

Congress

Terms

A **term** is the length of time that officials serve after an election, as in a two- or six-year term.

The date for the start of each new term has been set by the Twentieth Amendment (1933) as “noon of the 3rd day of January” of every odd-numbered year.

Two Houses of Congress

The Constitution creates a bicameral legislature for three reasons:

Historical: The British Parliament consisted of two houses since the 1300s, and many colonial assemblies were similar in form.

Practical: A bicameral legislature was necessary to compromise the Virginia and New Jersey plans of representation.

Theoretical: The Framers favored a bicameral Congress in order that one house might act as a check on the other.

Sessions of Congress

A **session** is the regular period of time during which Congress conducts business.

Congress **adjourns**, or suspends until the next session, each regular session as it sees fit.

If necessary, the President has the power to **prorogue**, or adjourn, a session, but only when the two houses cannot agree on a date for adjournment.

Only the President may call Congress into a **special session**—a meeting to deal with some emergency situation.

Size and Terms

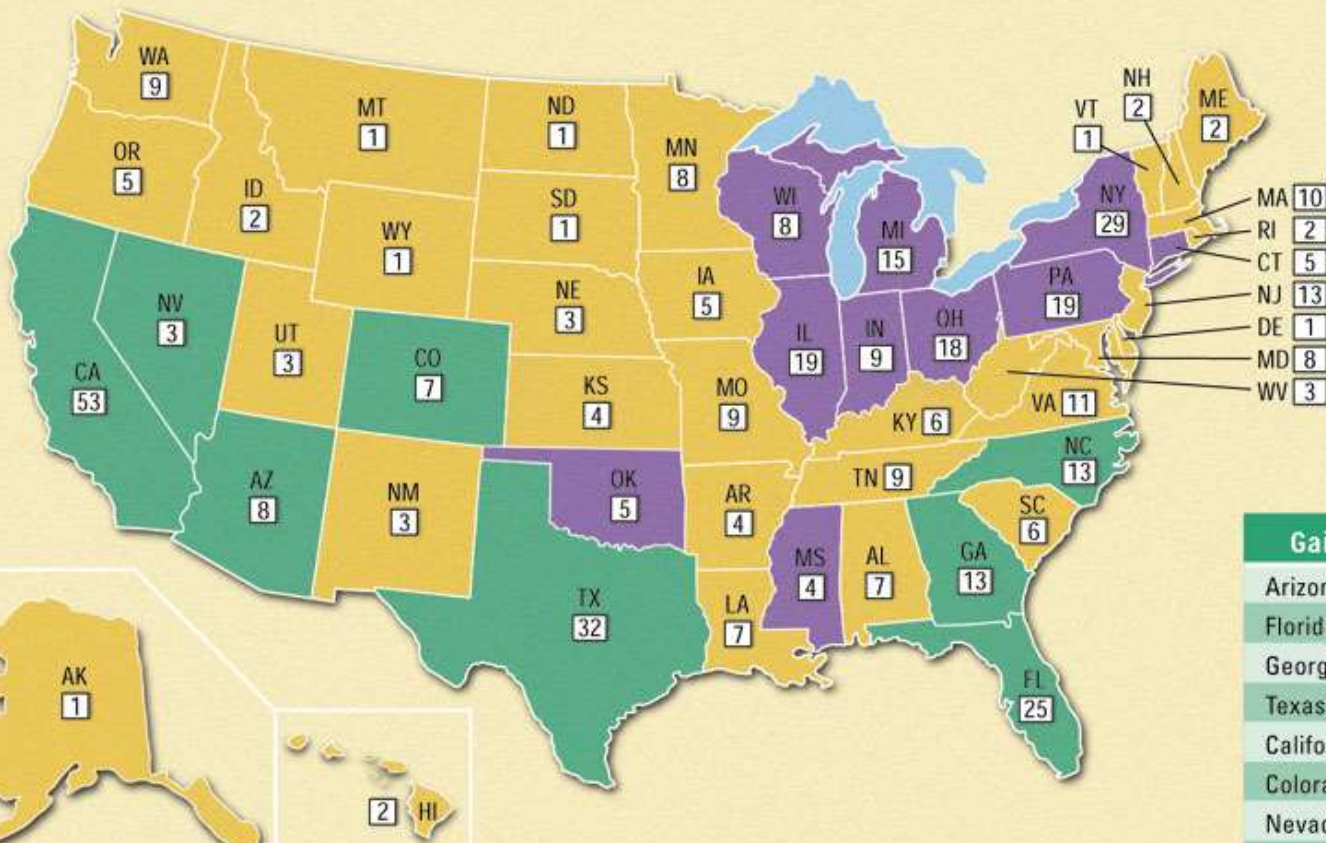
- The exact size of the House of Representatives, currently at 435 members, is determined by Congress.
- The Constitution provides that the total number of seats in the House shall be **apportioned** (distributed) among the States on the basis of their respective populations.

