Richard. 2003. "Consuming Government," *University of Michigan Law Review*.
- Brunner, Eric, Jon Sonstelie, and Mark Thayer. (2001). "Capitalization and the Voucher: An Analysis of Precinct Returns from California's Proposition 174." *Journal of Urban Economics*, 50(3), 517–536.
- Fennell, Lee Anne. (2002). "Homes Rule" (Review of Fischel). *Yale Law Journal*, 112(3), 617–624.

Assignment

Estimate hedonic price model using Zillow or CoreLogic data; test for school quality capitalization.

Week 4: Capitalization Theory and Housing Prices

Topics

- Housing prices as capitalized present value of amenity flows
- Components of capitalization: schools, crime, parks, neighbors, taxes, services
- Empirical challenges in measuring capitalization
- Omitted variables and selection bias
- Hedonic regression approach: theory and limitations
- Quasi-experimental designs: boundary discontinuities, repeat sales models
- Political implications of capitalization
- Wealth effects and distributional consequences
- Sorting mechanisms enabled by capitalization
- Zoning and land use as capitalization tools

Readings

- Rosen, Sherwin. (1974). "Hedonic Prices and Implicit Markets: Product Differentiation in Pure Competition." *Journal of Political Economy*, 82(1), 34–55.
- Oates, Wallace E. (1969). "The Effects of Property Taxes and Local Public Spending on Property Values: An Empirical Study of Tax Capitalization and the Tiebout Hypothesis." *Journal of Political Economy*, 77(6), 957–971.
- Chay, Kenneth Y. and Michael Greenstone. (2005). "Does Air Quality Matter? Evidence from the Housing Market." *Journal of Political Economy*, 113(2), 376–424.
- Bayer, Patrick, Fernando Ferreira, and Robert McMillan. (2007). "A Unified Framework for Measuring Preferences for Schools and Neighborhoods." *Journal of Political Economy*, 115(4), 588–638.
- Cellini, Stephanie Riegg, Fernando Ferreira, and Jesse Rothstein. (2010). "The Value of School Facility Investments: Evidence from a Dynamic Regression Discontinuity Design." *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 125(1), 215–261.

Assignment

Replicate Black (1999) boundary discontinuity design using local school district data; estimate capitalization effect of test score differences.

Week 5: Housing, Debt, and Political Behavior

Topics

- Homeownership and political participation
- Mortgage debt and voting behavior
- Housing wealth effects on partisan identification
- Foreclosures, financial distress, and incumbent support
- The "collateral channel" in electoral politics
- Mortgage credit conditions and presidential elections
- Differences between renters and homeowners in policy preferences
- Housing appreciation and political attitudes

Readings

- Hall, Andrew B. and Jesse Yoder. "Does Homeownership Influence Political Behavior? Evidence from Administrative Data." *Journal of Politics* 84.1 (2022): 1-15.
- Yoder, Jesse. "Does Property Ownership Lead to Participation in Local Politics? Evidence from Property Records and Meeting Minutes." *American Political Science Review* 114.4 (2020): 1213-1229.
- McCartney, W. Ben. 2021. "Does Household Finance Affect the Political Process? Evidence from Voter Turnout During a Housing Crisis." *The Review of Financial Studies*
- Choi, Chi-Young, David Quigley, and Xiaojun Wang. "The Impacts of Local Housing Markets on U.S. Presidential Elections: Via the Collateral Channel." *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics* 87.2 (2025): 451-481.
- Calomiris, Charles W., Stanley D. Longhofer, and William Miles. "Mortgage market credit conditions and U.S. Presidential elections." *Journal of Banking & Finance* 117 (2020): 105851.

Assignment

Use housing price data and election returns to test whether counties with greater housing appreciation showed different voting patterns.

