Chapter 16

1. Which of the following does *not* tend to be considered by most voters in assessing their individual member of Congress?

\*a. Legislative effectiveness

b. Home style

c. Service to the district

d. Communication style

2. Which of the following media sources tends to provide the most favorable coverage of individual members of Congress?

a. National media

\*b. Local broadcast media

c. Newspapers

d. Cable news

3. Which of the following is *not* a source of congressional ethics rules and regulations?

a. The Constitution

b. Ethics Codes

\*c. Presidential Oversight Committee

d. Party Rules

4. Which of the following is an example of opposition research?

a. A news reporter chooses to highlight scandalous lobbying violations in a broadcast

b. Congressional oversight uncovers that an executive agency is misusing funds

c. A Democrat presents evidence that a Republican-sponsored bill will hurt the economy

\*d. A challenger uncovers evidence that a Senator used illegal drugs

5. Which of the following is an example of “unorthodox” lawmaking?  
\*a. Packaging numerous disparate policies into omnibus bills

b. Scheduling votes for the “Tuesday-Thursday” club

c. The nuclear option for federal judicial nominations

d. The use of the pocket veto by the President

6. Which of the following is *not* a key element of strong party government?

a. Parties are internally cohesive

\*b. Subcommittee chairs tend to be very powerful

c. Members’ party-line voting present clear alternatives to voters

d. Caucuses meet regularly to decide policy

7. Which of the following was *not* historically a common reason for use of the filibuster in the Senate?

a. Regional conflicts

b. Issues of great importance to constituents

\*c. Routine procedural matters

d. Civil rights legislation

8. Which of the following issues is the focus of the Sunlight Foundation?

a. Climate change

b. Child abuse

c. The debt ceiling

\*d. Congressional transparency

9. In which of the following conflicts did the President actively seek congressional authorization for use of force?

\*a. Bush—use of force in Iraq

b. Obama—military action in Libya

c. Truman—intervention in the Korean War

d. Clinton—cruise missile attacks on Iraqi intelligence

10. Which branch of government is responsible for statutory interpretation?

a. Legislative

\*b. Judicial

c. Executive

d. Bureaucracy

11. In the modern Congress, committees have become much stronger and more influential compared to past Congresses.

a. True

\*b. False

12. Local representatives are primarily evaluated in light of the personal bonds they forge with constituents and the political positions they take.

\*a. True

b. False

13. During the 2008 financial crisis, Congress took the lead in setting the agenda and finding solutions.

a. True

\*b. False

14. When considering the greatest achievements of the federal government over the past 50 years, Congress played a minimal role in pushing forward these policy changes.

a. True

\*b. False

15. Crises often demand that Congress act quickly, without due deliberation.

\*a. True

b. False

16. Voters tend to view their own member of Congress as *less* ethical than the rest of Congress.

a. True

\*b. False

17. Members of Congress virtually always face strong challengers because of the robust party recruitment process.

a. True

\*b. False

18. Greater transparency in Congress tends to lead to more negotiation and compromise.

a. True

\*b. False

19. As polarization increases and majority party leaders centralize power, minority party members are less likely to be heard.

\*a. True

b. False

20. Increased levels of partisanship and partisan conflict in Congress tend to improve voters’ ratings of Congress as an institution.

a. True

\*b. False

21. For most of the Senate’s history filibusters were rare.

\*a. True

b. False

22. Congressional reforms in the 1970s were successful in permanently reshaping Congress-President relations, with Congress now having the upper hand on most issues.

a. True

\*b. False

23. Since WWII, presidents have regularly engaged U.S. troops in foreign conflicts without seeking congressional approval.

\*a. True

b. False

24. What is the “Tuesday-Thursday club” and how does it impact deliberation?

\*a. Answers Vary

@The Tuesday-Thursday club is a group of members who spend only Tuesday-Thursday working in DC and spend long weekends at home in their districts. While this group was once a minority of members, most members follow this type of schedule today and votes are scheduled to accommodate this practice. The shortened workweek leaves little time for committee hearings, markups, and other important deliberative activities.

25. How does the financial crisis of 2008 illustrate how Congress operates during a crisis?

\*a. Answers Vary

@Students could highlight a variety of themes here, such as presidential power vis-à-vis Congress during crises, challenges of a need for quick action in a body based on deliberation, difficulty with reigning in executive agencies, and/or attempts to satisfy constituents.

26. Why do Congress’s internal ethics procedures seem to fail to inspire public confidence?

\*a. Answers Vary

@One reason is that the Ethics Committees in both the House and Senate are structured to protect rather than discipline members; members do not enjoy judging and disciplining their peers. But, even when investigations are more vigorous, they still do little to change public perceptions. This may be because investigations highlight violations and because the proliferation of different ethics rules and guidelines makes it easier to violate these rules unintentionally. This is exacerbated by 24/7 news coverage.

27. What are the costs and benefits of increased congressional transparency?

\*a. Answers Vary

@Lack of transparency is a major source of public mistrust, so increasing transparency can lead to greater trust that members are actually working in the public interest. It can also lead to greater accountability. On the other hand, transparency can hamper internal legislative bargaining and compromise. Members might be less willing to negotiate and strike bargains with unpopular consequences if these deals can come back to haunt them in a future election. Reforms such as televisions in Congress (i.e., CSPAN) may also have made Congress more partisan as members use the floor to posture before the camera.

