

United States Congress: Facts and Figures

Congress is the legislative branch of the US system of government and is divided into two chambers: the House of Representatives (lower chamber) and the Senate (upper chamber). The formal powers of Congress are set out in Article 1 of the US Constitution, and include making laws, collecting revenue, borrowing and spending money, declaring war, making treaties with foreign nations, and overseeing the executive branch.

Elections to the US Congress occur in November every second year, with the Congress convening the following January. The current, 115th, Congress was elected in November 2016 and was convened in January 2017.

The US has a long-standing two-party system, which means that nearly all members of Congress belong to either the Republican or Democratic Parties, while independent members (if any) generally align or sit with one of the two main parties. At the most recent US Congressional and Presidential elections, in November 2016, the Republican Party retained its majority in both houses of Congress, as well as winning the White House.

This EPRS Briefing is designed to provide key facts and figures about the US Congress as an institution, including relevant comparisons with the European Parliament (EP). The back page contains a map showing the location of the various Congressional buildings on Capitol Hill, home to the Congress in Washington DC.

Composition of the US Congress

The US Congress has 535 voting members – 435 Representatives and 100 Senators – representing about [310 million](#) people in the 50 US states. Elected directly by the people, on the basis of individual, single-member districts, the 435 Representatives serve a two-year term. Each of the 50 states has [two Senators](#), who sit for a six-year term. Elections are held, on a rolling basis, for one third of the 100 Senate seats every two years.



435



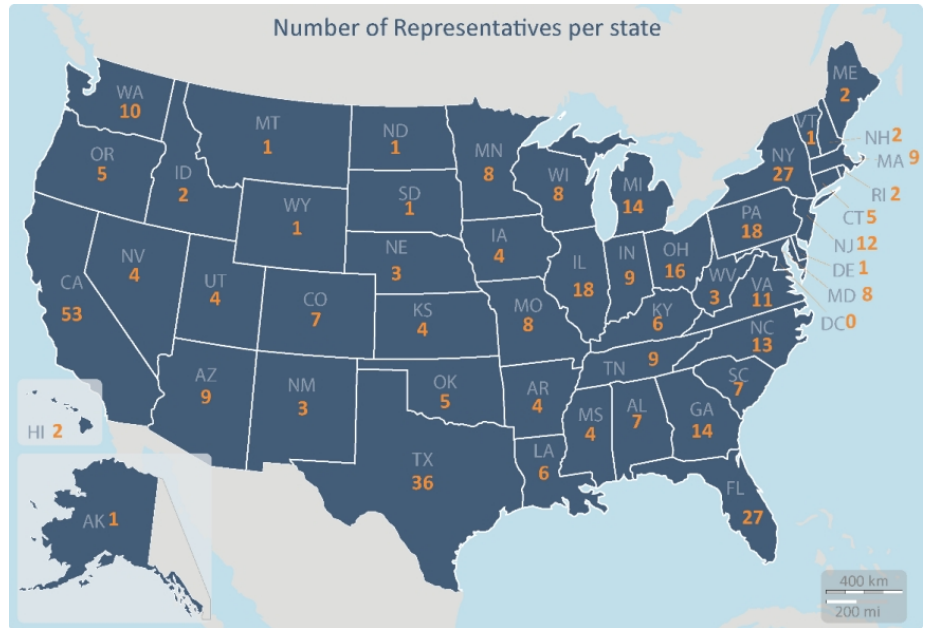
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Capitol Hill from the west. ©Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, photograph by Carol M. Highsmith [LC-HS503-4764].

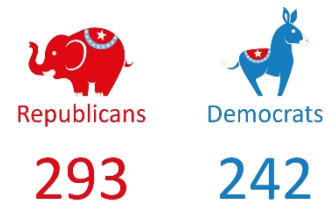
Representation by state

Each US state returns at least [one Representative](#), with the size of delegations to the House depending on total state population. The House also has six non-voting members: a resident Puerto Rican Commissioner, and five delegates – one each for Washington DC, American Samoa, Guam, the North Mariana Islands, and the US Virgin Islands.¹

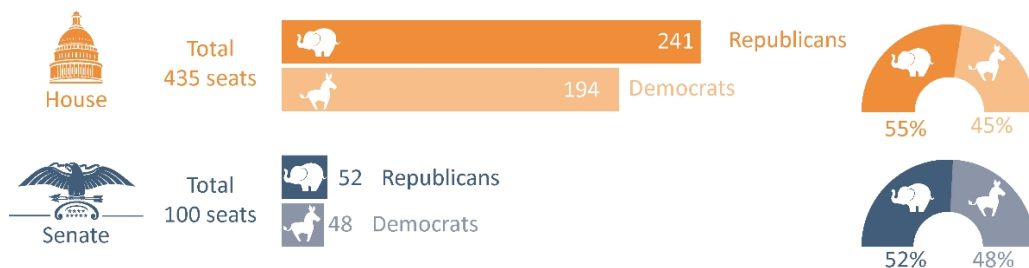


Party balance in the 115th Congress (January 2017 - January 2019)

The party winning the elections in each house of the US Congress is identified as the 'majority', and their political opponents as the 'minority'. This distinction is important, as the majority party holds the most significant leadership positions, such as [Speaker of the House](#), and in effect also appoints all the committee chairs.



Following the November 2016 elections, the 115th Congress has 293 Republicans and 242 Democrats, distributed in the two houses as follows:²



Compared to the preceding 114th Congress, Republicans lost two seats in the Senate, and six in the House, at the November 2016 elections.



















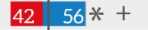























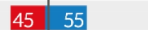











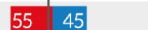














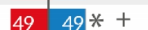


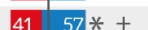


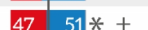


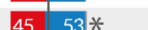









Data source: [US Congress](#).

