

Charles Stewart III  
Offices: E53-447  
Phone: 617-253-3127  
Office hours: By arrangement  
E-mail: Cstewart@mit.edu  
URLS:

Personal: <http://web.mit.edu/cstewart/www>  
Subject: <http://web.mit.edu/17.251/www>  
There is also a Stellar site that will redirect you to the subject URL.

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## Purpose

The United States Congress is the most open of the national branches of government and therefore the most closely studied. The purpose of this subject is to find ways to deal with the vast array of information we have about Congress. The two basic questions we will be asking are (1) what does Congress do and why and (2) What are the various ways of studying congressional behavior?

To accomplish these goals, this subject is organized around two major learning modes: lectures/discussion and paper/presentation. The lecture/discussion part will expose you to the basic social facts about Congress: what it takes to get elected, how Congress works internally, and how the relationships between Congress and the rest of the federal government are organized. The paper will focus on the 2012 congressional election, and allow you to analyze the outcomes of this important national election in light of the research on elections you will learn about.

This subject introduces students to Congress, primarily undergraduates, but graduate students who have never studied Congress are welcome, too. It is more empirical than theoretical, although theory encroaches here and there. The second subject in this sequence, which will be offered next year, is a seminar that is more theoretical than empirical, and is aimed toward graduate students and advanced undergraduates.

Having an introductory subject in American politics or policymaking, or receiving a 4 or 5 on the AP American Politics exam, is a prerequisite to taking 17.251.

## Subject requirements

### Readings

The core reading will be my textbook. I will pay you \$1 for each typo you find in the book, so that the third edition (let's hope!) will be better than the first two.

In addition to the textbook, there are several assignments that will augment the lectures and the text. You will do all the readings to coincide with the schedule at the end of the syllabus.

The following books are available for purchase at the Coop:

Charles Stewart III, *Analyzing Congress* (New York, W.W. Norton, 2011).  
Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein, *It's Even Worse than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).  
Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer, *Congress Reconsidered*, 9th ed. (Washington: Congressional Quarterly Press).

**Lectures**

The lectures serve two purposes. First, they will fill in basic material which the readings presuppose. Second, they will put the readings in their larger contexts and, I hope, set the stage for discussions of the readings. I especially encourage you to ask questions during the lectures, either for clarification or to explore topics of interest to you.

**Examinations**

There will be a midterm and a one-hour final. The final will be held during the final examination period.

**Paper**

The upcoming congressional election will be important and interesting, from a number of perspectives. You will be responsible for taking a broad topic that is pertinent to the study of Congress and writing a 12–15 page paper about it in the context of the 2012 congressional election. Topics you might write about include new patterns of campaign finance, membership turnover, congressional redistricting, the performance of statistical models predicting the 2012 outcome, and the Senate election in Massachusetts. More on this assignment once the class gets going.

**Problem set**

There are two problem sets in the term. You will be penalized for turning them in late.

**Class attendance**

You must come to class. If you can't come to class because you are sick or out of town, e-mail or call me ahead of time and let me know. Students who do not come to class, or who come and appear to be disengaged with the material (as evidenced by the fact that they never ask questions or contribute to discussions) will receive a lower grade.

**Congressional roundtable**

Each Wednesday we will start the class with a brief (15 minutes?) informal discussion about the previous week's developments in Congress. Everyone will be required to come into class with a newspaper/magazine/web page clipping to talk about. You will also need to e-mail me, by Tuesday night at 5:00 pm, the citation to the article. Late Tuesday night I will e-mail the class and suggest some agenda items for this discussion. Come prepared to talk.

**Laptops, cell phones, etc.**

You may use portable computers (including tablets) *only* to take notes or, occasionally, to look up a fact related to the class discussion/lecture. You may not do anything else with your portable computer during class. I wander around the class, so if I see you doing something other than taking notes, I will know about it.

### Grading distribution

Class attendance and discussion, 15%

Midterm examination, 15%

Final examinations, 30%

Problem sets, 15%

Paper, 25%

### Lecture/reading schedule

Topic	Date(s)	Assigned readings	Notes
I. Introduction	Sept. 5		An assignment (not quite a problem set) will be given out at the end of the class.
II. Unidimensional spatial model	Sept. 10	<i>Analyzing Congress</i> , chap. 1, pp. 3–23, 47–49	Problems will be assigned at the end of class
	Sept. 12	Dodd & Oppenheimer, chaps. 1 & 2	<b>Roundtable</b>
III. Constitutional origins of Congress	Sept. 17	<i>Analyzing Congress</i> , chap. 2; Appendix B.	
	Sept. 19	Stewart, “The Constitutional Origins of Congress” (available on the Stellar site)	<b>Roundtable</b>
IV. Origin & development of Congress	Sept. 24	<i>Analyzing Congress</i> , chap. 3	Hand in problems that were distributed on Sept. 10
	Sept. 26	Dodd & Oppenheimer, chap. 16.	<b>Roundtable</b>
V. Congressional candidates	Oct. 1	<i>Analyzing Congress</i> , chap. 4	
	Oct. 3	Dodd & Oppenheimer, chaps. 4, 6, & 15.	<b>Roundtable</b>
	Oct. 8		Columbus Day (no class)
VI. Congressional voters	Oct. 10	<i>Analyzing Congress</i> , chap. 5	<b>Roundtable</b>
	Oct. 15	Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, “The 2010 Congressional Elections” (available on the Stellar site)	
	Oct. 17		<b>Roundtable</b>
	Oct. 22		
VII. Regulating congressional elections	Oct. 24	<i>Analyzing Congress</i> , chap. 6	<b>Roundtable</b>
	Oct. 29	Other readings TBA	
	Oct. 31		<b>Midterm</b>
VIII. Multidimensional spatial model	Nov. 5	<i>Analyzing Congress</i> , chap 1, pp. 23–47	<b>Roundtable</b> Problems will be distributed at the end of class
	Nov. 7		<b>Election debrief</b>

Topic	Date(s)	Assigned readings	Notes
IX. Congressional parties & leadership	Nov. 14	<i>Analyzing Congress</i> , chap. 7 Dodd & Oppenheimer, chap. 7–9.	<b>Roundtable</b>
	Nov. 19		Hand in problems that were distributed on Nov. 3.
	Nov. 21		Thanksgiving (No class)
X. Congressional committees	Nov. 26	<i>Analyzing Congress</i> , chap. 8 Dodd & Oppenheimer, chap. 10.	
	Nov. 28		<b>Roundtable</b>
XI. Rules of the chamber/ Roll call voting	Dec. 3	<i>Analyzing Congress</i> , chap. 9 Dodd & Oppenheimer, chap. 11.	
	Dec. 5		<b>Roundtable</b>
	Dec. 10		Class canceled
XII. Review/wrap-up	Dec. 12	Mann and Ornstein (all) Dodd & Oppenheimer, chap. 18.	<b>Roundtable</b>

The average weekly reading load is around 60 pages/week before midterm and 80 pages/week after the midterm. In addition, you need to be working on the paper/project throughout the term, and not wait until the very end. Please plan your use of time wisely.