5.6 Congress in Practice: Committees, Incumbency and Relations with the Presidency: 10-minute Pack

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · about 10 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Short-answer questions may be brief phrases but extended answers must be in full sentences.

1 Source extracts on the US Senate filibuster and committee gatekeeping, for use in the question that follows. Extract A, scholarly summary: 'The Senate filibuster acts as a procedural minority veto in many policy areas. Senators opposing a bill can use extended debate to force concessions or delay votes until support wanes. Because cloture motions typically need 60 votes, a simple majority often cannot ensure passage. Committee chairs further shape legislation by blocking bills from markup or refusing to schedule them, meaning many proposals never reach the Senate floor.' Extract B, journalistic perspective: 'Supporters argue the filibuster protects minority rights and encourages consensus. Critics say it promotes gridlock, especially in periods of divided government, and that committee gatekeeping concentrates power among a few senior members. Recent changes to cloture rules for nominations show that procedural norms can be altered when a majority is determined to act.'

(Total for Question 1 is 12 marks)

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Mark scheme · 5.6 Congress in Practice: Committees, Incumbency and Relations with the Presidency: 10-minute Pack

Question 1

Level 1 Basic use of the extracts with limited analysis. May paraphrase one extract without evaluation or link to congressional practice.	**1-3**
Level 2 Some accurate use of the extracts with straightforward analysis of how the filibuster and committee gatekeeping affect legislation. Limited evaluation or consideration of counterarguments.	**4-6**
Level 3 Good use of both extracts, integrating their claims with additional, relevant knowledge about Senate cloture thresholds, committee control and examples of gridlock. Balanced analysis that weighs points for and against the extracts' claims.	**7-9**
Level 4 Excellent, well-supported evaluation driven by the extracts, combining accurate factual knowledge with analysis and judgement. Considers the merits of minority protection versus the costs of delay, the impact of divided government, and evidence that majorities can change procedures, reaching a clear reasoned conclusion on the extracts' overall validity.	**10-12**

Indicative content:

- Use of Extract A to explain how the filibuster can act as a de facto veto because cloture normally requires 60 votes, enabling a minority to block or shape legislation.
- Use of Extract A to explain committee chair power to block bills from markup or scheduling, preventing many proposals from reaching the floor and concentrating gatekeeping power.
- Use of Extract B to present the argument that the filibuster protects minority rights and forces consensus, showing a normative defence of the practice.
- Use of Extract B to note that procedural rules can change, citing the example of the 2013 and 2017 Senate changes to allow simple-majority confirmation for most nominations, demonstrating that majorities can alter norms when motivated.
- Apply outside knowledge: examples of legislative gridlock during periods of divided government, for instance when the presidency and one chamber are held by different parties, and how that heightens the filibuster's practical effect.
- Apply outside knowledge: examples of committee gatekeeping slowing legislation, for example important bills stalled in committee or modified heavily in markup before floor consideration.
- Evaluate trade-offs: minority protection and deliberation versus obstruction and delay, and how the institutional design of the Senate privileges stability and decentralised power.
- Conclude with a judgement on whether the extracts fairly represent the balance of advantages and disadvantages, perhaps arguing that both extracts capture real features but that the overall effect depends on the partisan context and the willingness of majorities to change rules.

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