NB: A special election took place in Alabama on 12 December 2017 to fill the Senate seat vacated by Senator Jeff Sessions, who was confirmed as US Attorney General early this year. Democrat Doug Jones won the election, becoming the first Democrat elected to the Senate from Alabama since 1992. His taking up his seat in early January results in a further reduction of the Republican majority in the Senate – to 51 Republicans and 49 Democrats.

History of party balance in the US Congress

Although the Republican Party currently controls not only both chambers of Congress, but the White House too, this situation has been relatively rare since 1969 – it has only occurred in seven of the 25 two-year terms. For example, Presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton enjoyed a majority in both houses of Congress only in the first two years of their eight-year terms, while George H.W. Bush and Ronald Reagan were never in this situation.

Congress	Year	 House of Representatives	 Senate	US President
88th	1963	 176 258 *	 34 66	John F. Kennedy/Lyndon Johnson 
89th	1965	 140 295	 32 68	Lyndon Johnson 
90th	1967	 187 248	 36 64	Lyndon Johnson 
91st	1969	 192 243	 43 57	Richard Nixon 
92nd	1971	 180 255	 44 54 * +	Richard Nixon 
93rd	1973	 192 243	 42 56 * +	Richard Nixon/Gerald Ford 
94th	1975	 144 291	 37 61 * +	Gerald Ford 
95th	1977	 143 292	 38 61 *	James Carter 
96th	1979	 157 278	 41 58 *	James Carter 
97th	1981	 192 243	 53 46 *	Ronald Reagan 
98th	1983	 166 269	 55 45	Ronald Reagan 
99th	1985	 181 254	 47 53	Ronald Reagan 
100th	1987	 177 258	 45 55	Ronald Reagan 
101st	1989	 175 260	 45 55	George H.W. Bush 
102nd	1991	 167 267 *	 44 56	George H.W. Bush 
103rd	1993	 176 258 *	 43 57	Bill Clinton 
104th	1995	 230 204 *	 52 48	Bill Clinton 
105th	1997	 226 207 **	 55 45	Bill Clinton 
106th	1999	 223 211 *	 55 45	Bill Clinton 
107th	2001	 220 213 **	 50 50	George W. Bush 
108th	2003	 229 205 *	 51 48 *	George W. Bush 
109th	2005	 233 201 *	 55 44 *	George W. Bush 
110th	2007	 202 233	 49 49 * +	George W. Bush 
111th	2009	 178 257	 41 57 * +	Barack Obama 
112th	2011	 242 193	 47 51 * +	Barack Obama 
113th	2013	 234 201	 45 53 *	Barack Obama 
114th	2015	 247 188	 54 44 **	Barack Obama 
115th	2017	 241 194	 52 46 **	Donald Trump 

* Independent + Conservative

Each symbol represents an individual Member who was not from either party.

Source: [House of Representatives](#) and [Senate](#).

Key to US states






















Alabama (AL), Alaska (AK), Arizona (AZ), Arkansas (AR), California (CA), Colorado (CO), Connecticut (CT), Delaware (DE), District of Columbia (DC), Florida (FL), Georgia (GA), Hawaii (HI), Idaho (ID), Illinois (IL), Indiana (IN), Iowa (IA), Kansas (KS), Kentucky (KY), Louisiana (LA), Maine (ME), Maryland (MD), Massachusetts (MA), Michigan (MI), Minnesota (MN), Mississippi (MS), Missouri (MO), Montana (MT), Nebraska (NE), Nevada (NV), New Hampshire (NH), New Jersey (NJ), New Mexico (NM), New York (NY), North Carolina (NC), North Dakota (ND), Ohio (OH), Oklahoma (OK), Oregon (OR), Pennsylvania (PA), Rhode Island (RI), South Carolina (SC), South Dakota (SD), Tennessee (TN), Texas (TX), Utah (UT), Vermont (VT), Virginia (VA), Washington (WA), West Virginia (WV), Wisconsin (WI) and Wyoming (WY).

Elections to the US congress

Mid-term elections – Seats lost or won by the President's party

Mid-term elections are often viewed differently to those in presidential election years, with the party of the President usually losing seats, sometimes in considerable numbers.

This chart shows the outcome of all mid-term elections to the US Congress since 1962.

Year	President		House	Senate
1962	John F. Kennedy		-4	3
1966	Lyndon Johnson		-47	-4
1970	Richard Nixon		-12	2
1974	Gerald Ford (Nixon)		-48	-5
1978	Jimmy Carter		-15	-3
1982	Ronald Reagan		-26	1
1986	Ronald Reagan		-5	-8 
1990	George H. W. Bush		-8	-1
1994	Bill Clinton		-52 	-8 
1998	Bill Clinton		5	0
2002	George W. Bush		8	2
2006	George W. Bush		-30 	-6 
2010	Barack Obama		-63 	-6
2014	Barack Obama		-13	-9 

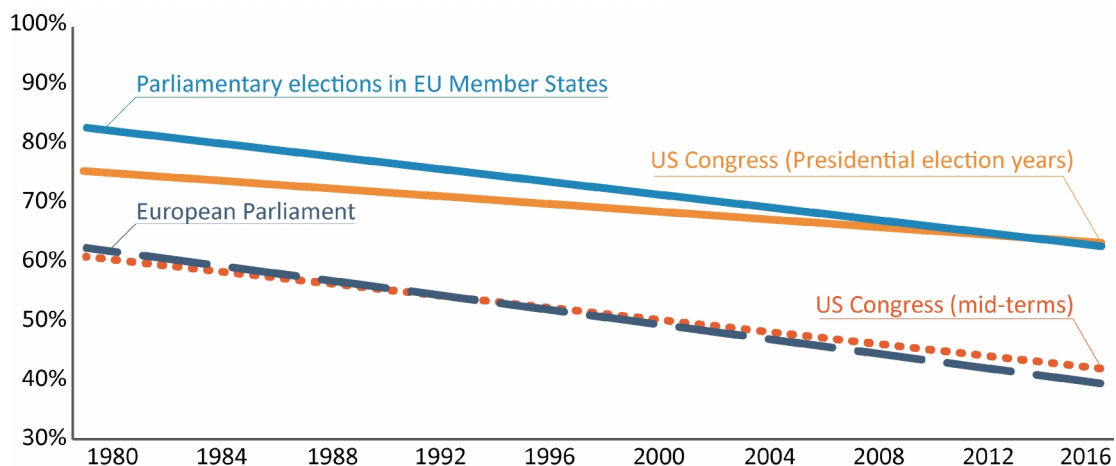
Data source: [House of Representatives and Senate](#).

