

Political Science 111
Fall 2003

Legislative Process Analysis

Working individually or with a partner, you will describe and analyze a current political issue and what, if anything, Congress is doing about it. You will compare how your issue fared in the legislative process with other issues, analyzed by your colleagues in the class and with the bills that were the focus of our legislative process simulation. From this comparison you will make some generalizations about how responsive Congress is to the general public and its problems.

The first step is to choose an issue from the list below. Select three issues, ranking them in order of preference. Every effort will be made to give you one of your three choices. Each of the following is an issue in which the Federal government has been involved. The issue may be a relatively new item on the policy agenda or one with which the government has been working for some time. To confine the issue to a manageable size, you should focus on recent legislative activity on the issue.

welfare reform (2002-3 reauthorization)
campaign finance reform
trade promotion authority to the President
repeal of the "marriage penalty" tax
repeal of the Federal estate ("death") tax
"partial-birth" abortions
prescription drug coverage for the elderly/Medicare reform
privatization of Social Security
HMO reform (patients' bill of rights)
permanent normal trading relations with China
reducing Federal income tax rates (President Bush's 2001 proposal)
reducing Federal income tax rates and ending "double taxation" of stock dividends (President Bush's 2003 proposal)
Federal support for social services delivered by "faith-based" organizations
ban on reproductive cloning
national missile defense
education reform (President Bush's 2001 proposal)
reforming the Headstart program
election reform, post-November 2000
immigration reform
Arctic National Wildlife Refuge drilling
antiterrorism proposals, post 9/11/01, e.g. USA Patriot Act
creating an independent commission to investigate the 9/11/01 attacks
reforming corporate governance/accountability, post-Enron
storing nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain, Nevada
establishing a Department of Homeland Security
reforming personal bankruptcy laws
authorizing the President to use military force in Iraq
authorizing \$87 billion to finance the post-war reconstruction of Iraq
reforming medical malpractice
limiting liability of gun manufacturers
reauthorizing the ban on assault weapons
reversing FCC deregulation of media competition

After choosing your issue, you will research, analyze and write about the legislative politics of your issues. Your analysis consists of three parts:

I. The Nature of the Issue

Discuss the substance of the issue you are examining. What is the problem that people would like the Federal government to address? What are the proposals for Federal action? What are the arguments about what the Federal government should or should not be doing, pro-con or otherwise? If the issue is one in which the government has been involved for some time, provide a brief history of Federal efforts.

Why has the issue become a prominent item on the policy agenda in recent months or years? What events or developments helped focus public/media/government attention on the issue?

- Were dramatic focusing events involved? (e.g., the controversial outcome of the 2000 presidential election; fall of Berlin Wall--changing U.S. relations with Eastern Europe; the 9/11/01 attacks; corporate scandals and bankruptcies in 2001-02).
- Were gradual or unexpected changes in economic or social conditions responsible? (e.g., increased inflation or unemployment, declining air quality, increased numbers of working women with children).
- What impact, if any, did national election results in 2000 or 2002 have?
- Were the efforts of prominent individuals in or out of the government ("policy entrepreneurs") significant in publicizing the issue? (e.g., Mary Tyler Moore, Christopher Reeve and other celebrities - stem cell research; U.S. Senator John McCain - campaign finance reform).

In other words, how did your issue come to occupy a prominent place on the policy agenda? A first draft of Part I of the project should be completed on October 13.

II. The Legislative Process and Your Issue

There are two components of this analysis. First, provide a step-by-step description of how your issue moved through the legislative process. Who formulated legislative proposals? Who introduced bills in both houses of Congress? Who sponsored the bills? What action did each house take? Which committees worked on the bills? What was the substance of committee action? Did bills proceed to the House and/or Senate floor? What floor action was taken? What were the key votes taken, broken down by party and/or other divisions? Was a conference committee called to reconcile the House and Senate bills and if so, what action did the conference committee take? Did a final version of the bill pass both houses and proceed to the President? What action did the President take? Was Congressional action to override a presidential veto necessary? How did the substance of the bill change from its introduction to final action?

