

# The United States Congress: Legislative Behavior & Representation

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS, EL PASO

Summer 2021

Course Format: Asynchronous Learning

Course Streams Link: [Microsoft Streams Channel Link \(Click Here\)](#)

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Instructor: Carlos Algara, Ph.D.

Office Hours: Mondays, 2:00-4:00pm (MST) & by appointment

Office Hours Link: <https://utep-edu.zoom.us/j/5752108162>

Course Resources: [Course Blackboard File Repository](#)

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## Course Objective: How do we study legislative behavior, elections, and representation within the context of the United States Congress?

This course offers an introduction to the systematic and meticulous study of the United States Congress on four salient dimensions.

- ★ (1) First, we assess the theoretical underpinnings of Congressional representation and powers as articulated by James Madison in the *Federalist Papers*. We pay special attention to the incentives motivating how individual members of Congress behave and the institutional logic behind Congressional institutions (i.e., the U.S. House & the U.S. Senate), with particular focus on the nature of *transaction costs* in the national legislature.
- ★ (2) Second, we focus on how members of Congress provide representation and how voters exert electoral accountability within this context. We pay particular attention to various models of electoral choice that voters use to make decisions on who represents them in Congress.
- ★ (3) Third, we contrast two different models assessing *how* Congress works internally—the Committee “Textbook” Model & the Partisan Cartel Model—and the differences between the two in terms of policy outcomes and elections. We also pay special attention to the committee structure and the role of political parties by contrasting two distinct theories of legislative policy-making.
- ★ (4) Lastly, we focus on policy-making within Congress and the interplay between Congress with other governmental institutions, such as the presidency. We focus on the degree to which the collective Congress is able to unilaterally exercise its “Article I” power, through the lens of the *Pivotal Politics* model, and why policy change is *slow* and with a *strong status quo bias*. We also discuss the *Pivotal Politics* model within the context of the interplay between Congress and the President.

In this course, we build on the scientific foundation of political science to provide an understanding of what motivates legislative behavior and representation. The main question motivating

the course is a simple, yet complex one: ***what factors influence how Congress behaves as a collective institution and as individual legislators and how well does Congress “represent” the country as a collective institution and at the district-legislator level?*** This course emphasizes the tools you need to assess political behaviors, practices, and institutional representation based on theory and evidence.

Welcome to the class!

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## Course Logistics & Requirements

This section of the syllabus serves as a guide for course expectations (both for me and for you) and logistical information such as grade breakdown and course texts.

**Online Class Format:** Given the global COVID-19 pandemic and our collective effort to stop the transmission of this virus, all lecture class meetings will be conducted online and asynchronously. Given this, all lectures will be recorded and posted on the [Microsoft Streams Channel Link \(Click Here\)](#) that can be accessed on any device on-demand. **Note that you must log in using your UTEP credentials to access the video material.**

**Course Texts & Announcements:** In the event of external readings or course announcements, I will provide those on the [Course Blackboard File Repository](#). There is one assigned textbook for this course which can be purchased wither as a paperback or eTextbook from the UTEP bookstore or various other outlets. The textbook, which I will call *AJS* in the syllabus, citation can be found below:

- ★ Adler, E. Scott, Jeffrey A. Jenkins, & Charles R. Shipan. 2021. *The United States Congress*. Second Edition, W.W. Norton & Company.<sup>1</sup>

### Grade Breakdown & Schedule:

- ★ 40% Midterm Exam
- ★ 40% Final Exam
- ★ 20% Weekly Reaction Posts

≥ 97% A+	87 - 89% B+	77 - 79% C+	67 - 69 D+	< 60% F
93 - 96% A	83 - 86% B	73 - 76% C	63 - 66% D	
90 - 92% A-	80 - 82% B-	70 - 72% C-	60 - 62% D-	

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<sup>1</sup>**Note:** This text is available as an eBook at a reduce cost. While I will use the second edition course text, I suspect that the first edition will suffice for this course.

**Exams (80%):** Both exams will consist of 30 multiple choice questions (worth 60% of the exam) and an essay question (worth 40% of the exam). The essays will involve the large themes covered and will be apparent if you pay close attention in the course. Material will come from the course readings and recorded lectures, with the exam **not being cumulative**. You may take the exam **anytime** during the week and will have **three hours** to complete the exam on the **Course Blackboard Page** once the exam is opened. The exam schedule articulating when, at any-point, you make take the exam is as follows:

- \* Midterm Exam: June 14<sup>th</sup> (Monday) - June 18<sup>th</sup> (Friday)
- \* Final Exam: June 30<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday) - July 7<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday)

**Make-Up Exams:** It is completely the student's responsibility to take the exams when they are scheduled. As a general rule, make-up exams **will not be** allowed; thus, a missed exam counts as a zero (0) toward the final course grade. Notwithstanding, at the instructor's sole discretion make-ups will be permitted, but only the gravest of reasons will be accepted. Even if there is an acceptable reason for missing the regularly scheduled exam, permission to take a make-up will be granted **only** if the student provides the professor with prompt and proper notification.

