

PLSC 227: The U.S. Congress (Yale Summer Session Online)

Prof. Amir Shawn Fairdosi

Semester: Summer 2025

Structure: 1.5 hours of recorded lecture followed by 1.5 hours of discussion, twice weekly

Meeting Time: TTH 7:00p.m.-8:30p.m.

My Office: 336 Rosenkranz

Office Hours: F 3:00-4:00

Email: amir.fairdosi@yale.edu

Course Description

This is a survey course on the United States Congress. We will explore such questions as: What are the causes and effects of political polarization? How would term limits affect policy outcomes? What is the effect of money on Congress? Where do/should constituents fit in in all this? How does Congress interact with the President and the bureaucracy? How does one run for office? Why is Congress's approval rating lower than any other institution in the country? These are only a few of the questions we'll be discussing this quarter.

The course is divided into two parts. In Part I, we discuss the theoretical and historical foundations of legislative government the United States. In Part II, we move beyond theories of legislating and on to the way Congress operates in practice.

Course Format

This class will take place entirely online. The format is 1.5 hours of recorded lecture followed by 1.5 hours of discussion, twice weekly.

Please make sure to watch the lectures *before* the corresponding discussion.

Course Requirements (100 points):

1). Midterm (30 points) (June 7-8)

2). Participation in Live Class Discussion (20 points)

Participation includes:

- Watching the relevant lectures BEFORE each discussion session.
- Being an active participant in discussion
- Serving as discussion leader at some point during the semester. (The discussion leader's job is to bring 10 discussion questions to class that are designed to get their classmates thinking and debating. You can find the sign-up sheet on Canvas under "Pages.")

3). Short Paper (15 points) (Due June 27)

4). Final (35 points) (June 28-29)

Course Readings

I will provide electronic copies of all required readings with the exception of two books, which you will need to purchase online:

Siemers, David J. 2018. *The Myth of Coequal Branches*.

H. Davidson, Walter J. Oleszek, Frances E. Lee, and Eric Schickler. 2013. *Congress and Its Members*, 17th Edition. Washington: CQ Press. [Abbreviated as “DOLS” hereafter].

SUMMER COURSE SCHEDULE

Timeline at a Glance (Tuesday), (Thursday)

Week 1: Lectures 1-2, Lectures 3-4

Week 2: Lectures 5-6, Lectures 7-8

Week 3: Lectures 9-10, Lectures 11-12

Week 4: Lectures 13-14, Lectures 15-16

Week 5: Lectures 17-18, Lectures 19-20

Note: Only readings with a * are required. The rest are recommended for further reading.

CLASS 1 (July 1)

Lectures 1-2: Philosophical Foundations, Congressional Supremacy BEFORE the Constitution

Reading

- Siemers, David J. 2018. *The Myth of Coequal Branches*. Intro, Chapters 1, 2, 7.*
- Manin, Bernard. (1997). *The Principles of Representative Government*. Introduction.
- Mill, John Stuart. *Representative Government*.
- Mezey, Michael. (2008). *Representative Democracy: Legislators and Their Constituents*. Chapters. 1–2.
- Pitkin, Hannah. (1967) *The Concept of Representation*. Chapters. 1, 3, (optional: 6, 7)
- DOLS Ch 1-2
- Burke, Edmund. *Speech to the Electors of Bristol*.
- Amy, Douglas. (2002) *Real Choices/New Voices: How Proportional Representation Could Revitalize American Democracy*.

CLASS 2 (July 3)

Lectures 3-4: Congressional Supremacy WITHIN the Constitution

Reading

- The Constitution*
- Federalist Papers, numbers 10, 51
- Federalist Papers, numbers 55, 56, 57, 62, 63
- The Anti-Federalist Papers (All essays by Brutus, Cato, and Melancton Smith).

CLASS 3 (July 8)

Lectures 5-6: Congressional Elections

Reading

- DOLS ch.3*
- DOLS ch.4
- Gary C. Jacobson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, 5th edition, first portion of Chapter 3, Chapters 5-6, and end of Chapter 8 (pp. 21-40, 101-209, 242-67).
- Richard F. Fenno Jr., *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts* (Little, Brown and Company 1978).

- Amy, Douglas. (2002) *Real Choices/New Voices: How Proportional Representation Could Revitalize American Democracy*.
- Sides, John. (February 2013, 2013). "Gerrymandering is Not What's Wrong with American Politics." *The Washington Post*.
- Schattschneider, E.E. 1975. *The Semisovereign People*. Intro, Chapters 1, 2.
- David Epstein and Peter Zensky, "Money Talks: Deterring Quality Challengers in Congressional Elections," *American Political Science Review* 89 (June 1995): 295-308.
- Powell, Lynda W. and Clyde Wilcox. 2010. Read pp 629-649. "Money and American Elections" In *The Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behavior* Ed. Jan E. Leighley Oxford University Press.

