Purpose. The purpose of the group projects is to allow you to explore on your own a large topic in the politics of Congress. I will give you some guidance about the specific topics I’d like you to address, but it will be up to you, as groups and individually, to refine the topics and the questions you address.

Deliverables. The groups will be responsible for delivering two final products. The first will be an oral presentation from each group, lasting 30 minutes each, of the group’s findings. The second will be a comprehensive and coherent report, consisting of “chapters” that address particular topics, introduced by a brief introduction that is the responsibility of the whole group. Your final grade will be based on the entire package, blending together your own individual effort and that of the group. To be specific, three-quarters of the grade will be based on your written chapter (a paper of 8–10 pages) and your oral presentation; one-quarter will be based on the summary essay and the overall quality of the presentation. Finally, I will poll members of both groups, asking you to indicate how the group effort was shared.

Dates.
- October 25. Project meetings.
- December 6. Project presentations.
- December 8. Reports due. [Note different date from syllabus]

Group Project 1
The Aftermath of the Contract with America

Group. Johnson, Kriner, Montgomery, Shen, Patel

Introduction. The election of 1994 ushered in the first period of extended Republican control of the House since the 1920s. This change in party control of the chamber came at a time when some, such as David Rohde (Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House), document a rise in the power of political parties within Congress. Indeed, Rohde’s book, which is assigned for this class, was written at the end of the long-running Democratic hegemony in the House. The time is now ripe to consider issues of “conditional party government” in a Republican era.

Assignment. Your assignment is to write a study of party government in Congress during the 1990s, focusing particularly (but not exclusively) on internal congressional politics since the election of 1994. This study should address the following questions:

1. To what can be attributed the dramatic Republican victory of 1994? Was it a one-time phenomenon or did it represent a lasting shift in electoral patterns?
2. How have the party organizations in Congress acted to further the aims of the party in the electoral arena, and how have they balanced the needs of individual members against the greater needs of the party?

3. What mechanisms have the parties used to impose party regularity internally, and how successful have they been?

4. Following the 1994 election the House Republicans instituted a number of committee reforms. How have the committees evolved under those reforms? What difference have they made?

5. How have the partisan strategies varied between the parties in the two chambers?

There may be other, similar, questions your group would want to take on. Feel free to generate a better set of questions concerning the partisanship of Congress during the 1990s and answer them.

Group Project A
The Aftermath of the 2000 Election

Group. Carey, Erdman, Ford, Karl, Mireles, Tietge

Introduction. The year 2000 stands as a potential watershed year in the electoral history of Congress. The two parties are narrowly matched in both chambers, raising the intensity of the competition for control of the House and Senate. This being a presidential election year, the resulting mix of control of the presidency and Congress will set the tone for policymaking for the next two-to-four years. And, this being a census year, outcomes in state legislative elections will presumably affect redistricting and congressional election results in the next decade.

Assignment. Your assignment is to write a study of the congressional election of 2000. This study should address the following questions:

1. What were the results of the 2000 election and how can they be analyzed in light of past research on individual voting behavior and macro electoral forecasting models?

2. To what degree were there presidential “coattails” in 2000, and how will the presence or absence of those coattails affect policymaking in the near term?

3. How will the reapportionment following the 2000 census affect the distribution of seats around the country and the partisan balance of Congress after the 2002 election?
4. What were the major campaign finance trends of 2000, and how did they differ from the immediate past?

5. What difference will the election outcomes in 2000 make for the composition of the party and committee leaderships in both chambers in the 107th Congress?

There may be other, similar, questions your group would want to take on. Feel free to generate a better set of questions concerning the implications of the 2000 congressional election on the politics of the institution.