



Chapter 13

Congress

The Representatives and Senators

■ The Job

- Salary of \$168,500 with retirement benefits
- Office space in D.C. and at home with staff
- Travel allowances and franking privileges
- Requires long hours, a lot of time away from family, and pressure from others to support their policies

The Representatives and Senators

A Portrait of the 111th Congress: Some Statistics

CHARACTERISTIC	HOUSE (435 TOTAL)	SENATE (100 TOTAL)
Party		
Democrat	257	55
Republican	178	43
Independent	-	2
Gender		
Men	363	83
Women	72	17
Race		
Asian	4	2
African American	40	1
Hispanic	24	3
White and other	367	94
Religion *		
Protestant	260	63
Roman Catholic	128	25
Jewish	30	13
Other and unspecified	14	1
Prior occupation**		
Law	161	61
Business	168	27
Education	87	14
Public service/politics	172	31
Agriculture	23	6
Journalism	7	7
Real estate	36	3
Medicine	13	3
Other	61	9

*Data for 110th Congress

**Some members specify more than one occupation.

Source: Congressional Quarterly

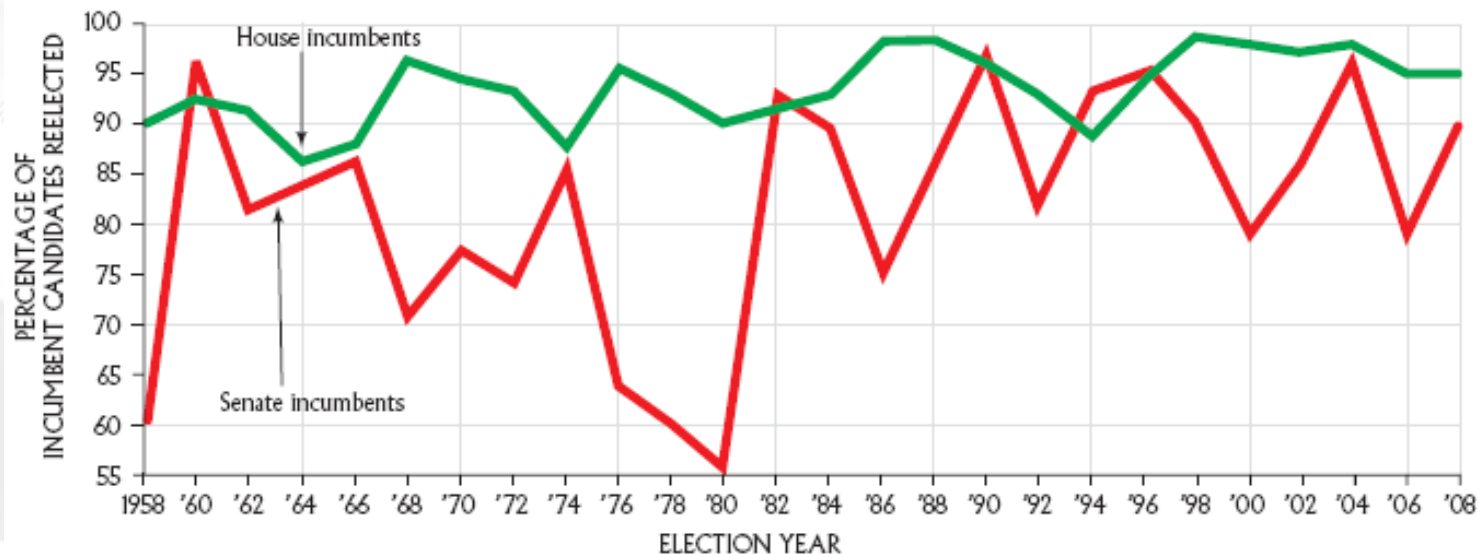
Congressional Elections

Who Wins Elections?

- Incumbents: Those already holding office.

FIGURE 12.1

The Incumbency Factor in Congressional Elections



Source: Norman J. Ornstein, Thomas E. Mann, and Michael J. Malbin, *Vital Statistics on Congress, 1997-1998* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1998). Data for 1998-2008 compiled by the authors. Figures reflect incumbents running in both primary and general elections.