Second, who was most involved in the legislative process? Describe the role and influence of each of the following: the President; White House staff (include the Vice-President and First Lady, if necessary); Cabinet and sub-Cabinet officials; legislative party leaders; committee and subcommittee chairs and ranking members; other members of Congress; congressional staff; interest groups (businesses, unions, professional associations, citizens' groups); the media; political parties and party platforms; political candidates and campaigns. Discuss who were the most important individuals or groups working on legislation for your issue.

A first draft of Part II of the project should be completed on November 14. If partners are working on a draft, and one person did most of the writing on Part I, the other partner should be the principal writer of Part II.

III. Comparison and Analysis of the Legislative Process

Compare what happened in the legislative process on your issue with what happened on the bills that were the focus of our legislative process simulation. What were the similarities and differences in how the two issues moved through the legislative process? What were the similarities and differences in how the two issues were brought to the attention of Federal officials and came to occupy a prominent place on the national policy agenda (Part I)? What were the similarities or differences in which individuals or groups were most involved (Part II)? Were the outcomes of the legislative process similar or different, i.e., “successful” enactment of legislation or failure to pass a bill? What factors explain the similarity or difference in the outcomes? Did government “work better” in one case versus the other? What does your comparison tell us about the legislative process and, specifically, the relative roles of the President and Congress?

Part III should be completed on December 8, along with the final drafts of Parts I and II. Turn in two copies of the final draft. One copy will be returned.

Sources

In your project you are to consult and cite sources from each of the following five groups:

1. Magazines of opinion: American Prospect, New Republic, National Review, Public Interest, Harper’s, Commentary, Society, Nation, New Leader, Regulation, New York Times Magazine, New York Review of Books, Atlantic, Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy; also relevant trade and other specialized publications. NOTE: You may substitute a scholarly journal for an opinion magazine, though these sources are often difficult to read and are not very current. Among the leading scholarly journals in political science are the American Political Science Review, The Journal of Politics, Political Science Quarterly, Western Political Quarterly and Public Administration Review
2. Weekly news magazines: Time, Newsweek, U.S. News and World Report, Business Week, Economist
3. Major national newspapers: The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Christian Science Monitor; you may access these and other newspapers via the on-line service, Lexis-Nexis.
4. Invaluable sources of government information: Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, Congressional Quarterly Almanac, National Journal, Almanac of American Politics, Public Papers of the Presidency, Congressional Record.
5. The Internet: A comprehensive list of political science websites can be found on the department links section of the Political Science Department web page (www.etown.edu/polysci). Useful sites include THOMAS, the White House page, and www.cnn/allpolitics.com. You may also e-mail members of Congress for information.

Other important sources for your paper include Gallup Opinion Index, Washington Monthly, Congressional Digest, Public Opinion, U.S. Government Organization Manual, CQ Washington Information Directory, Washington Post National Weekly, CQ Researcher (formerly Editorial Research Reports)

Indexes

For weekly news magazines and opinion magazines, consult the Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature. For scholarly journals and some opinion magazines, see the Social Science Index. For scholarly

journals, some opinion magazines, and invaluable sources of government information, try the Public Affairs Information Service index (or P.A.I.S.) One of the best guides to current events is the New York Times Index, which gives brief summaries of Times articles in chronological order. In addition, the Congressional Quarterly contains a comprehensive index of its contents. The computerized search service, Ebscohost, is a helpful but not sufficient tool. First Search accesses several additional databases. The on-line service, Lexis-Nexis, supplies complete text newspaper articles, and is very helpful for current events.

Documentation

The preferred format for documentation is APA (American Psychological Association) Style. See Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 3rd ed., Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1983. Other formats such as MLA and Chicago/Turabian are permissible, but you must follow one format consistently. See Ann Raimes, Keys for Writers: A Brief Handbook, 3rd ed. (2001) for an introduction to several formats. Documentation must be provided for the first draft of each section, as well as for the final draft.