

The United States Senate consists of how many members? The answer is fairly simple: with two members apiece representing each of the fifty states, the total is one hundred. How about the House of Representatives? The answer is much more complicated. There are currently 435 voting members of the House of Representatives. How did this number come about, and how is the number of Representatives per state determined?

### Designed by Our Founding Fathers

The story begins with the Constitution. The framers designed the House of Representatives to represent the people rather than the states. Article I, Section II of the Constitution says that each state shall have at least one U.S. Representative, while the total size of a state's delegation to the House depends on its population. The number of Representatives also cannot be greater than one for every 30,000 people. Over time, the country expanded, and the population of the nation grew. The House of Representatives mirrored this growth: the membership of the House of Representatives increased, as did the number of people represented by each member.

### Apportionment

*Apportionment* refers to how the number of Representatives for each state is determined every 10 years, as required by the Constitution, following a national census. The question of apportionment has been a concern of Congress for much of our history. What size should the House be in order to reasonably and fairly represent the people? Beginning in 1790, after each census, Congress enacted a law that specified the changes in the actual number of Representatives. The law also designated the increase in the ratio of Representatives to the population.

In order to keep the House at a manageable number, Congress twice set the size of the House at 435 voting Members. The House has only been reapportioned 21 times since 1790. Apportionments take effect two Congresses (three years) after the last census. The 24th census took place in 2020 and will take effect (following the required automatic reapportionment) for the 118th Congress (2023-2025). Illinois lost one of 18 House seats after the 2020 Census found the state's population reduced by 18,000 from 2010.

### Non-voting Members of the House

The total membership of the House of Representatives is 441 Members. There are 435 Representatives from the 50 states. In addition, five non-voting Delegates represent the District of Columbia and the U.S. territories of Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa. A non-voting Resident Commissioner, serving a four-year term, represents the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

### Rural vs. Urban Representation

The founders were vague about how large future Congresses should be and what method to use to reapportion the House after each federal census. Usually, the House reapportioned itself to increase or preserve most states' representation—the 20th century ushered in a significant shift of the U.S. population from rural to urban areas.

The method for calculating apportionment caused smaller rural states to lose representation to larger urbanized states. A battle erupted between rural and urban factions, causing the House (for the only time in its history) to fail to reapportion itself following the 1920 Census. Republican Majority Leader John Q. Tilson of Connecticut approvingly declared that the act dispelled the “danger of failing to reapportion after each decennial census as contemplated by the Constitution.” But opponents, such as William B. Bankhead of Alabama, who doubted its constitutionality, had earlier described the plan as “the abdication and surrender of the vital fundamental powers vested in the Congress of the United States by the Constitution itself.” In 1941, Congress adopted the current formula for reapportioning House seats.

The U.S. Constitution called for at least one Representative per state and that no more than one for every 30,000 persons. Thus, the size of a state's House delegation depended on its population. Seven states have one Representative: Alaska, Wyoming, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and Delaware. The total U.S. population cannot simply be divided by the number of members (435) to determine apportionment. This makes calculating the apportionment for each state more complicated.

### Redistricting

Based upon the Census and details explained above, state legislatures must redraw the physical boundaries of congressional districts. The states are bound by limits established by Congress and the U.S. Supreme Court. Often the districts are redrawn so that one political party dominates, thereby ensuring the election of Representatives of the desired party.

### QUESTIONS

**TRUE OR FALSE?** Write a *T* or *F* in the space provided.

- \_\_\_ 1. The Constitution states that each state will have at least one representative in the U.S. House.
- \_\_\_ 2. The Constitution requires a national census every 10 years.
- \_\_\_ 3. The maximum number of House members is 537.
- \_\_\_ 4. The 2020 Census results will be reflected in the 118th Congress.
- \_\_\_ 5. All 441 members of the U.S. House have voting rights in the Electoral College and legislation.
- \_\_\_ 6. The current formula for reapportioning House seats was decided in 1941.
- \_\_\_ 7. Minnesota has one representative in the House.

**Answers:** 1-T, 2-T, 3-F, 4-T, 5-F, 6-T, 7-F