

American Comprehensive Exam Notes

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Contents

1	POS 530 American Politics	2
1.1	Week 1 Introduction	2
1.2	Week 2 Congress	3

1 POS 530 American Politics

1.1 Week 1 Introduction

1.1.1 [Gilens \(2012\)](#) : Affluence and Influence (Book)

Cite Key Gilens2012

Author Martin Gilens

Year 2012

Summary

the association between government policy and public preferences could tell us something important about the responsiveness of our government to the public and the extent to which political influence is reserved for the affluent. Two questions: 1. under which conditions government is responsible 2. Who is among the governed that government respond to.

The author starts with the discussion of democracy and the citizen-government linkages. While Converse argue that American voters do not have coherent ideology and lacks political understandings, there are several ways that citizens can approach politics without sophisticated knowledge: 1. through cue-taking of the more-knowledgeable citizens. 2. Although democratic participation requires some minimal knowledge, citizens only need to be knowledgeable on some issues, not all of them.

Main Findings

Policy preference is measured by the actual policy outcomes. The main interest is the association between the policy outcomes and the degree of support expressed by the public/ or a subgroup.

Comparing education and income classes, policy congruence is more salient with the increasing levels of incomes; Interest group is interrelated with income classes. But income is still dominant factor: on economic and tax domain, interest group is closely related with rich people, on social welfare, interest group is evenly distributed across income classes. On gun control and environment, interest group is running against public wishes.

1.1.2 [Bartels \(2008\)](#) Unequal Democracy

Cite Key: Bartels2008

Author: Larry Bartels

Year: 2008

Summary

The major question of this book is to discuss political equality of a democracy. Economic growth, inequality and political accountability. How to explain the success of the Republican parties if Democrat party helps middle classes so dramatically over the past years? Increasing economic inequality has become a political issue.

Findings

1. Partisan divisions, under R's control, the real income growth for lower and middle income classes has consistently lagged well behind D's administration, also lagged well behind the income growth rates of the rich. Lower unemployment rates under D, but almost identical inflation rates, according to Hibbs 1987
2. Class divisions: Democrats lose support from the middle class and high-income class. However, the general public is not becoming more conservative. Working classes do not value cultural issues more either. (probably race? a US-them division?); Nor did the religious practice a deciding factor.
3. How Rep. can win elections: voters are myopic and only focus on election year performance; 2. Election year income growth for affluent voters is much more consequential, even for low and middle income voters 3. voters are swayed by the balance of campaign spending between incumbents and challengers.

1.2 Week 2 Congress

1.2.1 Sin (2014) Separation of Powers and Legislative Organization

Cite Key Sin2014

Author Gisela Sin

Year 2014

Summary

The goal is to explain the house rule changes in the Congress. The House majority has to anticipate the actions of Senate and the president, as predetermined by the constitution. Also, the House includes fractions of different goals and interests. Intraparty groups are important for the changes of the House rules as well.

Gephardt rule abolishment (Rep)

Constitutional Constraints: any bills requires approval of both House and Senate as well as the president, or a supermajority of both House and Senate.

Intraparty conflicts: conservative Rep. and progressive Rep.

Constitutional Theory of Legislative Organization. Environment: by the Constitution, there are three players in determining the policy outcomes: House, Senate and the president.

Two stages of game: the power-sharing game and the legislative game. In the power-sharing game, house fractions choose rules and procedures that distribute power among themselves. In the legislative game, there are two steps, the bicameral agreement stage and the constitutional stage (require all agreements from House, Senate and the President).

Findings

1. House rules changes as the set of constitutional actors changes. Even holding every House member's ideal point constant, a shift in the ideal point of the Senate or the president can change the constitutional set and the available policy choices of the House.
2. Constitutional set changes predict. Not the change of House median, the party homogeneity, the party polarization, party capacity nor the majority party size.
3. Centralization happens when the nonspeaker group now get closer to the speaker group, or has ally in Senate/president. Decentralization happens when the Senate and president closer to the speaker fraction/ or when House minority controls both Senate and the president.

1.2.2 **Schickler (2001): Disjointed Pluralism: Institutional Innovation and the Development of the US Congress**

Cite Key Schickler2001

Author Eric Schickler

Year 2011

Summary

What explains the institutional changes in Congress? Members have different interests, and different interests are effective at different time periods.

Pluralism: different coalitions promoting a wide range of collective interests drive processes of change. reelection interest, bolster the capacity, power and prestige of the chamber of Congress as a whole, interest of accessing to the institutional power bases, party-based interest, and policy-based interest.

Disjointed: the dynamics of institutional development derive from the interactions and tensions among competing coalitions promoting several different interests.

Predictions: 1. Electoral interests will matter more as member careerism increases (Mayhew 1974). 2. Congressional capacity and power will be more salient following episodes in which the president has gained influence at Congress's expense (Dodd 1977; Sundquist 1981). 3. Members' interest in institutional power bases will generate pressure for decentralization following an influx of junior members that substantially alters the seniority distribution (Dodd 1986; Diermeier 1995). 4. Majority party interests will be particularly important when the majority party is internally unified and has policy preferences that are

sharply different from those of the minority (Rohde 1991). 5. Policy-based interests will generate pressure for institutional changes when electoral shocks and other exogenous factors substantially shift the location of the median voter on the floor (Krehbiel 1998; Schickler 2000).

DV: Institutional changes, include leadership instruments, the committee system, and rules and procedures.

Findings

1890 - 1910: the longest successful era of party government in congressional history, multiple collective interests shaped institutional development. Majority party interest, minority party interest, and concerns about congressional capacity also shaped House rules in 1891-95. 1909-1910 reforms even brought a cross-party coalitions for minority Democrats and insurgent Republicans that was united by a confluence of ideological, partisan, and power base concerns.

1919 - 1932: the House majority party was once again more successful than the Senate majority in promoting interests. GOP majority, the institutional changes initiated by Republicans were at least partly intended to improve the GOP's effectiveness. Cross-party coalitions rooted in ideological and sectoral interests also shaped institutional changes during this period, particularly in the Senate. Even in the House, cross-party coalitions enjoyed notable victories in 1924 and in 1931. In both cases, ideological concerns interacted with members' personal power interests to promote reforms that loosened majority leaders' agenda control.

1937 - 1952: majority party interest receded further in importance. The main collective interests were defending Congress from presidential aggrandizement and promoting the cross-party conservative coalition. e.g.: the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946, which is due to the congressional-presidential rivalry.

In the 1970s-1980s, party interests returned to prominence, but they interacted with junior members' power base interests and with a renewed concern that Congress had lost too much ground to the executive branch. The result was an array of institutional changes that augmented majority party influence and helped coordinate spending decisions, but also facilitated entrepreneurship by junior members.

1.2.3 Palsby (1968) The Institutionalization of the U.S. House

Citekey Palsby1968

Author Nelson Palsby

Year 1968

Summary

Institution: 1. it is relatively well-bounded, different from its environment. 2. The organization is relatively complex, its functions are internally separate

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