Week 6: Political Manipulation of Housing Markets - The Curley Effect

Topics

- The Curley Effect: Using policy to shape the electorate
- Strategic redistribution and migration
- Wasteful policies that benefit core constituencies
- Inducing opponent out-migration through hostile policies
- Case studies: Boston (Curley), Detroit (Coleman Young), Zimbabwe (Mugabe)
- Zoning as deliberate segregation tool
- How politicians use land use control to benefit supporters

Readings

- Glaeser, Edward L. and Andrei Shleifer. "The Curley Effect: The Economics of Shaping the Electorate." *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 21.1 (2005): 1-19.
- Trounstein, Jessica. *Segregation by Design: Local Politics and Inequality in American Cities*. Cambridge University Press, 2018. (Chapters 1-2, 4)
- Clingermayer, James C. "Distributive Politics, Ward Representation, and the Spread of Zoning." *Public Choice* 77.4 (1993): 725-738.
- Glaeser, Edward L. and Joseph Gyourko. "The Impact of Zoning on Housing Affordability." *Economic Policy Review* 9.2 (2003): 21-39.
- Einstein, Katherine, David Glick, and Maxwell Palmer. 2019. *Neighborhood Defenders*, Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1: Introduction
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Assignment

Case study - Document evidence of strategic policy-making to benefit particular groups through housing/zoning policy in one city.

Week 7: State Tax Policy and Residential Sorting

Topics

- Property tax revolts: Proposition 13 and its national diffusion
- How tax limitations affect mobility and housing markets
- State income tax differentials and migration
- Sales tax competition among localities
- Tax increment financing and neighborhood change
- Political economy of tax limitation movements
- Who benefits from tax revolts? Generational and distributional effects
- TABOR and other tax and expenditure limitations
- Tax policy as tool for attracting/retaining residents
- Fiscal competition and the race to the bottom debate

Readings

- Martin, Isaac William. (2008). *The Permanent Tax Revolt: How the Property Tax Transformed American Politics. Stanford University Press. (Chapters 1, 3, 6)
- O'Sullivan, Arthur, Terri A. Sexton, and Steven M. Sheffrin. (1995). *Property Taxes and Tax Revolts: The Legacy of Proposition 13. Cambridge University Press. (Chapter 4: "Proposition 13 and Residential Mobility")
- Young, Cristobal and Charles Varner. (2011). "Millionaire Migration and State Taxation of Top Incomes: Evidence from a Natural Experiment." National Tax Journal, 64(2), 255-284.
- Slattery, Cailin and Owen Zidar. (2020). "Evaluating State and Local Business Incentives." Journal of Economic Perspectives, 34(2), 90-118.
- Vigdor, Jacob L. (2004). "Other People's Taxes: Nonresident Voters and Statewide Limitation of Local Government." Journal of Law and Economics, 47(2), 453-476.
- Hawkins, Brett W. and Regina M. Dougherty. (2006). "Work-residence mismatches and the incidence of local taxation in US metropolitan areas." Urban Studies, 43(11), 2091-2107.

Assignment

Analyze migration patterns before and after a major state tax change (Prop 13 in California, state income tax adoption/elimination, or TABOR in Colorado); test whether tax changes affected who moved in/out.

Week 8: Racial Sorting and Residential Segregation

Topics

- Historical patterns of racial segregation
- Redlining and path dependency
- Preferences vs. constraints in segregation
- Willingness to pay for diversity/segregation
- Racial composition and housing price dynamics
- Tipping points and neighborhood change

Readings

- Krysan, Maria, Kyle Crowder, and Michael D. M. Bader. "Realizing Racial and Ethnic Neighborhood Preferences? Exploring the Mismatches Between What People Want, Where They Search, and Where They Live." *Demography* 52.4 (2015): 1249-1274.
- Zubrinsky Charles, Camille. 2003. "The Dynamics of Racial Residential Segregation," *Annual Review of Sociology*.
- Bayer, Patrick, Fernando Ferreira, and Stephen L. Ross. "Are people willing to pay for less segregation? Evidence from U.S. internal migration." *Regional Science and Urban Economics* 53 (2015): 1-12.
- Howell, Junia and Elizabeth Korver-Glenn. "The Increasing Effect of Neighborhood Racial Composition on Housing Values, 1980-2015." *Social Problems* 68.4 (2021): 1051-1071.

Assignment

Analyze relationship between neighborhood racial composition and housing price trends in one metropolitan area.

