

## Chapter 6: Congress Qualifications for Congress

### Slide 1



As you will learn in this chapter, Congress has both changed and stayed the same. In terms of its formal structure and procedures, it has varied little over the years. But in terms of its interpersonal dynamics and policy issues, it has changed significantly.

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**Study Guide Questions**

What are the qualifications required to be an elected member of the House of Representatives and the Senate. How long are the terms for each? How many members are there for each? Why are they different? **Pages 158-159**

What determines the number of representatives in the House of Representatives? Has it always been that way? How was the current number of representatives established? **Pages 158-159**

How is the number of representatives in the House of Representatives for each state determined? **Pages 165-167**

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**Roots of the U.S. Congress**

Article I:

- Bicameral legislature
  - House
    - Representatives based on population
    - Two-year term
  - Senate
    - Two from each state
    - Six-year term

Article I of the Constitution describes the structure of the legislative branch of government: an upper house (the Senate) and a lower house (the House of Representatives). Together, they form our bicameral legislature. In Congress, the number of members each state sends to the House of Representatives is determined by the population of the state. In contrast, each state has two members in the Senate, regardless of population. By serving a two-year term and representing a portion of a state, members of the House are considered to be closer to the people that they represent. Further, they can be

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replaced faster than their counterparts in the Senate. Serving a six-year term, Senators are said to be somewhat insulated from quickly changing moods of the public. Originally, the Constitution called for senators to be appointed by the legislatures from the states they came from. Many believe this made the Senate more of an elitist institution. Even with the 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment giving state voters the right to direct selection of their senators, the Senate is considered to be less likely to be persuaded by short-term shifts in public opinion.

The qualifications and powers of Congress are clearly defined in Article 1 of the U. S. Constitution. It is the longest of the articles in our Constitution with 10 sections. Where specifics for the other branches of government are succinct if not vague, the Constitution gives much in the way of details for the legislative branch. While Section 2 gave the original number of members to the House or Representatives for each state, the house grew as the country grew. How did we get to the number of 435 representatives who currently serve in the House? In 1910, the House expanded to 435 members. When Alaska and Hawaii became states in the late 1950s, the House increased to 437 members. The current number reverted to 435 members in 1963 by an act of Congress, or a *statute*.

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**TABLE 6.2 What are the key differences between the House of Representatives and the Senate?**

TABLE 6.2 WHAT ARE THE KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND THE SENATE?

Differences in Operation	
House	Senate
More centralized, more formal, stronger leadership	Less centralized, less formal, weaker leadership
Committee on Rules being powerful in controlling time and pace of debate in conjunction with the Speaker of the House	No rules committee; trials on debate come through unanimous consent or adoption of cloture
More impersonal	More personal
Power distributed not evenly	Power distributed more evenly
Members are highly specialized	Members are generalists
Employs tax and revenue policy	Employs foreign policy

Changes in the Institution	
House	Senate
Power centralized in the Speaker's inner circle of advisors	Spoke involved in process and institution becoming more formal; threat of filibusters more frequent and effective
Procedures becoming more efficient	Becoming more difficult to pass legislation
Support is relatively high, although House working to attract almost alone vote	Support is moderate

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As you can see, this chart notes some of the key differences between the House of Representatives and the Senate. One of the big differences is the number of members each body has: The House has 435 members and the Senate, 100.

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Constitutional Differences	
House	Senate
435 voting members (apportioned by population)	100 voting members (two from each state)
Two-year terms	Six-year terms (one-third up for reelection every two years)
Initiates all revenue bills	Offers "advice and consent" on many major presidential appointments
Initiates impeachment procedures and passes articles of impeachment	Tries impeached officials
	Approves treaties

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**Eligibility**



- Members of the House
  - Twenty-five years old and a citizen for at least seven years
- Senators
  - Thirty years old and a citizen for at least nine years

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Who can run for Congress? Representatives must be at least twenty-five years old and a citizen of the United States for at least seven years. They must live in the district they want to represent. They are elected to two-year terms. The Framers expected that the House members would be more responsible to the people, both because they were elected directly by them and because they were up for reelection every two years.

Senators are elected to six-year terms, and every two years one-third of them face reelection. Originally, senators were selected by their state's

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legislature, but that changed with 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment, passed in 1913; voters now directly vote for their state's senators. The Constitution requires senators to be at least thirty years old and a citizen for at least nine years. They must live in the state they want to represent.

The Constitution requires that a census be taken every ten years to determine how many members each state will have in the House of Representatives.

### Slide 7

**Congressional Demographics**

- Better educated than general population
  - Two-thirds of members hold advanced degrees
- Wealthier than general population
  - Senate "Millionaires Club"
- Recent increases in minority representation

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Put simply, Congress is better educated, more male and whiter than the general population. More than two-thirds hold advanced degrees. Almost 250 members of Congress are millionaires, a fact which has led to the Senate at times being called "the Millionaires Club." Many members have significant inherited wealth; in 2010, representatives had a median net worth of \$75,000 and senators had a median net worth of \$1.7 million.

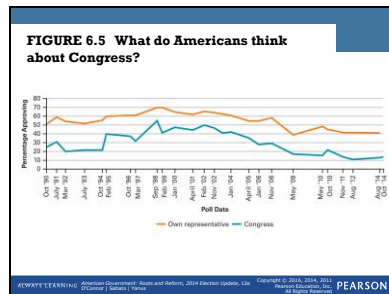
Most members of Congress may qualify for AARP benefits: The average age of House members is 57, while the average age of Senators is 63.

An influx of women, African Americans, and other minorities were elected in 1992. Some of those gains have held: the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress included 42 African Americans, all in the House, and 27 Hispanics. It also included seven members of Asian or Pacific Island American descent and four openly gay members. Some groups have lost ground, however: the number of women has declined slightly in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, as has

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the number of Jewish members of Congress.

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This graph shows the American public's views on Congress as an institution and individual members. Poll respondents were asked, "Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?" and "Do you approve or disapprove of the way the representative from your district is handling his or her job?"

*SOURCE: The Roper Center for Public Opinion, [http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data\\_access/tag/congressional\\_approval.html](http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/tag/congressional_approval.html); Gallup, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/156662/congress-approval-ties-time-low.aspx>; and ABC News/Washington Post Poll, <http://www.langerresearch.com/uploads/1144a43ThreeMonthsOut.pdf>*

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**The  
End**

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