 Change in overall control

Trends in turnout in US Congressional elections and EP elections³

Since 1979 (the year of the first EP direct elections), voter participation has fallen steadily in both the US and EU. These trends are consistent with a decline in general election participation in most G20 democracies since 1945, from a post-war 80 %, to around 60 % today.

In general, on both sides of the Atlantic, elections in which voters simultaneously decide who runs the executive branch of government, as well as who controls the legislature, attract a higher turnout. The US mid-term elections, like European Parliament elections, generally see turnout which is 15 to 20 percentage points lower than in US presidential elections or in national elections in Europe, in both of which control of the executive is being determined.



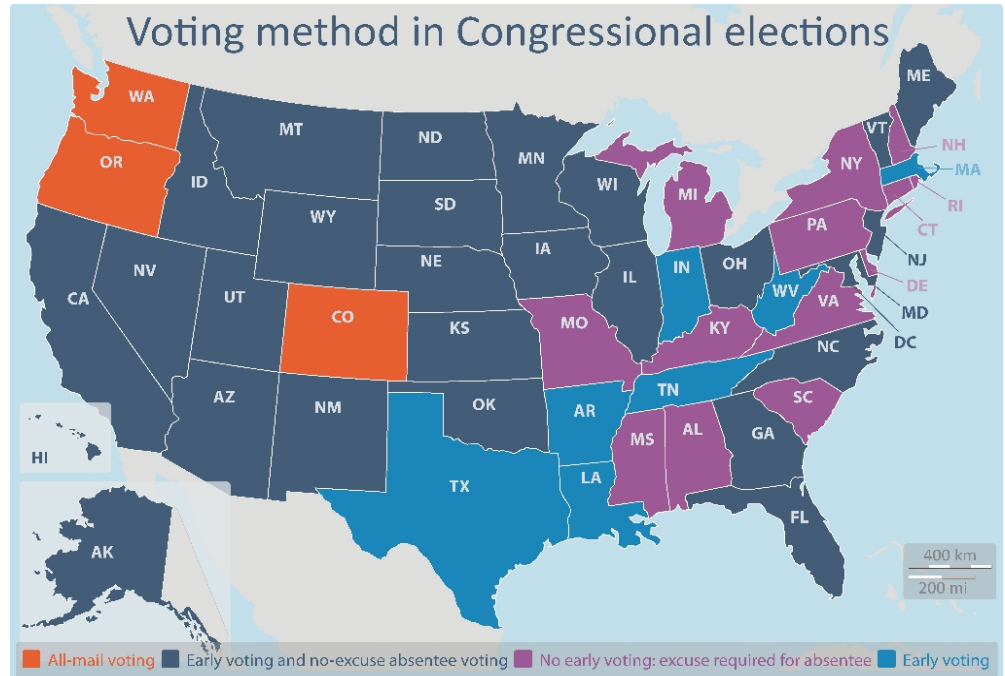
Data source: [IDEA](#).

For reference, turnout in both EP and national parliamentary elections is calculated as the total number of votes as a percentage of the total number of registered voters. All national elections taking place in the same year are totalled to generate an annual EU-wide percentage.

Voting methods

To boost turnout in US elections, many states have introduced alternative or convenience systems for casting votes. Overall three methods are used:

- 37 states and the District of Columbia allow **early voting in person** during a designated period before Election Day, without the voter needing to provide justification for voting early.
- All states mail **absentee ballot papers** to voters at their request (justification is required in 20 states).
- Postal ballot papers are automatically mailed to voters eligible for **mail voting**. (Three states use such voting for all elections: Oregon, Washington and Colorado.)



Source: National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), [Absentee and Early Voting](#).

House leadership

The Speaker is the political and parliamentary leader of the House of Representatives. Elected by the House every two years, at the beginning of each new Congress, the Speaker is the only House leadership position mentioned in the US Constitution (Article 1). The Speaker for the 115th Congress is Representative Paul Ryan (WI). The House Republican Conference and the House Democratic Caucus serve roles analogous to political groups in the European Parliament.

For the 115th Congress, the House leadership positions include, for the majority Republicans and for the minority Democrats:

Majority Republicans		Minority Democrats	
Speaker:	Paul Ryan (WI)	Democratic Leader:	Nancy Pelosi (CA)
Majority Leader:	Kevin McCarthy (CA)	Assistant Democratic Leader:	James Clyburn (CA)
Republican Conference Chair:	Cathy McMorris Rodgers (WA)	Democratic Caucus Chair:	Joseph Crowley (NY)
Majority Whip:	Steve Scalise (LA)	Democratic Whip:	Steny Hoyer (MD)
Republican Policy Committee Chair: Luke Messer (IN)			

Source: [House Leadership](#).

Senate leadership

In the Senate, there are two constitutionally mandated officers: the Vice-President of the United States, who serves as the President of the Senate (currently Mike Pence), and the President Pro-Tempore, who presides over the Senate in the Vice-President's absence, currently Orrin Hatch. The other Senate leadership positions include:


Majority Republicans		Minority Democrats	
Republican Leader:	Mitch McConnell (AL)	Democratic Leader and Chair of the Conference:	Charles Schumer (NY)
Republican Conference Chair:	John Thune (SD)	Assistant Democratic Leader:	Patty Murray (WA)
Assistant Republican Leader:	John Cornyn (TX)	Whip:	Richard Durbin (IL)
Vice Chair of the Senate Republican Conference:	Roy Blunt (MO)	Chair of Policy and Communications Committee:	Debbie Stabenow (MI)

Source: [Senate Leadership](#).