CLASS 4 (July 10)

Lectures 7-8: Congressional Elections (contd), Parties

Reading (Elections Contd)

- DOLS ch.5*
- David Mayhew. *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (Updated Edition). New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2004 (1974). "Updated Preface." "Chapter 1: The Electoral Connection.*"
- Kingdon, John (1989). *Congressmen's Voting Decisions, Ch. 9-10*
- Arnold, R. Douglas. 1990. *The Logic of Congressional Action*. Chapters 3-4.

Reading (Parties)

- DOLS ch.6*
- Green, Donald, Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schickler. 2002. *Partisan Hearts & Minds*. Yale University Press. Intro, Chapter 1.
- Cox and McCubbins: *Legislative Leviathan*. Introduction.

CLASS 5 (July 15)

Lectures 9-10: Parties (contd), Committees

Reading (Parties contd)

- Aldrich, John. "Political Parties in America," in *Why Parties? A Second Look*. Pages 3-26.
- Maisel, L. Sandy. "A Brief History of American Political Parties" in *American Political Parties and Elections: A Very Short Introduction*. 2007. Pages 28-55.

Reading (Committees)

- DOLS ch.7*

CLASS 6 (July 17)

Lectures 11-12: Committees (contd), Rules and Procedures

Reading (Committees Contd)

- Fenno, Richard. 1973. *Congressmen and Committees*.

Reading (Rules and Procedures)

- DOLS ch.8*

CLASS 7 (July 22)

Lectures 13-14: Congress and the Executive

Reading

- DOLS ch.10-11*

- Howell, William. (2003). *Power Without Persuasion*. Chapter 5.

CLASS 8 (July 24)

Lectures 15-16: Congress and the Courts, Congressional Staff

Reading (Congress and the Courts)

- DOLS Ch. 12*

Reading (Congressional Staff)

- Fairdosi, Amir. (2013). "New Blood: Policy-Making in a Freshman Congressional Office." *PS: Political Science and Politics*. 46(4), 872-874.*
- Peterson, R Eric. (2011). "Congressional Staff: Duties and Functions of Selected Positions." *Current Politics and Economics of the United States, Canada, and Mexico*. 401-419.

CLASS 9 (July 29)

Lectures 17-18: Congressional Polarization, Congress and Foreign Policy

Reading (Congressional Polarization)

- Lee 2015, How Party Polarization Affects Governance
- Layman, Carsey, Horowitz: Party Polarization in American Politics
- Theriault: Party Polarization in the US Congress
- McCarty etc. Does Gerrymandering Cause Polarization?
- Jones 2001 Party Polarization and Legislative Gridlock
- Geoffrey C. Layman, Thomas M. Carsey, and Juliana Menasce Horowitz. "Party Polarization in American Politics: Characteristics, Causes and Consequences." *Annual Review of Political Science*. 2006. Pp. 83-110.

Reading (Congress and Foreign Policy)

- DOLS ch.15*

CLASS 10 (July 31)

Lectures 19-20 The Budget, Restoring Congressional Supremacy, Interest Groups (if time)

Reading (The Budget)

- DOLS ch.14*

Reading (Restoring Congressional Supremacy)

- TBD

Reading (Congress and Interest Groups)

- DOLS ch.13

Resource Office on Disabilities

Your experience in this class is important to me. If you have already established accommodations with the Resource Office on Disabilities, please communicate your approved accommodations to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course. If you have not yet established services through ROD, but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations (conditions include but are not limited to: mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), you are welcome to contact ROD at 203-432-2324 to make an appointment. General information for students can be found on the Student Information page of the Resource Office on Disabilities' website (<https://rod.yale.edu/student-information>). ROD offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and/or temporary health conditions. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between you, your instructor(s), and ROD.

It is important to Yale University to create inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law.

Fostering Inclusivity and Respect in the Classroom (err, Zoom Room)

Yale University adheres to the philosophy that all community members should enjoy an environment free of any form of harassment, sexual misconduct, discrimination, or intimate partner violence. If you have been the victim of sexual misconduct, we encourage you to report this. If you report this to a faculty/staff member, they must notify our college's Title IX coordinator about the basic facts of the incident (you may choose to request confidentiality from the University). If you encounter sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, sexual assault, or discrimination based on race, color, religion, age, national origin, ancestry, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability please contact the Title IX Coordinator, Stephanie Spangler, at stephanie.spangler@yale.edu, 203.432.4446 or any of the University Title IX Coordinators, who can be found at <http://provost.yale.edu/title-ix/coordinators>.

Academic integrity is a core university value that ensures respect for the academic reputation of the University, its students, faculty and staff, and the degrees it confers. The University expects that students will conduct themselves in an honest and ethical manner and respect the intellectual work of others. Please ask about my expectations regarding permissible or encouraged forms of student collaboration if they are unclear.

Policies on Academic Integrity (also called Academic Dishonesty or Plagiarism)

Any work that you submit at any stage of the writing process— thesis, outline, draft, bibliography, final submission, presentations, blog posts, and more—must be your own; in addition, any words, ideas, or data that you borrow from other people and include in your work must be properly documented. Failure to do either of these things is plagiarism. I seek to protect the rights and intellectual property of all students, writers, and scholars by insisting that individual students act with integrity.