Congressional Elections

■ The Advantages of Incumbents

- Advertising:
 - The goal is to be visible to your constituents
 - Frequent trips home, use of newsletter, and technology
- Credit Claiming:
 - Service to constituents through:
 - Casework: specifically helping constituents get what they think they have a right to
 - Pork Barrel: federal projects, grants, etc. made available in a congressional district or state

Congressional Elections

■ The Advantages of Incumbents

- Position Taking:
 - Portray themselves as hard working, dedicated individuals
 - Occasionally take a partisan stand on an issue
- Weak Opponents:
 - Inexperienced in politics, unorganized, and underfunded
- Campaign Spending:
 - Challengers need to raise large sums to defeat an incumbent
 - PACs give most of their money to incumbents
 - Does PAC money “buy” votes in Congress?

Congressional Elections

■ The Role of Party Identification

- Most members represent the majority party in their district, and most who identify with a party reliably vote for its candidates

■ Defeating Incumbents

- One tarnished by scandal or corruption becomes vulnerable to a challenger
- Redistricting may weaken the incumbency advantage
- Major political tidal wave may defeat incumbents

Congressional Elections

■ Open Seats

- Greater likelihood of competition
- Most turnover occurs in open seats

■ Stability and Change

- Incumbents provide stability in Congress
- Change in Congress occurs less frequently through elections
- Are term limits an answer?

How Congress is Organized to Make Policy

■ Committees and Subcommittees

- Standing committees: subject matter committees that handle bills in different policy areas
- Joint committees: a few subject-matter areas—membership drawn from House and Senate
- Conference committees: resolve differences in House and Senate bills
- Select committees: created for a specific purpose, such as the Watergate investigation

How Congress is Organized to Make Policy

American Bicameralism

■ The House

- 435 members, 2-year terms of office
- Initiates all revenue bills, more influential on budget
- House Rules Committee
- Limited debates

■ The Senate

- 100 members, 6-year terms of office
- Gives “advice & consent,” more influential on foreign affairs
- Unlimited debates (filibuster)

How Congress is Organized to Make Policy

Congressional Leadership

■ The House

- Led by Speaker of the House—elected by House members
- Presides over House
- Major role in committee assignments and legislation
- Assisted by majority leader and whips

■ The Senate

- Formally lead by Vice President
- Really lead by Majority Leader—chosen by party members
- Assisted by whips
- Must work with Minority leader

How Congress is Organized to Make Policy

TABLE 12.2

House Versus Senate: Some Key Differences

CHARACTERISTIC	HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES	SENATE
Constitutional powers	Must initiate all revenue bills; must pass all articles of impeachment	Must give "advice and consent" to many presidential nominations; must approve treaties; tries impeached officials
Membership	435 members	100 members
Term of office	2 years	6 years
Constituencies	Usually smaller	Usually larger
Centralization of power	More centralized; stronger leadership	Less centralized; weaker leadership
Political prestige	Less prestige	More prestige
Role in policymaking	More influential on budget; more specialized	More influential on foreign affairs; less specialized
Turnover	Small	Moderate
Role of seniority	More important in determining power	Less important in determining power
Procedures	Limited debate; limits on floor amendments allowed	Unlimited debate

How Congress is Organized to Make Policy

TABLE 12.3

Standing Committees in the Senate and in the House

SENATE COMMITTEES

Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry	Energy and Natural Resources	Judiciary
Appropriations	Environment and Public Works	Rules and Administration
Armed Services	Finance	Small Business and Entrepreneurship
Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs	Foreign Relations	Veterans' Affairs
Budget	Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions	
Commerce, Science, and Transportation	Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs	

HOUSE COMMITTEES

Agriculture	Foreign Affairs	Science and Technology
Appropriations	Homeland Security	Small Business
Armed Services	House Administration	Standards of Official Conduct
Budget	Judiciary	Transportation and Infrastructure
Education and Labor	Natural Resources	Veterans' Affairs
Energy and Commerce	Oversight and Government Reform	Ways and Means
Financial Services	Rules	

