

Congress (1): Representation ("the Electoral Connection")

Module 7, Lecture 1

Shifting Gears: The *Branches* of Government (Discussions of the President and the Courts Will Follow Similar Pattern)

Resources at the disposal of each
branch of government

- **Constituency**: connections between each branch of government and the citizenry (*broader than definition used in text*)
- **Organization**—structure of the branch of government so that it can serve its constituencies

Overview: Balance of Power Between Congress and the President

- 19th Century: Congress dominant
 - President viewed as chief clerk
- 20th Century (particularly 1933-1960s): President dominant
 - The rise of the social welfare state and the national security state
 - Federal government's role shifted to providing goods and services
- Today: Conflict between Congress and President with neither dominant
 - "Divided Government" (different parties controlling different branches of government) the norm
 - Hyper-partisan behavior in Congress (and presidents seeking to "triangulate")

Drawing Districts

- Reapportionment (remember concept of single-member plurality elections)
 - Vast majority of incumbents in safe seats represent districts where the majority of voters are from the same party as they are
- The critical election in these districts is the primary
- Gerrymandering: Redrawing legislative district boundary lines to provide political advantage or disadvantage
- California's Citizens Reapportionment Commission

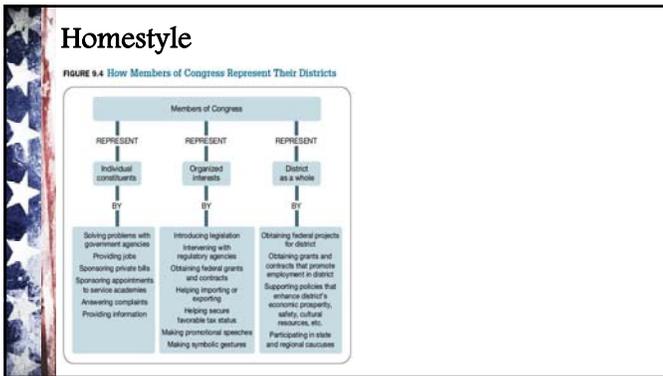
- Districts are drawn tactically = gerrymandering
 - Incumbency protection
 - Partisan gerrymandering
 - Majority-minority districts

The Original Gerrymander

Elbridge Gerry

How do Members of Congress Maintain their Connections to Constituencies? The "Electoral Connection"

- Incumbency
 - Members of Congress have many tools to keep them in office
 - Constituency services
 - Name recognition and title
- Homestyle
 - Direct Patronage
 - Pork-barrel spending
 - Patronage
 - Some local and state elected officials have jobs to offer to constituents
 - Constituent services
 - Private bills



The U.S. Congress in Comparative Perspective: Unique Relative to Other National Legislative Bodies

- It can say “yes” and “no”
- It has independent resources to compete with the Executive
- It governs
 - It must act for government to exist
 - It shapes the outcome of bills
 - It regulates the implementation of laws (oversight)
- It retains autonomous powers over the other branches

In Sum

- Power of Congress – and particularly the House of Representatives – is connection to the people
 - House of Representatives designed to be the “people’s house”
- Connection to the electorate mediated by redistricting (and by party)
- Members of Congress have autonomous powers to connect with constituencies
- Congress is unique among legislative bodies globally
