

Government 30

Lecture 15

Congress #2:
Voting, Parties, Committees

April 5, 2006

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Second Papers handed back today. Average grade: B/B+, and significant improvement over first. Congratulations.
2. Midterms handed back Monday; third paper Qs made available on web
3. Must cancel office hours tomorrow [daddy duty]; add one hour today [4-5PM, CGIS], three hours this coming Tuesday [4/11, 1-4PM, CGIS]

Committees in Congress

- I. Official function: hearings and bill markup.
 - A. Types: standing, select, joint, conference
 - B. Hierarchy: big committees are those which spend or raise \$

House: Ways & Means, Appropriations
Senate: Budget, Finance, Appropriations

Other status comms: Commerce, Armed Services, Judiciary, Agriculture.

Committees in Congress

C. Appointment – by party committees, but once in, *seniority*.

D. Committee power

1. Power to set the agenda: “gatekeeping power” over bills
2. Oversight of agencies, president
3. Grill people you don’t like, or draw attention to a cause by holding hearings [subpoena power is equivalent to that of courts]

Two Theories of Committee Function

A. committees as access points for pork-lovers: *distributive* theory [Weingast]

B. committees as fact-finders: *informational* [Krehbiel]

Stylized fact: why are farm-state reps on the Agriculture Committee? (2 explanations)

- distributive: farm-state reps bring home the bacon to their farm constituents
- informational: the people who should be on an Ag Comm are farm-state reps; they know farms

Parties in Congress

A. Party Hierarchy

- House: Speaker, Majority Leader, Whip
- Senate: President Pro Tempore, Majority Leader, Whip

Policy committee: schedules leg

Steering Committee (Dems), and Comm on Committees (Reps) : committee assignments

Campaign Committees: \$ and org for campaigns

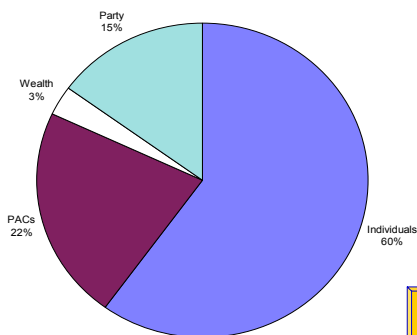
Decline of Congressional Parties?

SUM: Party cohesion was weakening, but now is rising again

1. Incumbency advantage
2. ↓ of parties generally, esp through individualization of campaigns
3. districts more heterogeneous; fewer big wedge issues
4. committee system



1996 Senate Campaign, Sources of Candidate Funds

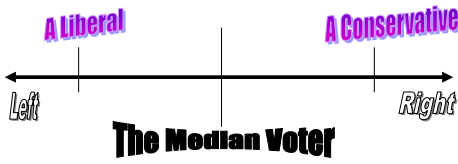


Voting in Congress

1. All sorts of votes occur -- in committee, approval voting (yeas and nays) on floor, roll-call voting
2. Small provisions complicate voter inference: Easy to say someone voted against a program when in fact they voted against a larger bill that contained an increase for the program.
3. Ideology and Party matter heavily, more so at some times than others...

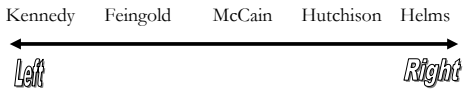
Spatial Voting...

Spatial Voting



Median Voter Theorem: Under certain conditions (well-behaved preferences, independence of irrelevant alternatives) median voter's position is decisive in majority rule contest.

Spatial (Ideological) Placement of Senators



SPATIAL VOTING: AN EXAMPLE USING SENATORS

Five Senators:

1. Ted Kennedy, 2. Debbie Stabenow, 3. John McCain, 4. Kay Bailey Hutchison, 5. Rick Santorum

Four bills:

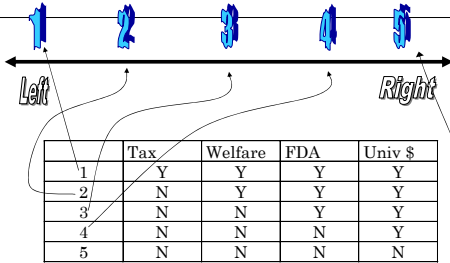
1. \$20B income tax increase
2. increase welfare spending by \$10B
3. expand FDA powers over tobacco
4. \$500M for univ research projects

Expected Votes on the Four Bills

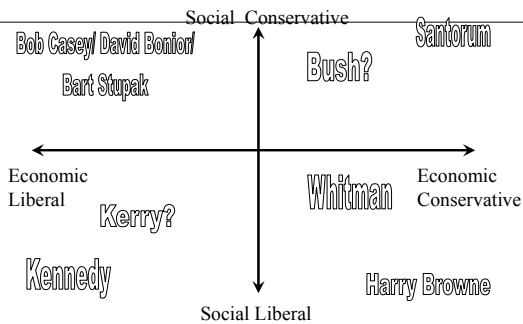
	Tax	Welfare	FDA	Univ \$
Kennedy	Y	Y	Y	Y
Stabenow	N	Y	Y	Y
McCain	N	N	Y	Y
Hutchison	N	N	N	Y
Helms	N	N	N	N

So political scientists often try to work backwards: given a distribution of votes (as above), can we infer anything about ideology, or general voting patterns?

Inferring Ideology from Votes



Ideology in Two Dimensions



Participation in Congress

Rick Hall [Michigan]: On each issue, MCs must decide (a) their position, (b) how much they care. Choice (b) can be as or more important than choice (a).

Example: Suppose I'm "conservative." Do I spend more time and energy on defense issues or tax cutting, pro-life cause or gay marriage?

Suppose I'm "liberal": Do I spend more time on welfare program or more time on environmental protection?

Hall [APSR 1993]: Difficult for moneyed interests to buy votes, but much easier for them to buy **time**.

[APSR 2006]: Lobbying best understood as legislative subsidy.