How Congress is Organized to Make Policy

■ The Committees at Work: Legislation and Oversight

– Legislation

- Committees work on the 11,000 bills every session
- Some hold hearings and “mark up” meetings

– Legislative oversight

- Monitoring of the bureaucracy and its administration of policy through committee hearings
- As publicity value of receiving credit for controlling spending has increase, so too has oversight grown
- Oversight usually takes place after a catastrophe

How Congress is Organized to Make Policy

■ Getting on a Committee

- Members want committee assignments that will help them get reelected, gain influence, and make policy.
- New members express their committee preferences to the party leaders.
- Those who have supported their party's leadership are favored in the selection process.
- Parties try to grant committee preferences.

How Congress is Organized to Make Policy

■ Getting Ahead on the Committee

- Committee chair: the most important influencer of congressional agenda
 - Dominant role in scheduling hearings, hiring staff, appointing subcommittees, and managing committee bills when they are brought before the full house
- Most chairs selected according to seniority system.
 - Members who have served on the committee the longest and whose party controlled Congress become chair

How Congress is Organized to Make Policy

■ **Caucuses: The Informal Organization of Congress**

- Caucus: a group of members of Congress sharing some interest or characteristic
- About 300 caucuses
- Caucuses pressure for committee meetings and hearings and for votes on bills.
- Caucuses can be more effective than lobbyists.

How Congress is Organized to Make Policy

■ Congressional Staff

- Personal staff: They work for the member, mainly providing constituent service, but help with legislation too.
- Committee staff: organize hearings, research and write legislation, target of lobbyists
- Staff Agencies: CRS, GAO, CBO provide specific information to Congress

The Congressional Process

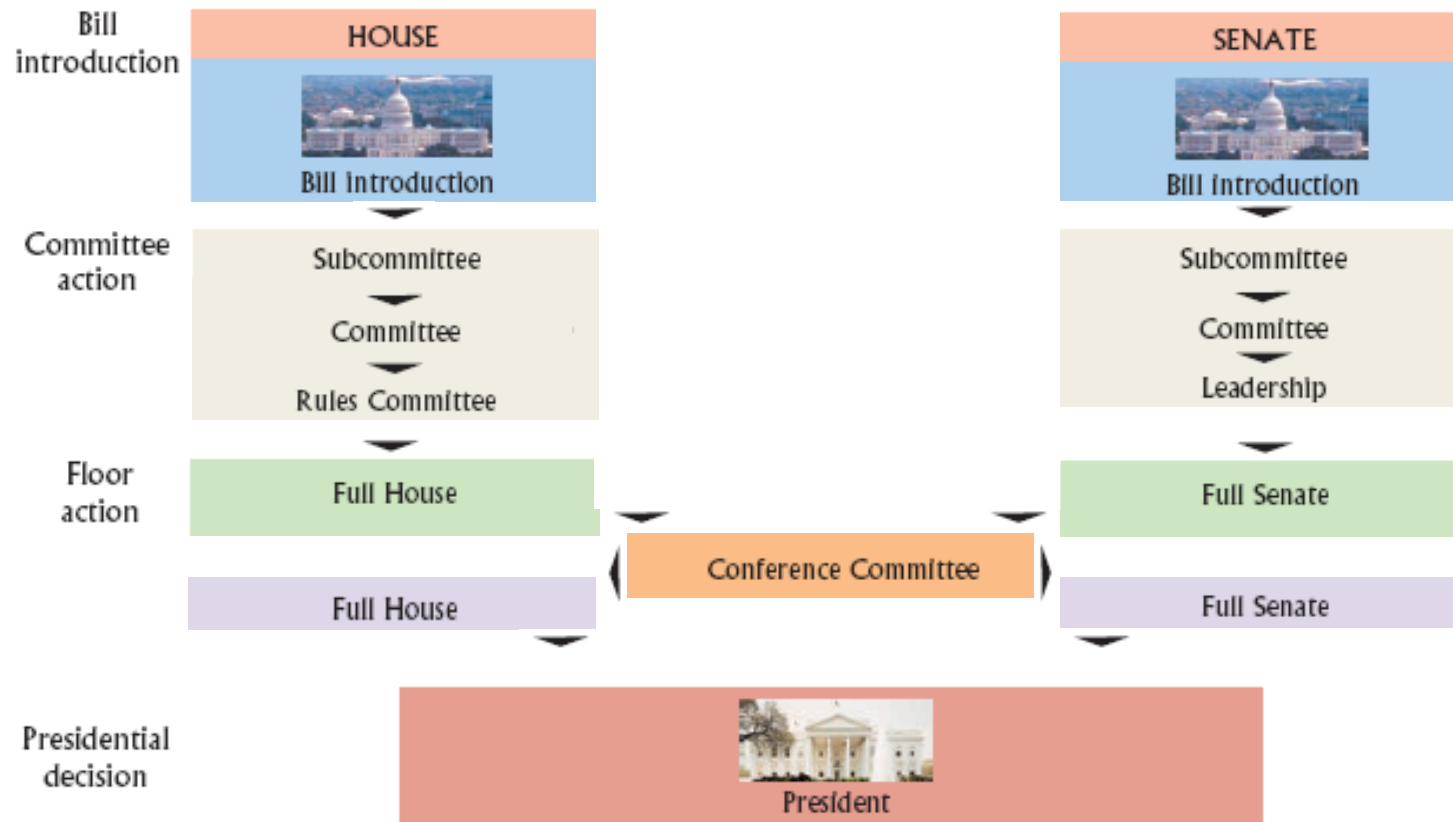
■ Legislation:

