

POL-UA 395
COMPARATIVE LEGISLATIVE INSTITUTIONS
SPRING 2012

Instructor: Professor Adam Ramey

Time and Location: W 12:30-3:00pm, 12 Waverly Place Room L113

Office: 212-998-8513

E-mail: adam.ramey@nyu.edu

Office Hours: T 2:00-4:00pm, 19 W 4th St. Rm. 220

Course Overview

The goal of this course is give students a broad introduction to the systematic study of legislative institutions. During the course of the semester, we will use the United States Congress as both a blueprint and a stepping-stone for the study of legislatures in other Western democracies. We will begin with a discussion of the nature of institutions and ways of designing mechanisms for representing individuals in large democracies. After that, we will focus on three broad themes: electoral accountability, the role of parties in shaping the legislative arena, and the impact of different institutional arrangements on outcomes. We will begin this part of the course with a survey of the origins and history of Congress. Subsequently, we will look at parties, elections, and institutional variation in a broader, comparative view.

Requirements

Students are expected to come to class every week. Since this is a small seminar, active, *quality* participation is absolutely necessary in order to perform well. I define quality presentation as coming to class, having done the reading, and prepared to discuss the arguments of authors critically. **Also:** I will assign both in class and take home problem sets from time to time. Failure to complete these will affect the participation grade adversely.

As far as grades are concerned, there are six major components to students' final grades. They are broken down as follows:

- Participation, 25%
- Four 2-4 page Reflection Papers, 12.5% each
- Final Research Paper, 25%

The reflection papers are to be thoughtful, literature-informed responses to the “key question” I pose for each week. Students will choose four different weeks to answer. *Note:* in the event that I notice the majority of the class is delaying these response papers until later in the semester, I will assign students to particular questions.

The final research paper is to be a 10-15 page paper that engages one of the main themes in the course. Students will be required to not only review extant research pertinent to their question, but offer a concrete plan to tackle the question empirically. While students will not be expected to conduct a full-fledged data analysis or game-theoretic treatment, they will be expected to sketch out the process by which such a process would be undertaken (e.g., interesting data sources, particular methodological techniques, etc.). *Students must inform me of their project no later than Week 5.* The final paper will be due on the last day of class.

Contacting Me

The best way to contact me is via e-mail. While I check it often, please allow 24-36 hours before sending a “follow-up.”

Required Texts

These texts are necessary and will be read in their entirety (or close to it).

- Charles Stewart. *Analyzing Congress*. 2nd Edition
- John Aldrich. *Why Parties?*
- Michael Gallagher, Michael Laver, and Peter Mair (GLM). *Representative Government in Modern Europe*. 5th edition.

These texts are optional to purchase. We will read a few chapters from each of them. I will place them on reserve at Bobst.

- Gary Cox and Mathew McCubbins. *Legislative Leviathan*. (I)
- Gary Cox and Mathew McCubbins. *Setting the Agenda*. (II)
- Keith Krehbiel. *Pivotal Politics*.
- Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal. *Ideology and Congress*.
- G. Bingham Powell. *Elections as Instruments of Democracy: Majoritarian and Proportional Visions*.
- George Tsebelis. *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work*.

Course Outline

PART I: THE STUDY OF INSTITUTIONS

Week 1: What is an institution and why does it matter? (January 25)

Readings:

- Cox and McCubbins I, Ch. 4
- Daniel Diermeier and Keith Krehbiel. 2003. "Institutionalism as a Methodology." *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 15, no. 2: 201-232.

Week 2: Tools for Analyzing Legislative Institutions (February 1)

Readings:

- Stewart, Ch. 1

Optional:

- Ken Shepsle. *Analyzing Politics*. Entire text.

PART II: THE DESIGN OF LEGISLATURES: CONGRESS AND WESTERN EUROPE

Weeks 3–4: The Origins and History of the American Congress (February 8 and February 15)

KEY QUESTION: How did the conditions of the early American republic (1783-1787) contribute to the institutional foundations of Congress?

Readings:

- Stewart, Ch. 2–3
- Aldrich, Ch. 3–5

Optional:

- Poole and Rosenthal, entire text.

Week 5: The Congress in a Comparative Context (February 22)

KEY QUESTION: In what (institutional) ways does Congress differ from major Western European legislatures/parliaments?

Readings:

- GLM, Ch. 1,3

Paper Proposals due February 22 by end of class!

PART III: ELECTIONS AND REPRESENTATION

Week 6: The Electoral Connection in Congress (February 29)

KEY QUESTION: How do elections constrain the behavior of legislators and how does this differ between the House and the Senate?

Readings:

- Stewart, Ch. 4–5

Week 7: The Electoral Connection in Western Europe (March 7)

KEY QUESTION: How do the different types of electoral districts in Western Europe affect the “representativeness” of European parliaments?

Readings:

- GLM, Ch. 12
- Powell, Ch. 1, 3–5, 7–9

Spring Break

PART IV: POLITICAL PARTIES

Week 8: Why Parties? (March 21)

KEY QUESTION: Do political parties induce political equilibrium or do they simply reinforce existing equilibrium structures in Congress?

Readings:

- GLM, Ch. 8, 9, 11
- Cox and McCubbins I, Ch. 5–6
- Aldrich, Ch. 2

Week 9: Elites and Cleavages (March 28)

KEY QUESTION: What role do party leaders play in shaping legislators’ electoral environments?

Readings:

- Stewart, Ch. 4
- GLM, Ch. 10

Week 10: Parties and Elections (April 4)

KEY QUESTION: In what ways do “parties in elections” differ from “parties in legislatures”?

Readings:

- Stewart, Ch. 5
- Aldrich, Ch. 6, 8

Week 11: Setting the Agenda (April 11)

KEY QUESTION: Does agenda control allow majority parties/coalitions to disproportionately manipulate political outcomes?

Readings:

- Stewart, Ch. 7
- Aldrich, Ch. 7
- Cox and McCubbins II, Ch. 1–3

PART V: INSTITUTIONAL VARIATION AND INTER-BRANCH BARGAINING**Week 12: Presidential Systems (April 18)**

KEY QUESTION: How does separation-of-powers affect equilibrium policy outcomes in the United States?

Readings:

- Stewart, Ch. 9
- Krehbiel, Ch. 1–3, 7

Week 13: Parliamentary Systems (April 25)

KEY QUESTION: How can we think about separation-of-powers across Europe when every country has its own unique lawmaking “pivots”?

Readings:

- Stewart, Ch. 9
- GLM, Ch. 3, 13
- Tsebelis, Ch. 1-2, 4

Week 14: Taking Stock—Voters, Politicians, and Representation (May 2)

KEY QUESTION: How do the competing tensions of electoral accountability, partisan politics, and separation-of-powers affect the end product of legislation?

Readings:

- No additional reading.

Papers due May 2 by end of class!