

Congress - I

The Evolution of Congress

- The intent of the Framers:
 - To oppose the concentration of power in a single institution
 - To balance large and small states
 - Bicameralism
- They expected Congress to be the dominant institution

Organization of the House

- Historically, power struggles have occurred between members and leadership
- 1994 brought changes:
 - Committee chairs hold positions for only 6 years

Organization of the House

- Reduced the number of committees and subcommittees
- The Speaker dominated the selection of committee chairs
- The Speaker set the agenda (Contract with America) and sustained high Republican discipline in 1995

Evolution of the Senate

- The Senate escaped many of the tensions encountered by the House
- The major struggle in the Senate was about how its members should be chosen; 17th amendment (1913)
- The filibuster is another major issue: restricted by Rule 22 (1917), which allows a vote of cloture

Who is in Congress?

- The House has become less male and less white
- Membership in Congress became a career
- Incumbents still have a great electoral advantage
- But in 1994, voters opposed incumbents due to budget deficits, various policies, legislative-executive bickering, and scandal

**TABLE 11-2 | CHARACTERISTICS OF THE
110TH CONGRESS, 2007-2009**

CHARACTERISTIC	U.S. POPULATION (2000)*	HOUSE	SENATE
Age (median)	35.3	55.1	60.3
Percentage minority	24.9	15.6	5
Religion			
Percentage church members	61.0	97.9	100
Percentage Roman Catholic	39.0	29.4	24
Percentage Protestant	56.0	57.7	57
Percentage Jewish	4.0	6.0	11
Percentage female	50.9	15.6	14
Percentage with advanced degrees	5.0	64.4	78
Occupation			
Percentage lawyers	0.4	36.8	58
Percentage blue-collar workers	20.1	1.8	3
Family income			
Percentage of families earning over \$50,000 annually	22.0	100.0	100
Personal wealth			
Percentage with assets over \$1 million [†]	0.7	16.0	33

Discussion Questions

1. Members of Congress tend to have a particular demographic profile—most members are middle-aged, male, white, well-educated attorneys. Is this a matter of concern? Does the preponderance of a particular demographic and professional group compromise the quality of representation provided by the U.S. Congress? In 1992, feminist organizations encouraged women to vote for women congressional candidates by noting that every member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, which had confirmed Clarence Thomas for the Supreme Court, had just this profile. How important is descriptive representation?

2. On the basis of the electoral outcomes since 2000, which party do you expect will control the legislative and executive branches in the future?
3. Should the number of terms served by members of Congress be limited, as they are for the president? If not, what justification exists for imposing a term requirement on the president but not on Congress? Wouldn't corruption be less likely if members of Congress were regularly rotated in office?