

PRINCETON FELLOWS

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I had an incredible summer as a research intern for the Center for Voting and Democracy (also known as FairVote), and am incredibly grateful to the Liman Program for making it possible. As I conclude my summer, I am more committed, educated, and prepared to advocate for structural reforms to ensure our country's government equitably and accurately represents its residents.

The Center For Voting and Democracy is a non-profit, non-partisan political reform group based in the DC metropolitan areas. American democracy is broken. FairVote researches, campaigns, and promotes numerous reforms (including universal voter registration, a constitutional right to vote, proportional representation districting, a national popular vote for president, and ranked choice voting) that would strengthen the electoral system. FairVote also has an active legal department, and its lawyers participate in cases involving voting rights. I was drawn to FairVote for two reasons. First, academic research unequivocally shows that their reforms would raise turnout, particularly in disadvantaged communities. Second, it is often the sole organization to advocate for critical structural

reforms (notably proportional representation) that would engage more voters in our democracy.

I worked in the Research and Legal departments of FairVote. Broadly, I researched (1) structural reforms that reduce voter turnout of minorities and low-income voters and (2) the state of women's representation in American government. I wrote numerous memoranda, blog posts, and research papers, and I provide highlights of the most important ones below.

- *Municipal Madness: The Dire Consequences of Falling Voter Turnout in Local Elections*

I wrote this report examining the implications of falling municipal turnout. It is relatively long (26 single spaced pages, 120 footnotes, and 11 graphs). It focuses on the policy consequences of low voter turnout on welfare generosity, tax rates, tax code progressivity, levels of government spending, and general amounts of government regulation and activism. It also addresses representation on city governments, responsiveness of city governments, social capital, equitable electorates, and polarization. It concludes with a case study, in which I examine Los Angeles in detail. It will be available on the FairVote website in the fall.

- *California Primary Turnout Project*

Executive Director Rob Richie and I co-authored this long blog series on low-turnout in the California primary. It reflects on the dismal turnout in the June 2014 California primary election, puts the election in context of California elections, history, and culture, and reflects on the consequences of low voter engagement and unrepresentative turnout. It also advocates for four reforms (national popular vote, fair representation voting, rank choice voting, and a culture of voting through a constitutional right to vote and universal voting registration). It was posted to the FairVote blog and as a series on Huffington Post, where it generated somewhat strong engagement. It can be accessed here: <http://www.fairvote.org/research-and-analysis/blog/whats-the-matter-with-california-turnout/>

- *Expanding the Franchise Legal Research*

I conducted research, which I incorporated into a memo, on the Department of Justice's lawsuits regarding Section 203 of the Voting Rights Language Assistance Act and Section 208 of the Voting Rights in Miami Dade County. I also wrote a memorandum on whether California charter cities have the authority to lower the voting to 16 for municipal elections based on Section II of the California Constitution and a plethora of legal precedents. Another issue I addressed is whether general

law cities must use staggered elections referring to the California Election Code, Section 1000.

- *Representation 2020 work*

I supplemented FairVote's efforts to research why America trails other western democracies in women's representation. I surveyed the female city council members of America's 100 largest cities, wrote two blog posts on women's representation issues, updated the Representation 2020 parity index, drafted a template of a city council resolution, and conducted many other research tasks related to this project.

Throughout all of these projects and the other assignments, I worked closely with Policy Analyst Andrew Douglas, Executive Director Rob Richie, Representation 2020 Director Cynthia Terrell, and Policy Analyst Andie Levien (who just left FairVote to enter Yale Law this fall).

I have attached a few pictures and one of them shows a particularly memorable moment. FairVote partners with the ACLU and the Brennan Center For Justice, and I attended an event on Capitol Hill featuring Senator Cardin and Senator Paul. This ACLU/Brennan Center event hosted the Senators as they unveiled the Democracy Restoration Act and the Civil Rights Voting Acts, which are the Senator's respective plans to restore voting

rights to felons. It was inspiring to see the conservative Republican and liberal Democrat put aside politics and untie for voting rights; without Liman, I doubt I would have been sitting in the front row when they did it.

Thank you for making this wonderful opportunity a reality. It was a phenomenal summer. Conducting legal research convinced me that law could be a force for proactive, tangible social change; this summer helped convince me to apply to law school. Let me know if you have any questions, and thank you again.









