HNRS I399-001: Reforming Congressional Representation (3 credits)

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Drexel University

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Overview and goals

Congressional apportionment refers to the number of seats per state in the House of Representatives. Three big factors affect this number: population shifts, the number of seats to divide among the states (i.e., the size of the House), and how to handle seat fractions that result from division (i.e., the apportionment formula). Laws can change the last two factors, and many have argued that Congress should pass such laws.

Demographic changes bring urgency to the apportionment debate. The United States' population is growing, becoming less white, and becoming more urban. Since those changes are uneven across states, yet representation is a state-level matter, one can imagine many impacts on the mix of interests reflected in Congress and our party system.

Finally, what we mean by "representation" may complicate efforts to make prescriptions. Most may think of a one-shot transfer of authority from voters to elected officials. But empirical reality is more complicated, which may lead us to be circumspect about simple proposals, e.g., the House should be larger, full stop.

By the end of this independent study, the student will:

1) Understand the mechanics of apportionment on a technical level,
2) Understand how those mechanics fit into broader theories of political institutions and democratic representation,
3) Be able to speak with sophistication to policy makers and other interested groups,
4) Have sharpened their persuasive writing and data visualization skills.

The course is designed for major readings to be done up front. Later weeks can then be used for research, writing, and revisiting those readings as needed.

Requirements and grading criteria

Your grade will be based on three components:

1) Reading reactions discussed with supervisor (20%) — For each set of readings, jot notes (in complete sentences) about how those readings might inform the final policy memo. We will discuss these reactions in our meetings. The purpose is to

get you thinking, as soon as possible, about what a persuasive final memo might contain.

2) Apportionment projections with attendant memo (40%) — Show how, given current population projections, House size and apportionment formula might affect the number of constituents per representative. Consider making tables of the state-level outcomes. Please limit the text to 500 words (not including tables nor figures). **Due at the end of week 6.**

3) Policy memo (40%) — Consider the implications of House size and apportionment method for populations of interest (e.g., historically underrepresented minorities, economically depressed states). Consider these possibilities in light of theories of representation (e.g., Mansbridge 2003). Aim for 1,200 words (i.e., the length of a blog post for a major media outlet), and incorporate the one or two most persuasive data visualizations from your projections exercise. Tables may be included in the appendix. For tips on writing clearly, see http://www.jacksantucci.com/docs/syllabi/how_to_write_an_a_paper.pdf. These guidelines can be adapted for a Web-based presentation format. **Due at the end of week 10, with revisions due in finals week.**

Potentially useful contacts as you work through the course

1) Peter Miller (Brennan Center at NYU)

2) Brianna Cea (Brennan Center at NYU)

3) James Gimpel (University of Maryland—College Park)

4) David Canon (University of Wisconsin—Madison)

Schedule of work and readings

Week 1: The already-existing public case for a larger U.S. House

Drutman, Lee. 2018. "To Fix Congress, Make it Bigger. Much Bigger." *The Washington Monthly*, December/November. Online at https://washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/november-december-2018/to-fix-congress-make-it-bigger-much-bigger/.

Kromkowski, Charles A. and John A. Kromkowski. 1991. "Why 435? A Question of Political Arithmetic," *Polity* 24 (1): 129-145. Online at https://doi.org/10.2307/3234988.

Optional: The Editors. 2018. "A Congress for Every American." *The New York Times*, November 10. Online at https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/11/10/opinion/house-representatives-size-multi-member.html.

Learning goals: What already has been said about increasing the size of the House? How has the size of the House changed over time?

Week 2: The already-existing public case for a different apportionment formula

Poston, Dudley L. 1997. "The U.S. Census and Congressional Apportionment," *Society* 34 (3): 36-44. Online at https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-997-1005-6.

Poston, Dudley L. 2019. "Adding a citizenship question to the 2020 census would cost some states their Congressional seats," *The Conversation*, March 18. Online at https://theconversation.com/adding-a-citizenship-question-to-the-2020-census-would-cost-some-states-their-congressional-seats-113166.

Learning goals: What already has been said about changing the apportionment formula? What methods were used in what years?

Weeks 3 and 4: Apportionment formulae and their consequences

Schuster, Karsten, Friedrich Pukelsheim, Mathias Drton, and Norman R. Draper. 2003. "Seat Biases of Apportionment Methods for Proportional Representation," *Electoral Studies* 22 (4): 651-76. Online at https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-3794(02)00027-6.

Optional: Gallagher, Michael. 1992. "Comparing Proportional Representation Electoral Systems: Quotas, Thresholds, Paradoxes and Majorities," *British Journal of Political Science* 22 (4): 469-96. Online at https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400006499.

Optional: Balinski, M.L. and H.P. Young. 1980. "The Webster Method of Apportionment," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 77 (1): 1-4. Online at https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.77.1.1.

Learning goals: What are the basic apportionment methods? (Note: allocation rules under "proportional representation" also apply to the allocation of seats to states on a population basis.) What methods were used in what years?

Weeks 5 and 6: Projecting apportionment with and without reform

Project state-level apportionment under the two main rival formulas. Use authoritative population projections out to as far as they will go, but not farther than 2100. Make projections for each expected decennial reapportionment (i.e., at ten-year intervals). Do this under two scenarios: for a House remaining at 435 members, and for a House whose size obeys the cube-root "rule" (Shugart and Taagepera 2017). Please consider a data visualization (e.g., bar graph) of state-level outcomes for the current apportionment formula (method of equal proportions), with and without a House size that tracks the cube root of population. We can discuss when these projections ought to start, but 2000 seems a reasonable date. Please restrict text to 500 words or less.

Optional: Shugart, Matthew S. and Rein Taagepera. 2017. *Votes from Seats: Logical Models of Electoral Systems,* selected chapters. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Week 7: How does representation work, and what kind(s) do we want?

Schwartz, Thomas. 1989. "Why Parties?" Unpublished manuscript, University of California at Los Angeles.

Mansbridge, Jane. 2003. "Rethinking Representation," *American Political Science Review* 97 (4): 515-28.

Learning goals: How should we think about "representation"? What type (or blend of types) is best?

Week 8: The politics of House size and "automatic reapportionment"

Gaynor, SoRelle Wyckoff and James G. Gimpel. 2019. "Reapportionment, Redistricting, and the Geographic Redistribution of Political Influence." Paper presented at the 2019 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association.

Canon, David and Bill Egar. 2014. "The Apportionment Act of 1842: Principle or Interest?" Paper presented at the American Politics Workshop, University of Wisconsin-Madision, April 7.

Revisit arguments in Kromkowski and Kromkowski (1991), particularly those invoking footnotes 17 and 18.

Learning goals: Why did the current regime emerge between 1910 and 1941? Why did the House *reduce* its size in 1842? What is the effect of so-called "automatic reapportionment" with a fixed House size?

Week 9: The politics of apportionment formulae

Revisit the history of apportionment formulae in Poston (1997).

Optional: Balinski, Michel L. and H. Peyton Young. 2001. *Fair Representation: Meeting the Ideal of One Man, One Vote* (skim for historical information). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Learning goals: What sorts of conditions have led to (a) increases in the size of the House, (b) decreases in the size of the House, (c) changes to the apportionment formula, and (d) the current regime of a fixed House and the "method of equal proportions"?

Week 10: Complete final memo by the end of Week 10.

Finals week: Implement suggested revisions.