



Congress

House of Representatives, The Senate, and the
Members of Congress



Size and Terms



- Today the size of the House of Representatives is 435 members
 - It is not fixed by the Constitution, rather, it is set by Congress
 - The total number of seats is apportioned (distributed) among the States on the basis of their respective populations
- Each State is guaranteed at least one seat in the House, no matter the population.
 - Seven States have only one representative
 - Alaska, Delaware, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming
 - District of Columbia
- There is no limit on the number of terms any member of Congress may serve.

+ Reapportionment

- Article I of the Constitution directs Congress to reapportion (redistribute) the seats in the House after each decennial census.
 - Census taken every 10 years





Reapportionment Act of 1929



- Law sets up what is often called an “automatic reapportionment”.

It says:

1. The “permanent” size of the House is 435 members.
 2. Following each census, the Census Bureau is to determine the number of seats each State should have.
 3. When the Bureau’s plan is ready, the President must send it to Congress.
 4. If, within 60 days of receiving it, neither house rejects the Census Bureau’s plan, it becomes effective.
- Reapportionment last happened in 2010. 10 States lost one seat, including Michigan, while 8 States gained seats.

+ Off-Year Elections



- Congressional elections that occur in the nonpresidential election years are known as off-year elections
- The next ones to occur will happen in 2014 and 2018



Districts

- The Constitution makes no mention of congressional districts.
- Under single-member district arrangement, the voters in each district elect one of the State's representatives from among a field of candidates running for a seat in the House from that district.
- Several States used the general ticket system. All of the State's seats were filled at-large – that is, elected from the State as a whole, rather than from a particular district.
 - At-large elections proved to be extremely unfair
 - States with only one representatives are said to be elected “at-large”

+ Gerrymandering



- Congressional district maps in several States show one and sometimes several districts of very odd shapes.
- Those districts have usually been gerrymandered. This means they have been drawn to the advantage of the political party that controls the State's legislature.
- Usually drawn to separate rural versus urban areas.



Wesberry v. Sanders, 1964



- In *Wesberry v. Sanders*, the Court held that the population differences among Georgia's congressional districts were so great as it violated the Constitution.
- *“While it may not be possible to draw congressional districts with mathematical precision, that is no excuse for ignoring our Constitution’s plain objective of making equal representation for equal numbers of people the fundamental goal of the House of Representatives. That is the high standard of justice and common sense which the Founders set for us.”*

-Justice Black, Opinion of the Court

- By basing apportionment on numbers of people, it ensured that populous areas such as cities and suburbs had a greater voice than before in Congress



Size, Election, and Terms of the Senate

- The Constitution says that the Senate “shall be composed of two Senators from each State.”
 - There are far fewer senators than representatives.
 - Each senator is more visible and tends to get more attention
- Each member is elected from the State at-large
- Senators serve for six-year terms and may be elected any number of times.
 - The Framers believed a six-year term would make senators less subject to pressure by public opinion or special interest groups
 - Strom Thurmond served 9 terms (nearly 50 years)
- The Senate is a continuous body. That is, all of its seats are never up for election at the same time.
 - Senators terms are staggered. Only a third of them expire every two years.

+ Constituency

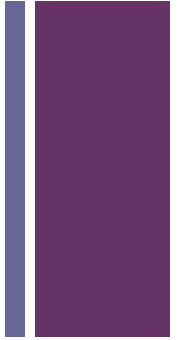


- Constituency – the people and interest the Senators represent
- A senator's constituency is generally much larger than that of a representative. A senator represents an entire State while a representative usually represents just a district within a State.



The Job

Representatives of the People



- Senators and representatives are elected to represent people
- A delegate most values the opinions and wishes of his or her constituents.
- A partisan most values the platform of his or her party and the wishes of that party's leader.



Compensation



■ Salary

- Senators and Representatives are paid a salary of \$150,000 a year
- The Speaker of the House makes \$187,500 (same as the Vice President)
- The Senate's president *pro tem* and the majority and minority floor leaders in both houses receive \$162,000 a year.

■ Fringe Benefits

- Each member has a special tax deduction designed to help members who must maintain two residences, one in his or her home State and one in Washington
- Generous travel allowances
- Pay small amounts for health and life insurance
- Generous retirement plans
- The Franking privilege

+ The Franking Privilege

- Well known benefit that allows them to mail letters and other materials postage-free.
- Congress has also provided its members with the free printing and distribution of speeches and newsletters.



+ Oversight Function



- A 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 various agencies in the executive branch are working effectively and are following congressional policies set by law

+ Roles that members of Congress play



1. Legislators
2. Committee members
3. Representatives of their constituency
4. Public servants
5. Politicians

+ Characteristics of Congress

Characteristics	House of Representatives	Senate
Size	435	100
Term Length	2 years	6 years
Date of Election	Tuesday following first Monday in Nov of each even-numbered year	Tuesday following first Monday in Nov of each even-numbered year
Qualifications		
Age	At least 25 years	At least 30 years
Length of Citizenship	At least 7 years	At least 9 years
Residence	Inhabitant of the State	Inhabitant of the State
How Chosen		
Originally	By voters in district	By State Legislatures
Today	By voters in district	By voters in the State