Members of the House of Representatives serve two-year terms.

Although there have been recent movements to limit terms, there are no limits set on the number of terms a representative may serve.

Current Apportionment

Congressional Apportionment, 2003–2013



KEY

- Gained representation
- Lost representation
- No change
- 2 Number of Representatives

Gained Seats		Lost Seats	
Arizona	+2	New York	-2
Florida	+2	Pennsylvania	-2
Georgia	+2	Connecticut	-1
Texas	+2	Illinois	-1
California	+1	Indiana	-1
Colorado	+1	Michigan	-1
Nevada	+1	Mississippi	-1
North Carolina	+1	Ohio	-1
		Oklahoma	-1
		Wisconsin	-1

SOURCE: Census 2000

Congressional Elections

- Congressional elections are held on the Tuesday following the first Monday in November of each even-numbered year.
- **Off-year elections** are those congressional elections held between presidential elections.

Districts and Gerrymandering

- Under the **single-member district** arrangement, the voter's in each district elect one of the State's representatives.
- The general-ticket system, no longer in use, provided that all of a State's seats were filled **at-large**.
- Districts that have unusual shapes or even defy description have sometimes been **gerrymandered**.
- Gerrymandering refers to the act of drawing congressional districts to the advantage of the political party that controls the State legislature.

Qualifications for House Members

- The Constitution says that a member of the House
 - (1) must be at least 25 years of age,
 - (2) must have been a citizen of the United States for at least seven years, and
 - (3) must have been an inhabitant of the State from which he or she is elected.
- The realities of politics also require some informal qualifications, such as party identification, name familiarity, gender, ethnic characteristics, and political experience.

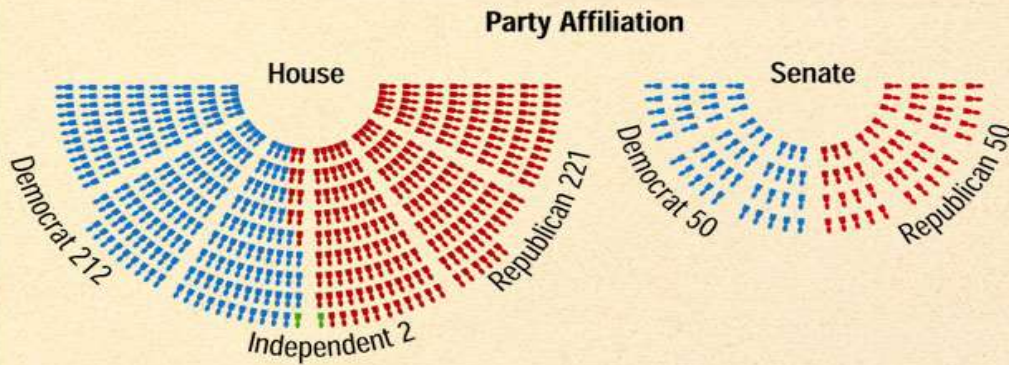
Size, Election, and Terms

- The Constitution says that the Senate “shall be composed of two Senators from each State.” Today’s Senate consists of 100 Senators.
- Originally, the Constitution provided that senators were chosen by the State legislatures.
- In 1912 the Seventeenth Amendment was passed and called for the popular election of senators.
- Senators serve for six-year terms.
- The Senate is a **continuous body**, meaning that all of its seats are never up for election at the same time.

Qualifications for Senators

- The requirements for the U.S. Senate are higher than for the House of Representatives.
- The Constitution says that a Senator
 - (1) must be at least 30 years of age,
 - (2) must have been a citizen of the United States for at least nine years, and
 - (3) must be an inhabitant of the State from which he or she is elected.