- Bill: a proposed law
- Anyone can draft a bill, but only members of Congress can introduce them.
- More rules in the House than in the Senate
- Party leaders play a vital role in steering bills through both houses, but less in the Senate
- Countless influences on the legislative process

The Congressional Process

FIGURE 12.2

How a Bill Becomes a Law



The Congressional Process

■ Presidents and Congress: Partners and Protagonists

- Presidents attempt to persuade Congress that what they want is what Congress wants.
- Presidents have many resources to influence Congress.
- But to succeed, the president must win at least 10 times.
- Ultimately, residential leadership of Congress is at the margins.

The Congressional Process

■ Party, Constituency, and Ideology

– Party Influence:

- Party leaders cannot force party members to vote a particular way, but many do vote along party lines.

– Constituency versus Ideology

- Prime determinant of member's vote on most issues is ideology
- On most issues that are not salient, legislators may ignore constituency opinion.
- But on controversial issues, members are wise to heed constituent opinion.

The Congressional Process

■ Lobbyists and Interest Groups

- There are 35,000 registered lobbyists trying to influence Congress—the bigger the issue, the more lobbyists will be working on it.
- Lobbyists try to influence legislators' votes.
- Lobbyists can be ignored, shunned and even regulated by Congress.
- Ultimately, it is a combination of lobbyists and others that influence legislators' votes.

Understanding Congress

■ Congress and Democracy

- Leadership and committee assignments are not representative
- Congress does try to respond to what the people want, but some argue it could do a better job.
- Members of Congress are responsive to the people, if the people make clear what they want.

Understanding Congress

■ Congress and Democracy

– Representation versus Effectiveness

- Supporters claim that Congress:
 - is a forum in which many interests compete for policy
 - is decentralized, so there is no oligarchy to prevent comprehensive action
- Critics argue that Congress:
 - is responsive to so many interests that policy is uncoordinated, fragmented, and decentralized
 - is so representative that it is incapable of taking decisive action to deal with difficult problems

Understanding Congress

■ Congress and the Scope of Government

- The more policies Congress works on, the more ways it can serve their constituencies.
- The more programs that get created, the bigger the government gets.
- Contradiction in public opinion: everybody wants government programs cut, just not *their* programs

Summary

- **Members of Congress make policy.**
- **They have a sizeable incumbency advantage.**
- **Congress is structurally complex.**
- **Presidents, parties, constituencies, and interest groups all affect legislators' vote choices.**