

17.20: Introduction to American Politics

Short Paper #2: Apply a Theory to a Particular Case

This paper asks you to *apply a theory to a particular case*. Specifically, you will apply Keith Krehbiel’s “pivotal politics” theory of congressional lawmaking to the case of climate legislation in the 111th Congress (2009–2010).

Your paper should accomplish the following:

1. Use the theory of pivotal politics to explain the fate of climate legislation in the 111th Congress (passage in the House, failure in the Senate).
2. Also using the terms of pivotal politics theory, identify the political changes that would make the passage of legislation addressing climate change more likely.
3. Evaluate the extent to which pivotal politics offers a complete or satisfying explanation for this case. What aspects of this case does the theory *not* explain?

Sources:

For the theory, you should rely primarily on Chapter 2 (“A Theory”) of Krehbiel’s *Pivotal Politics*. For the facts, you should rely primarily on Ryan Lizza’s *New Yorker* article “As the World Burns.” These two readings are sufficient to complete the assignment. For further background on pivotal politics, you can consult Chapter 1 (“Basics”) of Krehbiel’s book. For more details on climate legislation in 2009–2010, see Judith Layzer’s chapter “Cold Front,” especially pages 332–42. Cnq. 'tgcf 'y g'f qewo gpv K gqmi { 'qh'y g'333y 'Ugpcv. 'y j lej 'eqpckpu'y g'guko cvgf 'kf gcnr qkpu'qh'o go dgtu'qh'y g 333y 'Ugpcv' *cu'y gm'cu'qh'Rt gulf gpv'Qdco c+0

Use these estimates as a way of ranking senators on an ideological scale from most liberal to most conservative.¹

Paper Requirements:

- Your paper must be uploaded in PDF format by **noon on March 22**.
- Your paper must be double-spaced and between 1,000 and 1,250 words in length (around 4 pages).
- Assignments submitted after the noon deadline will be immediately penalized 1/3 of a grade (e.g., A to A–), and each 8 hours the penalty increases by 1/3 of a grade.
- Use parenthetical citations with a references list at the end of your essay. (The reference list **will not count toward your word limit**.) For a good resource, consult *The Chicago Manual of Style*. When citing a specific quotation or part of a work, provide the page number.

¹ These ideal points, which were calculated using a procedure called “DW-NOMINATE,” represent the estimated location of members of Congress on a scale of general liberalism (–1) to conservatism (+1). Conservative members are more likely to oppose liberal initiatives, such as legislation to address climate change. More information is available at <http://voteview.com>.

Writing Tips:

- Focus not on normative questions (e.g., whether the climate change bill should have been passed) but rather on explaining what actually *did* happen.
- The first component of the paper (“Use the theory of pivotal politics to explain...”) should probably take up the bulk (perhaps half) of your paper. The second and third tasks should take up the remainder in roughly equal proportion. You do not necessarily have to address them in the order that they are written.
- Your paper should have an introductory paragraph that provides an overview of your argument and addresses each component. (Don’t be concerned if your argument is too complex to express in a simple thesis of a sentence or two.) The body of your essay should elaborate upon and provide evidence for all the claims made in the introduction. The conclusion should explain the significance and implications of your argument.
- In terms of explaining the outcome, you should focus primarily but not exclusively on the bill’s failure in the Senate.
- Graphics are not required for this paper, but you are welcome to make use of diagrams or plots to illustrate the theory. These will not count towards the word requirement.

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