28. How has political news coverage changed in recent years?

\*a. Answers Vary

@Overall, the quality and quantity of this news coverage has declined. Print media, which is probably best suited to serious, in-depth reporting on Congress, has limited its coverage of Congress as circulation has decreased and budgets have been cut. Television coverage has also shifted its focus away from news about government and toward topics such as celebrities and consumer products. Finally, the content of political news in general has shifted, with fewer stories about policies and more about scandal and corruption.

29. How do the public’s expectations differ for individual members compared to Congress as a whole?

\*a. Answers Vary

@From Congress as a whole, the public expects answers to the nation’s problems developed in an open and fair policy process. In contrast, when assessing their own personal member of Congress, voters consider policy but also service to the district, communication, and home style.

30. What types of media coverage are members most likely to seek out, and why?

\*a. Answers Vary

@Members are most likely to seek out coverage from local media, especially broadcast media. Coverage from hometown reporters is overwhelmingly positive, with stations viewing appearances by members as a way to get the legislator on video rather than an opportunity to question them in detail. This allows members to express their views with few challenges while reaching a large number of voters.

31. How does the public perception of congressional ethics compare with assessments by political scientists?

\*a. Answers Vary

@Most people view Congress negatively in terms of their ethics. Especially when it comes to Congress as a whole (opposed to their individual member), voters consistently rate Congress poorly on honesty and ethical standards. However, political scientists have found that the vast majority of members do not exhibit unethical practices. In fact, transparency has increased over time, while corruption seems to have decreased compared to past Congresses.

32. What are the “hazards of public life” and how might they influence who runs for Congress?

\*a. Answers Vary

@The “hazards of public life” include long hours, time away from family, and the potential to be swept up in ethics or other scandals. These hazards may deter the “best and brightest” from seeking careers in government. For example, young people show little interest in government jobs, and it can be difficult for parties to recruit strong challengers.

33. What are some of the major achievements of the federal government? Did Congress play a major role in bringing about these achievements?

\*a. Answers Vary

@Students should list some of the achievements noted in the text, including the Marshall Plan, Voting Rights Act, Civil Rights Act, and Medicare. They should note that while Presidents were sometimes the initiator of these achievements, Congress was also often the initiator of these ideas. And, whether the proposal started with Congress or the President, Congress was essentially always involved in a significant way at the inception, ratification, or implementation stage.

34. How have recent developments in Congress impacted the quality and quantity of congressional deliberations?

\*a. Answers Vary

@The most significant development relevant to deliberation is an increase in polarization and partisanship. This has led party leaders to short-circuit normal deliberative procedures at all stages of the legislative process. For example, many disparate policies may be inserted into omnibus legislation, making it difficult for all members to know exactly what they are voting on. Or leaders may bypass the committee process and bring measures directly to the floor. Students could provide additional examples from the text as well.

35. What is party government, and how has the increase in party government in recent years impacted policy-making?

\*a. Answers Vary

@Political scientists of the 1950s argued that American democracy would be improved under a party government model in which parties ran on coherent platforms, had strong leaders, high party unity, and high internal cohesion. While all these factors have increased in the modern era, partisanship has been blamed for increasing rancor and stalemate rather than improved policy-making and democratic processes.

36. What is the partisan filibuster and when did it emerge? How does it differ from the traditional use of the filibuster?

\*a. Answers Vary

@The partisan filibuster is the process by which most or all the Senate’s majority party agenda is systematically blocked by an organized minority party filibuster. This is in contrast to the traditional use of the filibuster only on specific issues with great importance to a region or constituency. It emerged in the first two years of the Clinton Presidency (or students could say in the early 1990s) and has escalated since then.

37. What is the impact of the partisan filibuster on governance?

\*a. Answers Vary

@The partisan filibuster is the process by which most or all the Senate’s majority party agenda is systematically blocked by an organized minority party filibuster. It has made governance in the Senate very difficult, because in means that a supermajority is required to pass even minimally controversial legislation. Coalition building becomes that much more difficult, and gridlock/status-quo-bias is increased.

38. How has Congress contributed to the imbalance of power between the executive and legislative branches in national security?

\*a. Answers Vary

@Although recent Presidents have pushed the boundaries of their power, Congress has been complicit in its loss of power. Congress actively granted the executive branch broad powers after 9/11. And it tends to prefer to avoid responsibility for difficult decisions that could be controversial among voters, preferring to let responsibility (and blame) lie with the President. Polarization may also help explain Congress’s refusal to assert itself, at least during periods of unified government.

39. How does polarization influence the balance of power between Congress and the Supreme Court?

\*a. Answers Vary

@Polarization tends to make it more difficult for Congress to respond to attacks from the Court. This is because of the increase in gridlock that has resulted. When the Court makes statutory interpretations at odds with the original intent of a law, it is very hard for the modern Congress to respond simply because it is so difficult for it to pass any laws at all. A Congress that cannot act is unable to protect its authority against judicial encroachment.

40. What are some of the institutional shortcomings of Congress, and what are some of the proposed reforms to these shortcomings? Do you believe effective reform is possible?

\*a. Answers Vary

@Students could choose to focus on structural problems, procedural problems, quality of deliberations, ethics, and/or lack of transparency. Whichever issues they select, they should identify at least two possible reforms and evaluate the potential of such reforms for solving (or improving) the identified problem. In assessing efficacy, the best essays will consider both the likelihood of the reform passing and/or being implemented as well as the likelihood of the reform changing practices for the better once implemented.

41. Is the trend toward increasing presidential power reversible or not? What steps could or should Congress take to reclaim some power from the executive?

\*a. Answers Vary

@Students should present a clear argument about the balance of power between Congress and the President and its likely path in the future. They should utilize concepts and evidence from the text in making their case.