

7. Congress

Breakout Sessions

POLS 1101

**12:40pm-1:30pm Park Hall 145
& 1:50pm-2:40pm Leconte Hall 135**

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Exam Hand Back

- **Add points wrong**
 - **WITHIN TODAY (Friday)**
- **Questions on why I lost points in short-answers**
 - **Tomorrow (Saturday)**
- **Appeal your grade**
 - **48 hours later (Sunday)**
 - **Do as told by the syllabus**
 - You must write a statement to have the assignment regraded saying why you believe you should have received more credit and you will need to give me your blue book.
 - If you appeal your grade, I (your TA) will need to regrade which could result in a higher grade, a lower grade, or no change at all.
 - Only submit an appeal if you are sure that you can make a strong case for a higher score!
 - If you are still unsatisfied with your grade after that, you can repeat the process with Professor Nicholson.

The Origin and Powers of Congress

- *The origin of Congress came as a balance of benefits between large and small states – the **Senate** for equal representation (small), the **House** for large ones.*
- **How are members of congress elected?**
 - The Senate: 17th Amendment -> direct election by popular vote
 - The House: directly based on population -> **reapportionment** (after each census, the redistribution of representatives among the states based on population change)
- **Powers**
 - The Senate: to approve major presidential appointments and treaties with foreign nations
 - The House: the power of **impeachment** (the formal charging of a government official with serious crimes)