Congressional Committees

Much of the legislative and oversight work of the US Congress is undertaken in the committees of each house. There are 20 main committees in the House of Representatives and 16 in the Senate, together with four joint committees. Their names, chairs, ranking members and total numbers of members are set out below. Most have several subcommittees.

Composition of House Committees

 Name of Committee	Chair (R)	Ranking Member (D)	Number of Representatives	
Armed Services	Mac Thornberry (TX)	Adam Smith (WA)	62	34 28
Transportation and Infrastructure	Bill Shuster (PA)	Peter DeFazio (OR)	61	34 27
Financial Services	Jeb Hensarling (TX)	Maxine Waters (CA)	60	34 26
Energy and Commerce	Greg Walden (OR)	Frank Pallone, Jr. (NJ)	55	31 24
Appropriations	Rodney Frelinghuysen (KY)	Nita Lowey (NY)	52	30 22
Foreign Affairs	Edward Royce (CA)	Eliot Engel (NY)	47	26 21
Agriculture	K. Michael Conaway (TX)	Collin Peterson (MN)	46	26 20
Natural Resources	Rob Bishop (UT)	Raul Grijalva (AZ)	43	25 18
Oversight and Government Reform	Jason Chaffetz (UT)	Elijah Cummings (MD)	42	24 18
Judiciary	Bob Goodlatte (VA)	John Conyers, Jr. (MI)	41	24 17
Education and the Workforce	Virginia Foxx (NC)	Robert Scott (VA)	40	23 17
Ways and Means	Kevin Brady (TX)	Richard Neal (MA)	40	24 16
Science, Space and Technology	Lamar Smith (TX)	Eddie Bernice Johnson (TX)	39	22 17
Budget	Diane Black (TN)	John Yarmuth (KY)	36	22 14
Homeland Security	Michael McCaul (TX)	Bennie Thompson (MS)	30	18 12
Small Business	Steve Chabot (OH)	Nydia Velazquez (NY)	24	14 10
Veterans' Affairs	David Roe (TN)	Timothy Walz (MN)	24	14 10
Rules	Pete Sessions (TX)	Louise McIntosh Slaughter (NY)	13	9 4
Ethics	Susan Brooks (IN)	Theodore Deutch (FL)	10	5 5
House Administration	Gregg Harper (MS)	Robert Brady (PA)	9	6 3

Composition of Senate Committees

 Name of Committee	Chair (R)	Ranking Member (D)	Number of Senators
Appropriations	Thad Cochran (MS)	Patrick Leahy (VT)	31 16 15
Armed Services	John McCain (AZ)	Jack Reed (RI)	27 14 13
Commerce, Science and Transportation	John Thune (SD)	Bill Nelson (FL)	27 14 13
Finance	Orrin Hatch (UT)	Ron Wyden (OR)	26 14 12
Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs	Mike Crapo (ID)	Sherrod Brown (OH)	23 12 11
Budget	Michael Enzi (WY)	Bernard Sanders (VT)	23 12 11
Energy and Natural Resources	Lisa Murkowski (WA)	Maria Cantwell (WA)	23 12 11
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions	Lamar Alexander (TN)	Patty Murray (WA)	23 12 11
Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry	Pat Roberts (KS)	Debbie Stabenow (MI)	21 11 10
Environment and Public Works	John Barrasso (WY)	Thomas Carper (DE)	21 11 10
Foreign Relations	Bob Corker (TN)	Benjamin Cardin (MD)	21 11 10
Judiciary	Chuck Grassley (IA)	Dianne Feinstein (CA)	20 11 9
Rules and Administration	Richard Shelby (AL)	Amy Klobuchar (MN)	19 10 9
Small Business and Entrepreneurship	James Risch (ID)	Jeanne Shaheen (NH)	19 10 9
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs	Ron Johnson (WI)	Claire McCaskill (MO)	15 8 7
Veterans' Affairs	Johnny Isakson (GA)	Jon Tester (MT)	15 8 7

Composition of Joint Committees

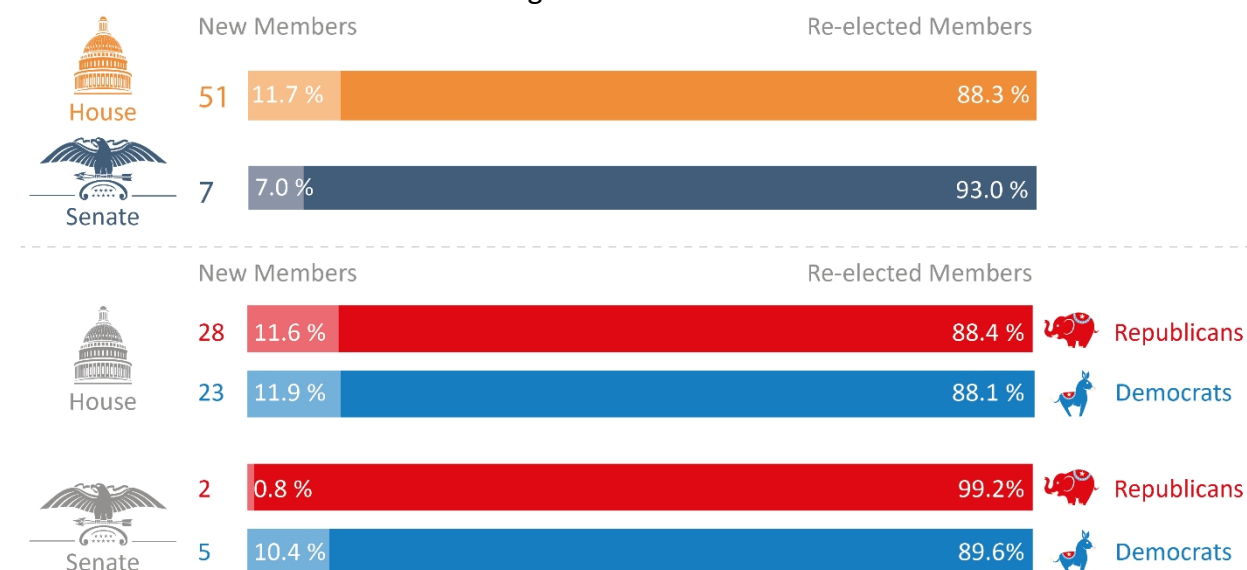
Joint Committee	Chair (R)	Vice Chair (R)	
Economic	Rep. Patrick Tiberi (OH)	Sen. Mike Lee (UT)	20 12 8
Library	Rep. Gregg Harper (MS)	Sen. Richard Shelby (AL)	10 6 4
Printing	Sen. Richard Shelby (AL)	Rep. Rodney Davis (IL)	10 6 4
Taxation	Rep. Kevin Brady (TX)	Sen. Orrin Hatch (UT)	10 6 4