Week 9: Partisan and Ideological Sorting - Theory and Evidence

Topics

- The "Big Sort" hypothesis
- Partisan preferences for neighborhood characteristics
- Stated vs. revealed preferences for political compatibility
- Constraints on partisan sorting: schools, affordability, jobs
- Migration and polarization: correlation vs. causation
- In situ partisan change vs. selective migration

Readings

- Bishop, Bill and Robert G. Cushing. *The Big Sort*. Introduction, Chapters 1-2.
- Mummolo, Jonathan and Clayton Nall. "Why Partisans Do Not Sort: The Constraints on Political Segregation." *Journal of Politics* 79.1 (2017): 45-59.
- Hui, Iris S. and James G. Gimpel. "Seeking politically compatible neighbors? The role of neighborhood partisan composition in residential sorting." *Political Geography* 48 (2015): 130-142. ([Interlibrary loan](#))
- Martin, Gregory J. and Steven W. Webster. "Does Residential Sorting Explain Geographic Polarization?" (Full paper).
- Liu, Xuancheng, et al. "Migration and political polarization in the U.S.: An analysis of county-to-county migration flows." *PLoS ONE* 14.11 (2019).

Assignment

Short essay (3-4 pages) - Argue for or against "migration drives polarization," citing empirical evidence.

Week 10: Gentrification as Political Process

Topics

- Defining gentrification: economic vs. political perspectives
- Political drivers of neighborhood change
- Upzoning, downzoning, and displacement
- Role of elected officials in managing gentrification
- Voting patterns in gentrifying neighborhoods
- Class conflict over neighborhood change
- Resistance movements and their effectiveness
- Affordable housing mandates and inclusionary zoning
- Community benefits agreements
- Gentrification and political representation

Readings

- Autor, David, Christopher Palmer, and Parag Pathak. (2014). "Housing Market Spillovers: Evidence from the End of Rent Control in Cambridge, Massachusetts." *Journal of Political Economy*, 122(3), 661-717.
- Hwang, Jackelyn and Robert J. Sampson. (2014). "Divergent Pathways of Gentrification: Racial Inequality and the Social Order of Renewal in Chicago Neighborhoods." *American Sociological Review*, 79(4), 726-751.
- Stein, Samuel. (2019). *Capital City: Gentrification and the Real Estate State*. Verso Books. (Chapters 1-2)
- Mast, Evan. (2023). "The Effect of New Market-Rate Housing Construction on the Low-Income Housing Market." *Journal of Urban Economics*, 133, 103383.
- Freeman, Lance. (2005). "Displacement or Succession? Residential Mobility in Gentrifying Neighborhoods." *Urban Affairs Review*, 40(4), 463-491.
- Schaller, Jessamyn and Yona Rubinstein. (2020). "Neighborhood Gentrification and Voting." National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 27515.

Assignment

Select one gentrifying neighborhood in a major city. Document: (1) timeline of policy changes (zoning, development approvals, public investment), (2) voting patterns in local elections before/during gentrification, (3) evidence of political mobilization by existing residents or newcomers.

Week 11: Unintentional Gerrymandering and Political Geography

Topics

- How residential clustering creates "unintentional gerrymandering"
- Urban concentration of Democratic voters
- Geographic compactness of parties
- Senate malapportionment
- Electoral College distortions
- Neutral redistricting rules and partisan outcomes

Readings

- Chen, Jowei and Jonathan Rodden. "Unintentional Gerrymandering: Political Geography and Electoral Bias in Legislatures." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 8.3 (2013): 239-269.
- Rodden, Jonathan. "The Geographic Distribution of Political Preferences." *Annual Review of Political Science* 13 (2010): 321-340.
- Warshaw, Christopher. "Local Elections and Representation in the United States." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22 (2019): 461-479.

Assignment

Simulation exercise - Create alternative redistricting maps for one state; calculate partisan bias measures.

Week 12: Infrastructure Politics and Racial Geography

Topics

- Federal Highway Act of 1956 and urban destruction
- Deliberate routing of highways through Black neighborhoods
- Case studies: Detroit (I-375), Birmingham (I-59/20), Los Angeles (I-10), Atlanta (I-20)
- Urban renewal as "Negro removal"
- Political economy of infrastructure siting decisions
- Who decides where infrastructure goes?
- Long-run effects on residential patterns and wealth accumulation
- Path dependency: how mid-century decisions shape current geography
- Contemporary infrastructure justice movements
- Reparative approaches: highway removal, community reconnection

Readings

- Connolly, Nathan D.B. (2014). *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida. University of Chicago Press. (Chapter 7: "The Ends of Fair Housing")
- Rothstein, Richard. (2017). *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America. Liveright. (Chapter 6: "White Flight")
- Avila, Eric. (2014). *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City. University of Minnesota Press. (Introduction, Chapter 1)
- Archer, Deborah N. (2020). "'White Men's Roads Through Black Men's Homes': Advancing Racial Equity Through Highway Reconstruction." *Vanderbilt Law Review*, 73(5), 1259-1330.
- Baum-Snow, Nathaniel. (2007). "Did Highways Cause Suburbanization?" *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 122(2), 775-805.
- Davoudi, Simin and Ali Madanipour, eds. (2015). *Reconsidering Localism. Routledge. (Chapter on infrastructure inequalities)

Assignment

Case study: Select one urban freeway built through a minority neighborhood.