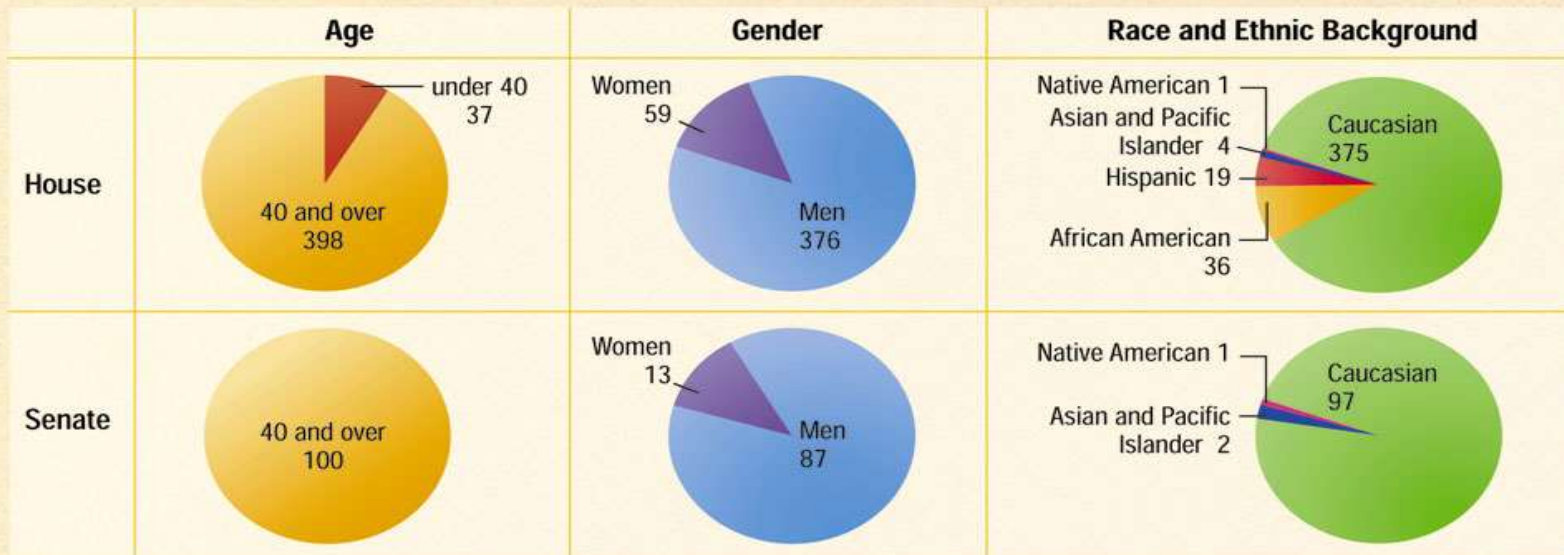
Profile of the 107th Congress



Educational Background*

	House
Bachelor's degrees	399
Master's degrees	124
Law degrees	162
Doctoral degrees	20
Medical degrees	12

*Sum is more than total membership because of members with more than one degree.



SOURCE: Congressional Research Service

Representatives of the People

Senators and representatives are elected to represent people. As legislators, they have four voting options:

<p><i>Trustees</i></p> <p>Trustees believe that each question they face must be decided on its merits.</p>	<p><i>Delegates</i></p> <p>Delegates see themselves as agents of the people who elected them.</p>
<p><i>Partisans</i></p> <p>Lawmakers who owe their first allegiance to their political party are partisans.</p>	<p><i>Politicos</i></p> <p>Politicos attempt to combine the basic elements of the trustee, delegate, and partisan roles.</p>

Committee Membership and Public Servants

- As committee members, senators and representatives screen proposed laws before they are voted on.
- Another vital part of their committee work involves the **oversight function**.
- Oversight is the process by which Congress, through its committees, checks to see that the agencies of the executive branch are working effectively.
- Members of the House and the Senate also act as servants of their constituents.
- Requests from voters vary widely, and members of Congress take heed to many of them. Ignoring their constituencies would not bode well in the next election.

Compensation

- Today, senators and representatives are paid a salary of \$174,000 a year. Certain members, such as the Speaker of the House and the Senate's president *pro tem*, are paid more.
- The **franking privilege** allows members of Congress to mail letters and other materials postage-free by substituting their facsimile signature (frank) for the postage.
- The Constitution says that Congress fixes its own "compensation." Therefore, the only real limits to congressional pay are the President's veto and fear of voter backlash against a pay increase.

Membership Privileges

- Members of Congress are immune from arrest for noncriminal offenses while engaged in congressional business.
- More importantly, the Speech and Debate Clause (Article I, Section 6, Clause 1) protects representatives and senators from suits for libel or slander arising from their official conduct.