Source: [House of Representatives and Senate](#), June 2017.

Profile of Members of the 115th Congress

New Members of Congress

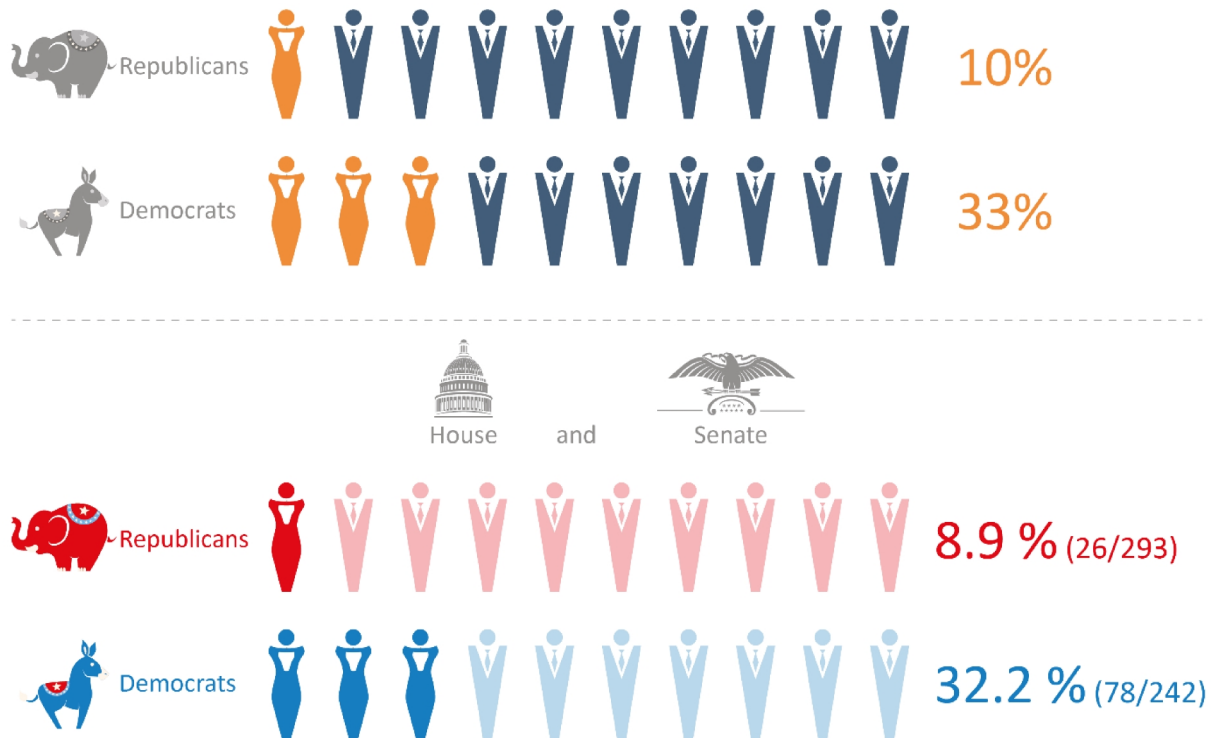
Newly elected members of Congress are often referred to as '[freshmen](#)'. There are a total of 58 first-term members in the 115th Congress.



Source: [House of Representatives](#) and [Senate](#).

Women in Congress

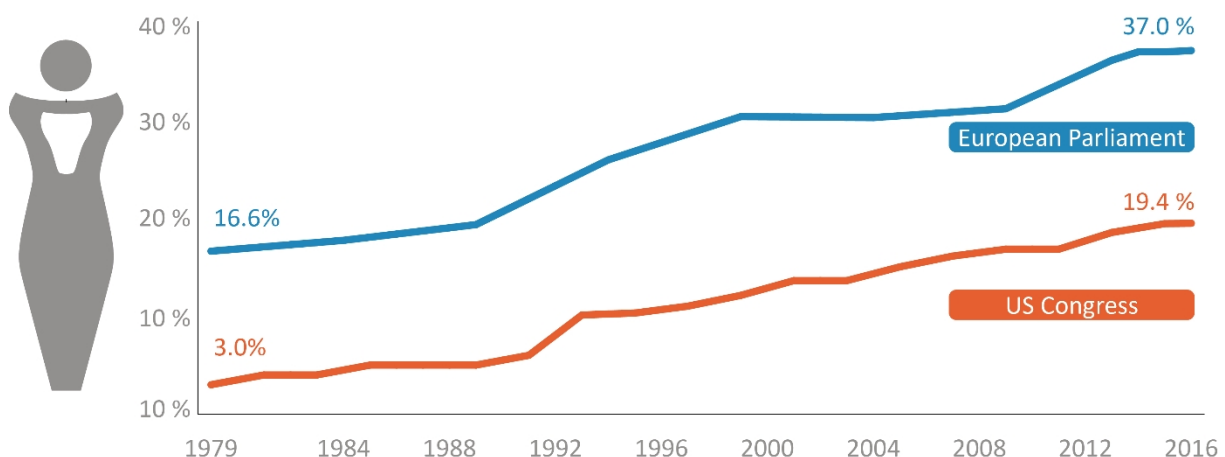
A total of 104 [women](#) were elected to the 115th Congress: 83 serve in the House (62 Democrats and 21 Republicans) and 21 in the Senate (16 Democrats and 5 Republicans). Five non-voting members in the House (four Delegates; one Resident Commissioner) are also women.⁴



Source: [House of Representatives](#).

