



# Congress

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## Chapter 7

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*In this chapter we will learn about*

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- The clash between representation and lawmaking
- The powers and responsibilities of Congress
- Congressional membership and elections
- The organization of Congress and the rules of congressional operation
- The relationship of citizens to Congress

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# Representation and lawmaking

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- Representation: the efforts by elected officials to look out for the interests of those who elect them
- Lawmaking: the creation of policy to address the problems and needs of the entire nation

# The conflict between representation and lawmaking

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- Local good different from national good, and members favor representing their local constituencies
- Difficult for members to fulfill their collective responsibility of national lawmaking
- Explains why Americans hate Congress as a whole but love their own senators and representatives

# Four kinds of representation

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- Policy representation: congressional work to advance the issues and ideological preferences of constituents
- Allocative representation: congressional work to secure projects, services, and funds for the represented district
  - Pork barrel: public works projects and grants for specific districts paid for by general revenues

# Four kinds of representation, cont'd.

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- Casework: legislative work on behalf of individual constituents to solve their problems with government agencies and programs
- Symbolic representation: efforts of members of Congress to stand for American ideals or identify with common constituency values

# Powers of the House vs. Senate

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- Bicameral legislature: legislature with two chambers
- Constitutional differences
  - Term length, age, apportionment, treaties, appointments, etc.
- Organizational differences
  - Size, number of committees, Rules Committee, limits on debate
- Electoral differences
  - Campaign spending

# Differences between the House and Senate

	House	Senate
<b>Constitutional Differences</b>		
Term length	2 years	6 years
Minimum age	25	30
Citizenship required	7 years	9 years
Residency	In state	In state
Apportionment	Changes with population	Fixed; entire state
Impeachment	Impeaches official	Tries impeached official
Treaty-making power	No authority	2/3 approval
Presidential appointments	No authority	Majority approval
<b>Organizational Differences</b>		
Size	435 members	100 members
Number of standing committees	20	16
Total committee assignments per member	Approx. 6	Approx. 11
Rules Committee	Yes	No
Limits on floor debate	Yes	No (filibuster possible)
<b>Electoral Differences</b>		
Costs of elections		
Incumbents	\$1.1 million	\$8.5 million
Challengers	\$190,024	\$971,379
Open seat	\$550,839	\$3.0 million
Incumbency advantage	98% reelected (93.4% 50-year average)	96% reelected (80.4% 50-year average)

**Source:** Roger Davidson and Walter Oleszek, *Congress and Its Members*, 9th ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2004), 60, 205; Federal Election Commission data compiled by Center for Responsive Politics; calculations by authors.

# Checks and balances: Congress and the president

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- Congress passes bills; president signs or vetoes
  - President’s State of the Union address formulates policy
- President appoints cabinet, ambassadors, judges to federal courts
  - Senate has “advise and consent” role
- President represents national constituency; Congress represents district or state constituencies

# Checks and balances: Congress and the judiciary

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- Congress makes the laws; the courts interpret them
- Congress sets up lower federal courts, determines salaries
- Congress decides jurisdiction for courts to hear cases
- Congress passes legislation that limits courts' discretion to rule or impose sentences

# Congressional elections

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- Politics of defining congressional districts
  - Reapportionment: a reallocation of congressional seats among the states every ten years, following the census
  - Redistricting: process of redrawing of district lines in states with more than one representative (carried out by state legislators or commission)
  - Gerrymandering: redistricting to benefit a particular group

# Types of gerrymandering

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- Pro-incumbent gerrymandering
- Partisan gerrymandering
  - Texas redistricting (see “What’s at Stake?”)
- Racial gerrymandering: redistricting to enhance or reduce the chances that a racial or ethnic group will elect members to the legislature
  - Majority-minority districts after Voting Rights Act (1982)
  - Often deemed unconstitutional by Supreme Court

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# Deciding to run for Congress

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- Who can run?
  - Age, citizenship, and residency qualifications
- Why would anyone want this job?
  - Sense of duty, policy, ideology
  - Pay, perks, power
  - Down side: hard work, low job security, expensive

# Deciding to run for Congress, cont'd.

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- Strategic politician: office-seeker who bases the decision to run on a rational calculation that he or she will be successful
  - Understands national trends

# Who gets elected?

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- Congress does not represent the public demographically
- Descriptive representation: the idea that an elected body should mirror demographically the population it represents

# How Congress works: organization

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- Central role of party
  - Parties frequently vote in unison in Congress
  - Majority party controls leadership structure

# Organization, cont'd.

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- Speaker of the House: majority party leader, serves as the presiding officer of the House
  - Speaker has more power in House than majority leader has in Senate
  - Leadership power depends on person and amount of power given by party members

# Committee system: types of committees

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- Standing committees: permanent committees responsible for legislation in particular policy areas
  - Draft legislation and provide oversight
  - Committee chairs wield considerable power
  - House Rules Committee: determines how and when debate on a bill will take place
  - Getting on “right” committee essential for members of Congress

# Committee system, cont'd.

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- Select committees: appointed to deal with an issue or problem not suited to a standing committee
- Joint committees: combined House-Senate committee formed to coordinate activities and expedite legislation in a certain area

# Committee system, cont'd.

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- Conference committees: formed temporarily to reconcile differences in House and Senate versions of a bill
  - May alter or rewrite legislation
- Congressional resources (staff and bureaucracy) have grown

# How Congress works: process and politics

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- Separate houses, identical bills
  - Bicameral legislature
- Fragmentation of legislative power
  - Committees break up legislation
- Norms of conduct: informal rules that govern behavior in Congress
  - Norms have changed, leading to adversarial behavior

# How a bill becomes a law – some of the time

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- Getting on the legislative agenda
  - President: State of the Union, exercises role as policy entrepreneur; highly publicized agenda
- Legislative process
  - Introduced and then moves through committees (most often dies here or is marked up)

# How a bill becomes a law, cont'd.

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- Getting to the floor
  - House has rules on debate from Rules Committee
  - Senate can offer amendments or filibuster (stopped only by cloture)
- Final challenge: consideration by full House and/or Senate
  - Roll call vote; if bill passes with different language, must go to conference committee
  - Presidential veto
  - Congress can override veto with two-thirds vote in each chamber

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# The citizens and Congress: why the public dislikes Congress

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- Changing nature of campaigns (voter cynicism and candidates running against Congress)
- Negative media coverage of Congress
- Role of money in congressional elections
  - Need to raise funds
  - Suspicion about special interest access

# Why the public dislikes Congress, cont'd.

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- Dissatisfaction with congressional politics
  - Want efficiency, not bickering
  - But democracy is messy
- Reforms aren't likely to work
  - Congress is a representative institution that is unlikely to take on more lawmaking
- Founders intended Congress not to move hastily