**Weekly Reaction Posts (20%):** This course component will require you to answer about two to four discussion questions throughout this short summer course, for a total of four weekly reaction posts. **You can turn find the weekly reaction posts prompt, and turn in your response, over the course Blackboard page every week. These posts are due Saturdays at 11:59pm.**

**Academic Dishonesty & Ethics:** This course is about developing critical thought and developing personalized skill-sets necessary to examine politics in a systematic and rigorous way. Thus, it is important to develop your own arguments and work to hone in analytical skills. Academic dishonesty is not only a serious breach of ethics in the university community, but it is also detrimental to your scholarly growth. Ethics breaches, such as cheating and plagiarism, will be referred to the [Office of Student Conduct & Conflict Resolution](#). Students may refer to the [University's Academic Integrity principles](#) for further clarification or may contact the instructor for any specific questions.

**Course Resources:** If accommodations are needed for you to succeed in this course, please speak with me and we will work together to make sure you are accommodated. If you are unsure if you need accommodations, please visit the [UTEP CASS site](#). On another note, I highly recommend taking advantage of the great campus resources offered by the [UTEP Academic Advising Center](#) for strategies on how to succeed not only in this course but throughout your tenure here.

**Late Work Policy:** Unless arranged prior to a given assignment's deadline with the instructor, late work **will not be accepted** in this course. Moreover, this is an online asynchronous course which provides for ultimate flexibility in terms of planning out the drafting and submission of assignments by students.

## Course Road-Map

- ★ Week 1 (6/7-6/11): The Theoretical Framework of Madisonian Republican Government & The Role of Congress
  - [Constitution of the United States](#). 1788. *Particular* emphasis on Articles I, II, IV, & VI.
  - *AJS (Ch.1 in both editions)*: Representation & Governing in a Separated System
  - Burke, Sir Edmund. 1774. [“Speech to the Electors of Bristol.”](#)
  - *Republic at Risk (Ch.2 )*: Big Answers, Better Questions: Madison’s Theory of the Republic<sup>2</sup>
  - **Optional (we will synthesize text in lecture)**: Madison, James. 1787. “Federalist 10.” In [United States Congress Resources](#)
  - **Optional (we will synthesize text in lecture)**: Madison, James (or Alexander Hamilton). 1788. “Federalist 51.” In [United States Congress Resources](#)
  
- ★ Week 2 (6/14-6/18): Models of Electoral Choice, The Electoral Connection, & Campaign Dynamics
  - *Republic at Risk (Ch.4 )*: Who’s In Charge Here? Voting Choice in Elections<sup>3</sup>
  - *AJS (Ch.3 in Second edition, Ch. 4 in First edition)*: Elections
  - *AJS (Ch.4 in Second edition, Ch. 3 in First edition)*: Representation & Governing in a Separated System
  
- ★ **Midterm Exam Live-Review on June 11<sup>th</sup> (Friday), 2:30PM-3:45PM (MST/ELP Time)**  
**Link: <https://utep-edu.zoom.us/j/5752108162>**
  
- ★ **Midterm Exam Window on Week 1 & Week 2 Material (L1-L5 Lectures):**  
**June 14<sup>th</sup> (Monday) - June 18<sup>th</sup> (Friday)**
  
- ★ Week 3 (6/21-6/25): Contrasting The Committee Government Model & Partisan Procedural Cartel Theory
  - Mayhew, David. 1974. “The Electoral Connection and the Congress.” In Terry Sullivan & Matthew Sullivan eds., *Congress: Structure and Policy*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. 1987.<sup>4</sup>
  - Cox, Gary W. & Matthew D. McCubbins. 2005. “Setting the Agenda: Responsible Party Government in the U.S. House of Representatives.” In Steven S. Smith et al. eds. *The American Congress Reader*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. 2009.<sup>5</sup>
  - *AJS (Ch.5 in both editions)*: Committees

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<sup>2</sup>I will provide this reading chapter on the [Course Blackboard File Repository](#).

<sup>3</sup>I will provide this reading chapter on the [Course Blackboard File Repository](#).

<sup>4</sup>I will provide this reading chapter on the [Course Blackboard File Repository](#).

<sup>5</sup>I will provide this reading chapter on the [Course Blackboard File Repository](#).

- *AJS (Ch.6 in both editions): Parties*
- ★ Week 4 (6/28-7/2): How does Congress pass legislation and how does Congress interact with other institutions (i.e., the presidency) towards policy-making? How does the President interact, or fail to interact, with Congress towards providing representation?
  - *Republic at Risk (Ch.7): A Pivotal Politics Model of the Policy Process*<sup>6</sup>
  - *AJS (Ch.7 in both editions): Policymaking in the House & Senate*
  - *AJS (Ch.9 in both editions): Congress & the Presidency*
- ★ **Final Exam Live-Review on June 29<sup>th</sup> (Tuesday), 2:30PM-3:45PM (MST/ELP Time)**  
**Link: <https://utep-edu.zoom.us/j/5752108162>**
- ★ **Final Exam Window on Week 3 & Week 4 Material (L6-L9 Lectures):**  
**June 30<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday) - July 7<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday)**

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<sup>6</sup>I will provide this reading chapter on the [Course Blackboard File Repository](#).