Women in the US Congress and European Parliament

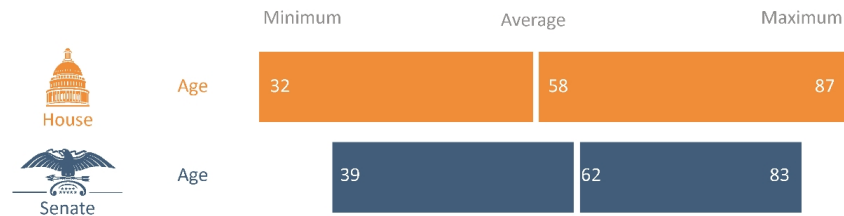
The proportion of female members of the US Congress and of the European Parliament have both increased over time, with the former consistently having fewer women than the latter. Congress counted only 3 % female members in 1979, although the proportion has risen to 19.4 % this term. The proportion of women in the Parliament at the start of each parliamentary term has also shown steady growth, from 16.6 % in 1979, to 37 % in the current term.



Source: Women in Congress, [Historical data](#), US House of Representatives.

Age of Members of Congress

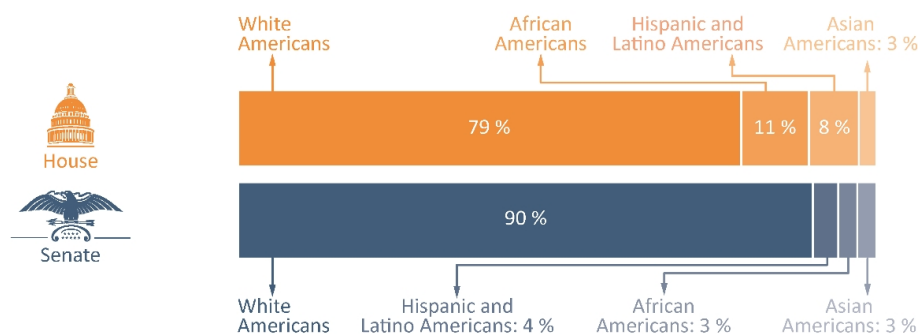
The US Constitution states that, to serve in office, a Representative must be at least [25 years old](#) and a Senator at least [30 years old](#). The average age of members in the House is currently 58, and in the Senate, 62.



Source: J. E. Manning, [Membership of the 115th Congress: a Profile](#), CRS, 17 February 2017.

Ethnic origin of Members of Congress

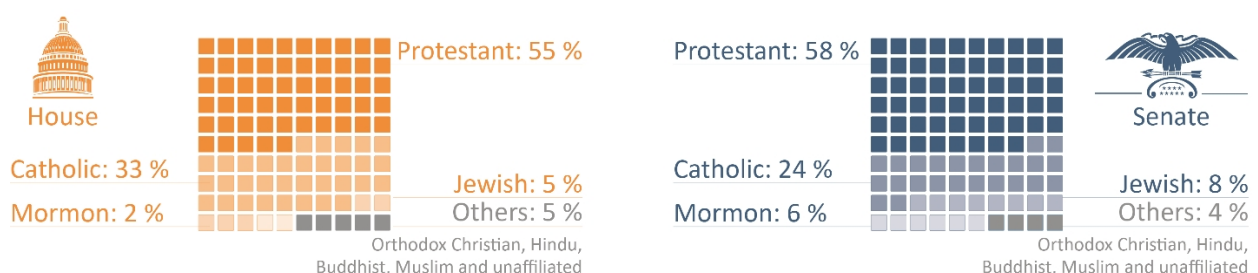
The 115th Congress is the most diverse in history, with a record presence of members of African American, Hispanic/Latino and Asian origin. However, the percentage of non-white members (around 19 %) is below the 38 % share of the US population.⁵ The House is significantly more diverse than the Senate.



Source: [Pew Research](#), January 2017.

Religious affiliation of Members of Congress

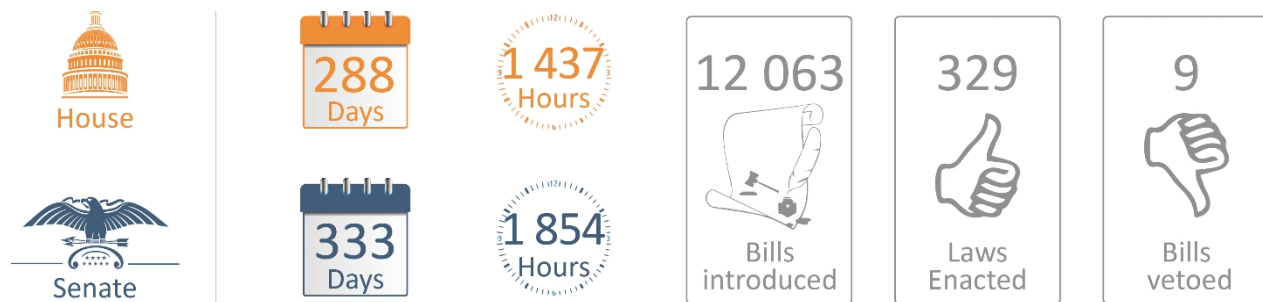
Around 91 % of Members of Congress consider themselves to be Christians, of whom 57 % are Protestant (mostly Baptist and Methodist). Judaism, Mormonism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam are also represented in Congress. While only 0.2 % of Congressional members have no religious affiliation, 23 % of the US population do not identify with a specific faith.



Source: [Pew Research](#), January 2017.

