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By Ginger Adams O'Niels, professor of political science and international affairs at Columbia University.

Not only does she teach classes in the political science department and the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA)—and turn out award-winning papers—but she’s also written three books (and counting)—pub-

lished numerous papers, given multi-

ple lectures at universities and

distinguished scholars. “It’s hard to imagine how Sharyn

O’Halloran, professor of political

science at Columbia University, could have

achieved so much at such a young age. She

was already filling up with expectations when she

entered Barnard College, the College for Women, and

headed to Stanford University.

There she studied economics, took writing courses and finally became

enrolled in the Stanford Law School in 1950, at a time when only

3 percent of law school students were women.

She explained. “I love the work, but my desk is

still cluttered with papers. I can’t keep up with the

voting districts. If we could build coalitions in communities and
elect a particular candidate to office, the district boundaries might

achieve substantive representation—that is, policy

representation—of minority voters.

With a key provision of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which, among

other things, limited the lines in which districts could be gerrymer-

tered, its impact has been undeniable. It is a tragedy that the

question is immensely relevant.

In 1965, when white voters rarely cast ballots across color lines, heavily minority districts were

largely ignored. The Supreme Court, recognizing the importance of the issue, adopted our language of

racial redistricting.

We did a lot of research and sta-

tistical analysis on trends in minority vote.

In 1959, Sharyn O’Halloran, who col-

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were two ways for minorities to influ-

ence the political process. They can build coalitions in communities and
elect a particular candidate to office, or they can build coalitions in legis-

latures. Sometimes both these objec-
tives go hand in hand; and sometimes they don’t.

At issue, the professor says, is

whether so-called majority-minority voting districts are

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