

2016-11-09

Institutions of Government

Congress

- **Constituents** = the group of people being represented by a Congressperson
- Office Requirements
 - House of Reps
 - * At least 25 years old
 - * Citizen for at least 7 years
 - Senate
 - * At least 30 years old
 - * Citizen for at least 9 years
- Election cycles
 - House of Reps
 - * Popularly elected every two years
 - Senate
 - * Initially, elected by state legislatures every 6 years
 - Due to 17th Amendment, senators are now popularly elected

Districts

- For the assignment of representatives, **districts** are drawn
 - **District** = a section of the state in question
 - The candidate with the plurality in that district wins the seat
 - If a state has x representatives, they draw x districts
- **Redistricting** = the process of state legislatures re-drawing district boundaries
 - Meant to be a mechanism through which the electoral process keeps up to date with a changing population
 - Happens when a new census is done
 - Results in **Gerrymandering** = the drawing of districts to benefit one party
 - * Cram as many of the opposing party into a few, concentrated districts
 - * Let the rest of the districts be a narrow but predictable victory for your party

Incumbency

- **Incumbency** = the state of seeking re-election
- After cold war, there is a large increase in “career politicians”
 - People are seeking stability and level-headedness
- Advantage in advertising and visibility
- **Franking Privileges** = ability to use existing infrastructure to communicate with constituents at no cost
 - Primarily mail system = they can send postage for free
 - * FREE ADVERTISING
- **Gerrymandering** = technically illegal, but is still done
 - As a result, only about 25% of seats were *truly* competitive
- **Credit Claiming**
 - **Casework** = individual help provided to constituents
 - **Pork Barrel** = projects or grants that specifically benefit certain districts/states
 - * Tangible things: roads, bridges, highways, hospitals, schools, etc
 - **Earmark** = extra provisions baked into a bill that benefit a certain group of constituents
 - * Like the “add your pork” instruction on the Mock bill assignment
 - * Less tangible
- **Position Taking** = the act of portraying one’s self as hardworking, principled individuals
 - Can be easier to back up if you have a good voting record
- Much of the time, opponents to incumbents are poorly funded and disorganized in comparison
- *Why do incumbents ever lose?*
 - Scandals
 - Gerrymandering puts them at a disadvantage
 - Anti-government sentiment

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How Congress is Organized to Make Policy

- The Great Compromise

- Established a **bicameral legislature**
 - * Composed of *two* houses
 - Senate
 - House of Representatives
- Federalist Paper 51
 - * “in order to control the legislative authority, you must divide it”
- House of Representatives
 - 435 members = assigned to each state based on population
 - * Each state gets 1 to start with, even if they don’t have that much population
 - 2-year terms in office
 - * Constantly re-elected
 - * Makes the House the institution of government closest to the people
 - Responsible for all spending/taxing bills = **power**
 - Debate time is limited == **rule**
 - * This is because there are 435 PEOPLE
 - General role = regulate spending
- Senate
 - 100 members
 - * Each state gets 2 members
 - Is responsible for federal appointments and foreign affairs = **power**
 - Debate time is not limited = **rule**
 - * **Filibuster** = senator can stand and argue for a bill for as long as they want
 - General role = overseeing the government and foreign affairs

Powers

- Legislative Powers
 - **Expressed Powers**
 - * Also known as **enumerated powers**
 - * Examples
 - Declare war
 - Coin money
 - Levy taxes
 - Control immigration
 - **Implied Powers**

- * Justified by the **Necessary and Proper Clause**
 - Also called **Elastic Clause**
 - Non-Legislative Powers
 - House of Representatives
 - * Decide president if majority of electors is not reached
 - * Initiate impeachment process
 - Senate
 - * Try impeached officials
 - * Verifying treaties
 - Both
 - * Amendment passing
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Dynamics of Power in Congress

- House of Representatives
 - **Speaker of the House** = official elected by House
 - * Exercises significant control over committee assignments and legislation
 - * Serves as coordinator for debate time and committee action
 - **Whips** = party affiliates who exert influence over politicians by threatening to withdraw support of the party to their candidacy
 - House Committee Rules
 - * **Closed Rule** = bill cannot be modified on the floor
 - Must be passed *as-is*
 - * **Open Rule** = bills can be modified on the floor
 - Easier to get passed
 - Possible that bill's purpose will be compromised into nonexistence
- Senate
 - **Vice President** = official that oversees the Senate
 - **President Pro-Tempore** = An official, typically a Senator, that the Senate elects to be a “backup” president in case the President and Vice President die
 - * Typically the senior member of the majority party