The work of the 114th Congress (January 2015 - January 2017)⁶

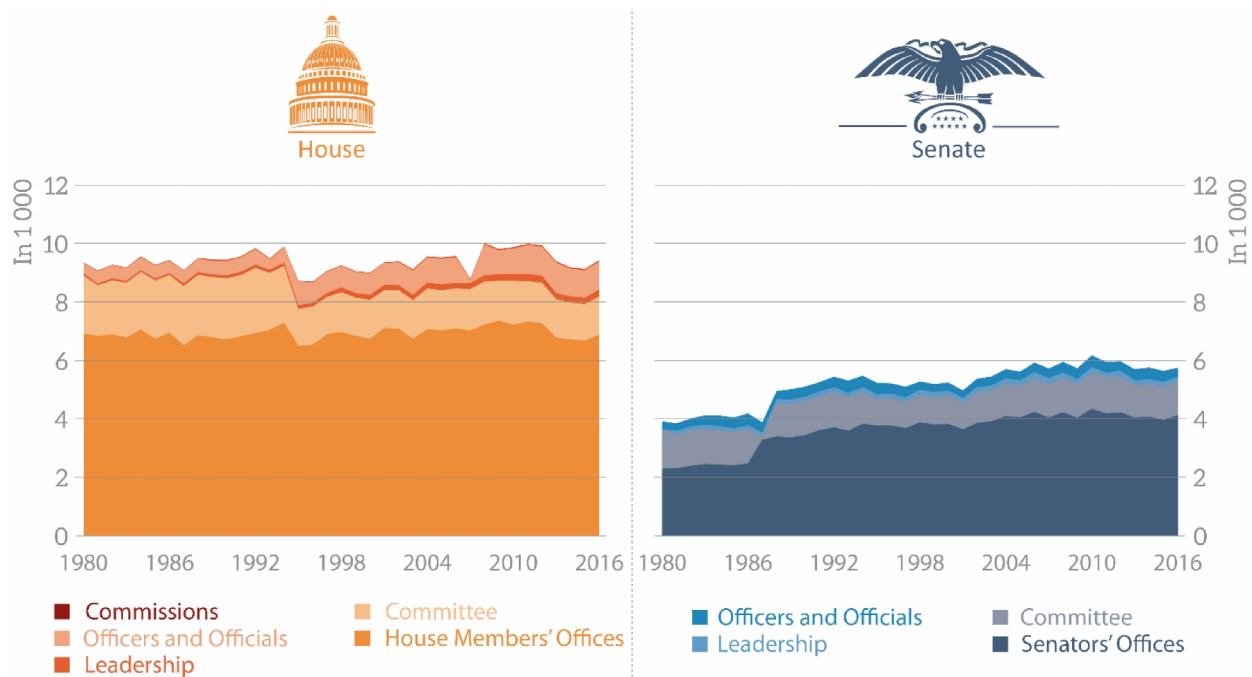
The work of members of Congress is structured around two types of day: work on Capitol Hill, when Congress is in session, and 'district days' in their constituencies. Each member of Congress may introduce bills and resolutions.⁷ Between 1973 and 2014, each member has introduced an average of [20](#) proposals per Congress. In total, 12 063 proposed measures (bills, joint resolutions) were introduced in the 114th Congress (2015-2017), but only [3 %](#) of them were enacted.⁸



Source: [Résumé](#) of Congressional Activity of the 114th Congress.

Staff levels in Congress

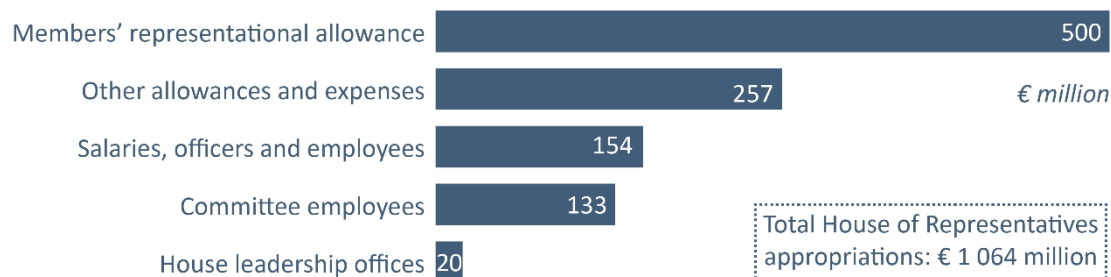
'Staffers' working on committees, in members' personal offices and in other Congressional roles help Representatives and Senators in their daily work. In 2016, there were 9 420 staff working in the House of Representatives and 5 749 staff in the Senate. Over time, the proportion of committee staff appears to have decreased and personal staff increased (including in districts/states), notably in the Senate.



Source: CRS report on [Senate](#) and [House](#) of Representatives Staff Levels in Member, Committee, Leadership, and Other Offices, 1977-2016, 13 September 2016.

Cost of the House of Representatives

Funding for the House of Representatives in fiscal year (FY) 2015 amounted to €1 064 million (US\$1 180 million). A large portion was devoted to Members' representational allowance (MRA), supporting Representatives in their official and representational duties (i.e. official expenses, including staff, mail, travel, office equipment, district office rental).



Source: CRS report on Legislative Branch: [FY2016 Appropriations](#), 1 February 2016.

Congressional agencies

A number of specialised bodies support members of Congress – notably the [Congressional Research Service](#) (CRS), which provides independent, non-partisan policy and legal analysis; the [Congressional Budget Office](#) (CBO), which provides comparable analysis of budgetary and macro-economic issues; and the [Government Accountability Office](#) (GAO), which investigates and reports to Congress how US taxpayers' money is spent by the federal government, and assists Congressional committees with oversight of the executive. In total, these three Congressional agencies have almost 4 000 staff and spend around €600 million (FY 2015).

	Financial resources		Staff (full-time equivalent posts)
	€ million	US\$ million	
CRS	96	107	651
CBO	41	45	235
GAO	470	522	3 015

Source: CRS report on Legislative Branch: [FY2016 Appropriations](#), [Library of Congress](#) budget justification for FY 2016; [CBO](#) appropriation request for FY 2016; Budget requests for [GAO](#) for FY 2016 (exchange rate €1 = US\$1.1095).