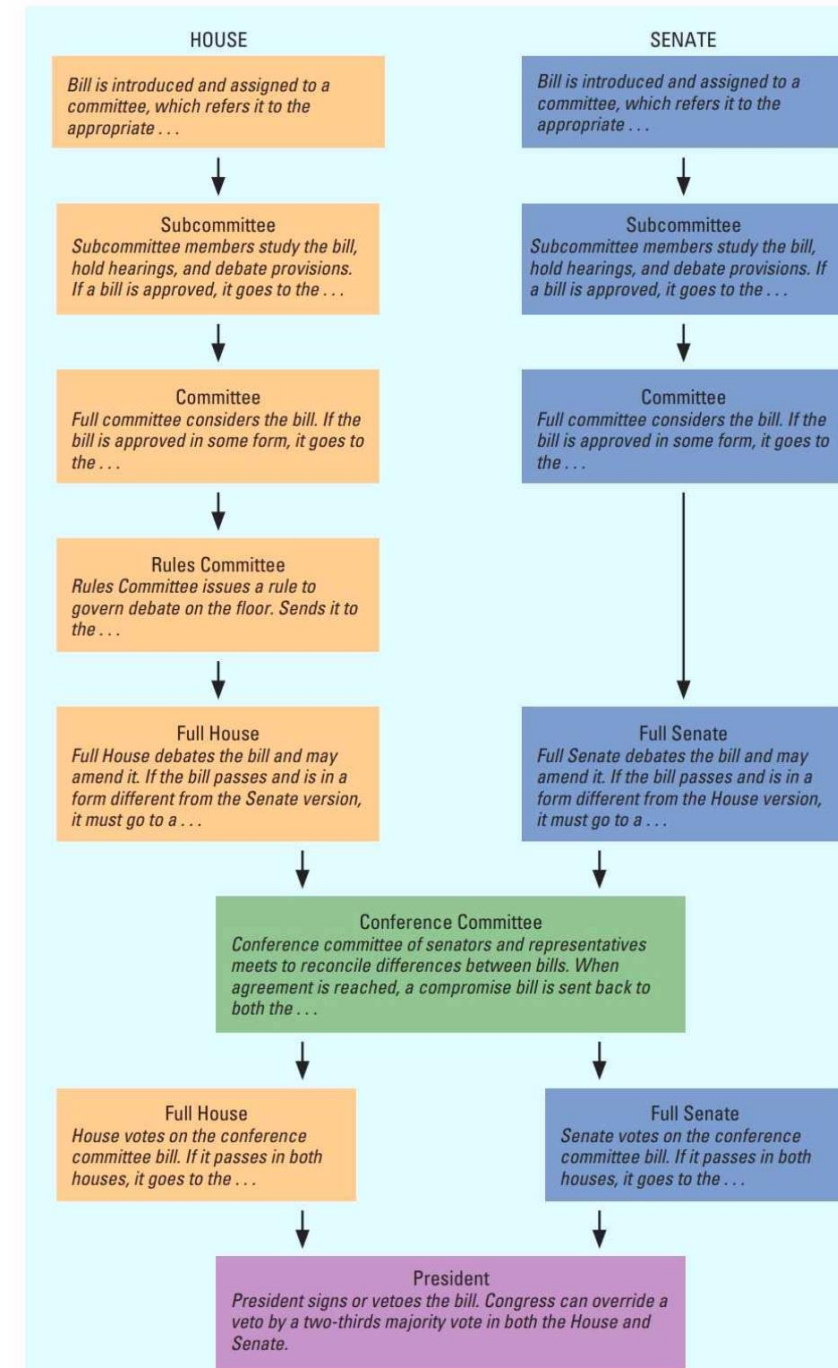
Electing Congress

- **The Incumbency Effect – Centralization of resources; Seniority matters!**
 - **Redistricting:** Strategic redistribution of representatives - **gerrymandering**
 - **Name recognition**
 - Franking privilege: the right to send mass communications at taxpayer expense
 - Use of social media: **What do you think of political stars' use of social media? Is it good or bad / substantive or just a performance?**
 - **Casework:** Solving problems in person for constituents
 - **Campaign financing**
- Successful challengers: Also some kind of “centralization”
 - “Vulnerable incumbents bring out higher-quality challengers.”
- Whom do we elect? – Most are upper-class professionals.
 - Elite theory? **Does majoritarian democracy always lead to elite ruling?**
 - **Descriptive representation:** Legislature should resemble the demographic characteristics of the population it represents.

How does Congress work?

- Agenda Setting
- Bill introduced
- Committee & subcommittee -> **specific expertise**
 - “Congress in session is Congress on public exhibition, whilst Congress in its committee-rooms is Congress at work.”
 - Markup sessions: the meetings at which subcommittees and committees actually debate and amend legislation.
 - **Why can members of Congress be usually willing to discuss and negotiate?**
- **Committees**
 - Standing committees (permanent)
 - Joint committee: made up of members of both the House & the Senate, for fact finding or publicizing issues
 - Select committee: for specific, (temporary) purposes
 - Conference committee: rare in practice

Figure 11.3 The Legislative Process



How does Congress work? (cont`d)

- **Leadership**

- The House: Speaker of the house, majority / minority **leader** / **whip**
- The Senate: Vice president (rarely present), *President pro tempore* (honorary), majority leader (actual power holder)

- **Rules of procedure**

- Major differences between the House & the Senate
 - **Amendments:** directly relevant to the bill at hand **v.** they can be irrelevant
 - **Floor debate governing:** Rules committee **v.** unanimous consent agreements
 - **Length of debate:** Only the speaker & minority leader can speak more than 1 hour **v.**
 - **Filibuster:** A delaying tactic used in the Senate that allows any senator to prevent a bill from coming to a vote.
 - **Cloture:** The mechanism by which a filibuster is cut off in the Senate.
 - **Hold:** A letter requesting that a bill be held from floor debate, which signals filibuster.
- Great efforts in coordination -> centralize the authority of party leaders
 - **Is the centralization of power an inevitable result of high coordination costs?**

How does Congress work? (cont`d)

- **Stakeholders in legislation**

- **Political Parties:** leading to majoritarianism

- As a reward to loyalty, those who vote in line with the party can get better assignments.

- **Partisan polarization** leads to harder procedures for a bill to be passed or revised.

- The House majority -> **closed rule**, which only allows amendments to come from the committee that brought the bill to the floor of the chamber.
 - The Senate majority -> **“filling the amendment tree”**, which allows the majority leader to propose all permissible amendments to a post-cloture bill on the floor, preventing the minority party from altering the bill.

- **President:** leading to majoritarianism

- Extension of presidency in the legislative process (“chief legislator”)

- **Constituents:** leading to pluralism

- The diversity of America is mirrored by the geographical basis of representation in Congress. Constituencies push and pull Congress in many different directions.

- **Interest groups:** leading to pluralism

- Lobbies

Majoritarian & Pluralist democracy in Congress

- **Majoritarian**

- Representatives & senators are directly elected. Most committees reflect the general ideological profiles of the two parties' congressional contingents.
- One view: Congress members are **trustees** of their constituents. (They aren't obliged to vote according to their constituents' views if they think it wrong.)
- When legislators act as **trustees**, policymaking becomes less tied to the narrower interests of districts and states. (more **majoritarian**)
 - However, ... can be more tied to partisanship
- Both parties can have similar policy focus (e.g. reduction in deficits).

- **Pluralist**

- Another view: Congress members are **delegates** of their constituents. (faithfully reflect the majority will of constituents)
- When legislators act as **delegates**, congressional policymaking is more **pluralistic**.
- However, when it comes to distribution of benefits, legislators can turn to what they can do for their district or state.

Discussion: Delegates or Trustees?

- Abortion legislation
- Climate Change & Environmental Regulation
- Marijuana Control
- Foreign Policy & War Powers
- Economic Policy & Taxation
- Civil Rights & Minority Rights
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Next week...

- Read materials on **Presidency** before class, and that will be helpful to participate in peer discussions.
- Feel free to email me if you have any questions!
- ENJOY YOUR WEEKEND!