

Module 3: Congress

Topic 1 Content: The House and The Senate

Introduction



Glover Mint: The Founding Fathers established the legislative branch of government in the first Article of the U.S. Constitution. Their model for democratic government resembled the representative democracy of ancient Rome more than the direct democracy of ancient Athens. Representatives, elected by American citizens, would comprise this branch of government, known as Congress.

Echoing the structure of British Parliament, the U.S. Congress is a bicameral legislature. Congressional expert, Pilar de la Casa, and legislative analyst, Bill O'Law, join us to discuss the organization of these two chambers of Congress.

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The House of Representatives

The House of Representatives



- Lower chamber of Congress
- 435 seats in the House
- Seats distributed among the states based on their population

Pilar de la Casa: The U.S. House of Representatives is the lower chamber of Congress. There are currently 435 seats in the House of Representatives. This number was set by law in 1929 and can only be increased by an act of Congress. These 435 seats are distributed among the states based on their population.

The Census Bureau conducts a survey every 10 years to establish an estimate of the population in each state. This information is then used to determine the number of districts allotted to each state. A state will receive one House seat for each of these districts. A district generally has a population of about 700,000. Virginia, for example, has a population of approximately eight million and is divided into 11 districts.

Simply stated, a state's representation in the House is proportionate to its population. If the census shows that a state's population has drastically increased, then its number of districts will increase. If a state's population has significantly decreased, then its number of districts will also decrease.

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The House of Representatives II

The House of Representatives

Every state is guaranteed at least one seat in the House of Representatives.

American Samoa **Washington, D.C.** **Guam**

Northern Mariana Islands **Puerto Rico** **U.S. Virgin Islands**

Pilar de la Casa: It is important to note that regardless of population size, every state is guaranteed at least one seat in the House. There are even some non-voting representatives from American Samoa, the District of Columbia, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. These members represent the populations from these areas; however, they do not have voting rights, as they do not represent states.

Members of the House of Representatives serve two-year terms, with all seats up for election at the same time. This can result in major membership changes, which may cause major changes in current government policy. This is one of the reasons why the House of Representatives is known as the lower house; these shorter terms mean that the representatives from the House have a shorter influence on legislation.

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The Senate

The Senate



- Upper chamber of Congress
- 100 members of the Senate
- Two seats per state



Bill O'Law: The United States Senate is considered the upper chamber of the Congress. There are 100 members of the Senate, with each state receiving two seats. The Constitution initially gave state legislatures the power to choose Senators, instead of the people. With the ratification of the 17th Amendment in 1913, citizens were given the power to elect their Senators.

Senators serve six-year terms. These terms are staggered so that every two years, around one-third of the seats in the Senate are up for election. Staggered elections prevent major changes in Senate membership due to any one election. This offers a nice balance to the House of Representatives, where all 435 seats are up for election at the same time. This is also one reason why the Senate is considered the upper chamber of Congress; the longer terms in the Senate allow Senators to have a longer lasting impact on legislation.

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Requirements for Members of Congress

The infographic is titled "Requirements for Members of Congress" in white text on a black background. It is divided into two main sections: "House of Representatives" on the left and "Senate" on the right. Each section has a yellow header and a dark teal or brown background for the requirements. The House of Representatives requirements are: must be at least 25 years old, must have been a citizen of the U.S. for at least 7 years, and must be an inhabitant of the state in which you are elected. The Senate requirements are: must be at least 30 years old, must have been a citizen of the U.S. for at least 9 years, and must be an inhabitant of the state in which you are elected.

House of Representatives	Senate
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Must be at least 25 years old• Must have been a citizen of the U.S. for at least 7 years• Must be an inhabitant of the state in which you are elected	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Must be at least 30 years old• Must have been a citizen of the U.S. for at least 9 years• Must be an inhabitant of the state in which you are elected

Pilar de la Casa: There are some basic requirements to become a member of one of the two chambers of Congress. These requirements vary slightly between the two chambers.

To become a member of the House of Representatives you must meet the following criteria:

- you must be at least 25 years old;
- you must have been a citizen of the U.S. for at least seven years; and
- you must be an inhabitant of the state in which you are elected.

Bill O'Law: To become a Senator you must meet the following criteria:

- you must be at least 30 years old;
- you must have been a citizen of the U.S. for at least nine years; and
- you must be an inhabitant of the state in which you are elected.

That is all for today. Thank you for having us, Demi and Glover!

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Ending of Episode



Glover Mint: Thank you, Pilar. Thank you, Bill. The reason the representation of the two chambers of Congress differs is the Great Compromise. The House of Representatives benefits larger states with larger populations, since its membership is proportionate to the number of its constituents. The Senate ensures that all states, regardless of size, have equal representation in Congress. See you next time.