Main references

[Congressional Profile](#), Office of the Clerk, US House of Representatives, 1 February 2017. [Résumé of Congressional Activity](#), First and Second Sessions of the one hundred fourteenth Congress, Congressional record, Daily Digest.

Endnotes

¹ By law, Delegates' term of service is also two years, and the Resident Commissioner serves for four years.

² In the Senate, two Independents caucus with Democrats. Following the resignations of Representatives, three seats are [vacant](#) in the House and six further vacancies have already been filled, as of December 2017.

³ Since 1972, US citizens (both native and naturalised) must be at least 18 years old to vote. Every state except North Dakota requires eligible voters to formally register to exercise their right to vote.

⁴ To date, two states have never returned a woman to the House or the Senate (Mississippi and Vermont).

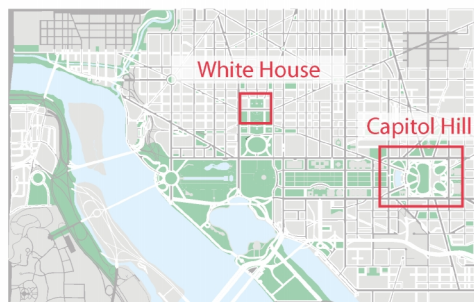
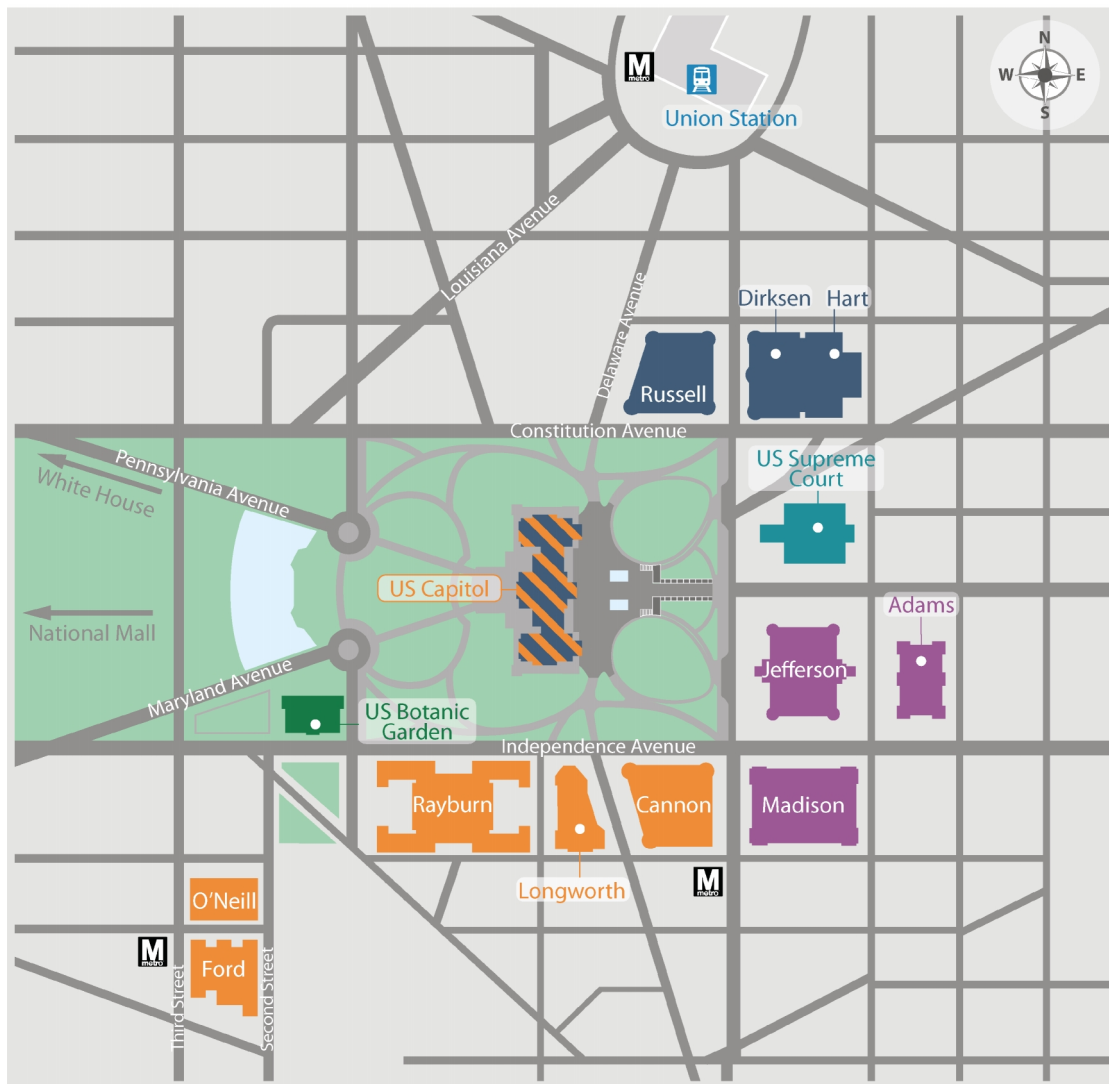
⁵ The 115th Congress includes 18 Representatives and 5 Senators [born abroad](#); four Representatives were born in Europe.

⁶ In terms of legislative activity, 2016 was atypical in that it saw an early summer recess due to national party conventions, followed by Congressional and Presidential elections in November.

⁷ Bill, resolution, concurrent resolution, and simple resolution. 'Companion' bill is used to describe a bill, introduced in one House of Congress, similar or identical to a bill introduced in the other.

⁸ The House and Senate must pass exactly the same bill before it becomes law. Once both House and Senate agree, the bill is signed or vetoed by the President.

Congressional buildings on Capitol Hill, Washington DC



Types of office

- Senate
- House of Representatives
- Library of Congress

M Metro station

■ Railway station

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