Document: (1) political decision-making process and key actors, (2) contemporary opposition/support, (3) demographic and property value changes in affected areas 1950-1980, (4) current calls for highway removal or mitigation.

Week 13: Redistricting and Housing Markets

Topics

- How redistricting affects property values
- School district boundary changes and capitalization
- Annexation politics and property values
- Political incentives in drawing district and service boundaries
- Municipal fragmentation as political strategy
- Special district formation: who benefits?
- Case studies: cities that resisted consolidation
- Secession movements and boundary disputes
- Exclusionary incorporation
- Effects of redistricting on neighborhood investment and development

Readings

- Ananat, Elizabeth Oltmans. (2011). "The Wrong Side(s) of the Tracks: The Causal Effects of Racial Segregation on Urban Poverty and Inequality." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 3(2), 34-66.
- Burns, Nancy. (1994). *The Formation of American Local Governments: Private Values in Public Institutions*. Oxford University Press. (Chapters 1, 3)
- Trounstein, Jessica. (2010). "Representation and Accountability in Cities." *Annual Review of Political Science*, 13, 407-423.
- Einstein, Katherine Levine and Vladimir Kogan. (2016). "Pushing the City Limits: Policy Responsiveness in Municipal Government." *Urban Affairs Review*, 52(1), 3-32.
- Sahn, Alexander. (2022). "The Political Economy of School District Secession." *American Political Science Review*, 116(4), 1510-1517.
- Agrawal, David R. and William H. Hoyt. (2018). "Commuting and Taxes: Theory, Empirics, and Welfare Implications." *Economic Journal*, 128(616), 2969-3007.

Assignment

Analyze one metropolitan area with multiple municipalities. Map: (1) municipal boundaries overlaid with median home values, (2) school district boundaries overlaid with test scores, (3) special district boundaries (if available). Test whether property values show discontinuities at boundaries. Explain political incentives that created this fragmentation.

Week 14: Policy Interventions and Future Directions

Topics

- Moving to Opportunity and neighborhood effects
- Housing vouchers and integration
- Barriers to residential mobility: information, discrimination, search costs
- Place-based vs. people-based policies
- Political feasibility of integration policies
- Zoning reform and housing abundance
- Inclusionary zoning and affordable housing mandates
- State preemption of local land use control
- Climate migration and political geography
- Future research directions

Readings

- Chetty, Raj and Nathaniel Hendren. (2018). "The Impacts of Neighborhoods on Intergenerational Mobility I: Childhood Exposure Effects." *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 133(3), 1107-1162.
- Bergman, Peter, Raj Chetty, Stefanie DeLuca, Nathaniel Hendren, Lawrence F. Katz, and Christopher Palmer. (2023). "Creating Moves to Opportunity: Experimental Evidence on Barriers to Neighborhood Choice." *American Economic Review*, 113(11), 2807-2854.
- Ludwig, Jens, et al. (2013). "Long-Term Neighborhood Effects on Low-Income Families: Evidence from Moving to Opportunity." *American Economic Review*, 103(3), 226-231.
- Lens, Michael C. and Paavo Monkkonen. (2016). "Do Strict Land Use Regulations Make Metropolitan Areas More Segregated by Income?" *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 82(1), 6-21.
- Huang, Hanchen and Ryan Butts. (2023). "COVID-19 and Urban Exodus: Patterns and Consequences." *Journal of Urban Economics*, 138, 103570.
- Nall, Clayton. (2015). "The Political Consequences of Spatial Policies: How Interstate Highways Facilitated Geographic Polarization." *Journal of Politics*, 77(2), 394-406.

Assignment

Policy memo (5-7 pages): Design an intervention to reduce residential segregation and improve democratic representation in one metropolitan area. Address: (1) specific policy tools, (2) expected effects with supporting evidence, (3) political feasibility and stakeholder analysis, (4) potential unintended consequences.