- Each party’s senators elects a leader
 - * Majority party’s leader effectively controls the Senate because he can influence the majority of the delegates
 - * Minority party’s leader is essentially powerless
- **Filibuster** = unlimited debate time
 - * Introduced in the 1830’s
- **Cloture** = a vote that moves to end debate on a topic
 - * Requires a super-majority(60%)

Congressional Committees

- **Congressional Committees** = collection of Congresspeople that principally focus on a few issues
 - **Chairman** = leader of committee
 - Central role: consider and develop legislation
 - **Standing Committee** = a permanent committee
 - * Allocated one subject on which to consider policy
 - * Constitutes the source of most bills
 - **Select/Special Committee** = short-term committee meant to address a pressing issue
 - * Traditionally functions as an investigative body
 - * **Oversight Hearings** = individuals associated with the federal bureaucracy testify to things that are investigated by certain Congressional committees
 - **Joint Committee** = a committee composed of members from both chambers of Congress that are meant to serve interests of Congress as a whole
 - * Considers issues directly related to Congress as a whole
 - * Oversees Congressional support agencies
 - **Conference Committee** = a committee composed of members from both chambers of Congress that exists to resolve legislative disputes
 - * Forms compromises on bills so they are more widely appealing

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Examples of Congressional Committees

- **House Rules Committee** = attaches “rules” to bills

- Most powerful committee
- Can control how much time is given to debate
 - * If it is, they decide *when*
- **House Appropriations Committee** = responsible for allocating funds for specific programs and projects
- **House Ways and Means Committee** = responsible for considering tax bills in House of Representatives
- **Senate Finance Committee** = responsible for considering tax bills in Senate

How Do I Get On a Committee?

- Members of Congress want to get on the best committee for **them**
 - Typically region-specific
 - * *e.g.* Arizona reps focus a lot on immigration committees
 - In order to get on their desired committees, they typically need party consent
 - * Parties make efforts to get approved members onto certain committees

How Do I Get to Lead a Committee?

- **Committee Chair** = big dog
 - Always held by the majority party
 - * Not a codified rule, but a tradition that is kept to
- Biggest factor is **seniority**
 - **Seniority** = *how long have you been involved in this issue?*

Can I Pass Legislation Without a Committee?

- **Answer:** *yes*
 - **Discharge Petition** = a tool used to bring a bill up for voting in the House of Representatives or the Senate **without** requiring a committee to pass it
 - * Typically used if a committee head is purposefully blocking the bill
 - * Fairly rare—a very difficult process

Congressional Caucuses

- **Caucus** = a collection of Congresspeople that share a similar characteristic or goal
 - Principal role: pressure committee to meet and petition Congress to vote for their bills

Congressional Staff

- **Personal Staff** = hired persons that work for a member of Congress
 - Primarily serves to represent constituents
 - Also helps research and write bills
- **Committee Staff** = persons hired by the committee
 - Roles
 - * Organize meetings
 - * Research and write bills
 - Main target of lobbyists
- **Staff Agencies** = organizations that give specific information to Congress
 - **CRS** = **C**ongressional **R**esearch **S**ervice
 - **GAO** = **G**overnment **A**ccountability **O**ffice
 - * Keeps track of expenses, receipts, etc
 - **CBO** = **C**ongressional **B**udget **O**ffice
 - * Responsible for disclosing information about the budget

How Does a Bill Become a Law

- **Bill** = a proposed law
- *Anybody* can draft a bill
- Party leaders play important role in steering bill
- House is more “regulated” than the Senate
- *Who writes the bill?*
 - **Delegate** = a person meant to represent the constituents
 - * Steers development of bills to match interests of the people
 - **Trustee** = a person who isn’t expected to represent anyone but themselves

Congress-President Relationship: Partners and Antagonists

- Presidents have many tools for influencing Congress
 - Electoral support = *I was popularly elected; you better listen to me or you won't get re-elected*
 - Veto power
- In order for Presidential influence to successfully impact Congress, he must win several battles

Lobbyists

- There are over 26 lobbyists per member of Congress
- Congress is capable of just *ignoring* lobbyists
 - Additionally, they can place regulations on what they can do
- Lobbyists and many other groups