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ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER NEWLY REVISED

10TH EDITION



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U.S. Army

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PERSEUS PUBLISHING
Cambridge, Massachusetts

QUORUM; ORDER OF BUSINESS AND RELATED CONCEPTS

1 §40. QUORUM

As indicated on pages 20–21, a quorum in an assembly is the number of voting members (see definition, p. 3) who must be present in order that business can be legally trans-
acted. The quorum refers to the number of such members
present, not to the number actually voting on a particular
question.

10 Rules Pertaining to the Quorum

NUMBER OF MEMBERS CONSTITUTING A
QUORUM. Depending on the organization and the pro-
vision it adopts in this regard, the number of members con-
stituting a quorum may vary. As discussed below, most
voluntary societies should provide for a quorum in their by-
laws, but where there is no such provision, the quorum, in
accordance with the common parliamentary law, is as follows:

- 20 1) In a mass meeting, the quorum is simply the number of
persons present at the time, since they constitute the en-
tire membership at that time.

- 2) In organizations such as many churches or some soci-
eties in which there are no required or effective annual
dues and the register of members is not generally reli-
able as a list of the bona-fide members, the quorum at
any regular or properly called meeting consists of those
who attend.
3) In a body of delegates, such as a convention, the quo-
rum is a majority of the number who have been regis-
tered as attending, irrespective of whether some may
have departed. This may differ greatly from the number
elected or appointed.
4) In any other deliberative assembly with enrolled mem-
bership whose bylaws do not specify a quorum, the
quorum is a majority of all the members.

To accomplish their work, voluntary societies that have
an enrolled membership generally need a provision in their
bylaws establishing a relatively small quorum—considerably
less than a majority of all the members. In most such organ-
izations, it is rarely possible to obtain the attendance of a ma-
jority of the membership at a meeting. Sometimes the
specification of a quorum is based on a percentage of the
membership; but such a method has the disadvantage of re-
quiring recomputation and may lead to confusion—for ex-
ample, when the secretary, or other officer who is in a
position to certify as to the current number of members for
purposes of the percentage calculation, is absent. There is no
single number or percentage of members that will be equally
suitable as a quorum in all societies. The quorum should be
as large a number of members as can reasonably be depended
on to be present at any meeting, except in very bad weather
or other exceptionally unfavorable conditions.

NOTE ON PROCEDURE IN CHANGING THE
QUORUM PROVISION IN BYLAWS. If it becomes

- 1 necessary to change the quorum provision in a society's by-laws, care should be taken, because if the rule is struck out first, the quorum will instantly become a majority of the membership, so that in many cases a quorum could not be
5 obtained to adopt a new rule. The proper procedure is to strike out the old provision and insert the new provision, which is moved and voted on as one question.

QUORUM IN BOARDS AND COMMITTEES. In
10 a committee of the whole or its variations (52), the quorum is the same as in the assembly unless the rules of the assembly or the organization (that is, either its bylaws or its rules of order) specify otherwise. In all other committees and in
15 boards, the quorum is a majority of the members of the board or committee unless a different quorum is fixed: (a) by the bylaws, in the case of a board or standing committee that the bylaws specifically establish; or (b) by a rule of the parent body or organization or by the motion establishing the particular committee, in the case of a committee that is
20 not expressly established by the bylaws. A board or committee does not have the power to determine its quorum unless the bylaws so provide.

PROCEEDINGS IN THE ABSENCE OF A QUORUM. In the absence of a quorum, any business transacted (except for the procedural actions noted in the next paragraph) is null and void. But if a quorum fails to appear at a regular or properly called meeting, the inability to transact business does not detract from the fact that the society's rules requiring the meeting to be held were complied with and the meeting was convened—even though it had to adjourn immediately.

The only action that can legally be taken in the absence of a quorum is to fix the time to which to adjourn (22), adjourn (21), recess (20), or take measures to obtain a quorum.

rum. The first three of these motions are governed by the Standard Descriptive Characteristics given for them in the numbered sections indicated. A motion that absent members be contacted during a recess would represent a measure in the last category. Motions to obtain a quorum are treated as privileged motions that take precedence over a motion to Recess (20). Such motions are out of order when another has the floor; must be seconded; are not debatable; are amendable (any amendment being undebatable in accordance with the general rule); require a majority vote; and can be reconsidered. Motions to obtain a quorum are similar to a *Call of the House*, which can be ordered in assemblies having the power to compel attendance (see below).

The prohibition against transacting business in the absence of a quorum cannot be waived even by unanimous consent, and a notice (pp. 116–18) cannot be validly given. If there is important business that should not be delayed, the meeting should fix the time for an adjourned meeting and then adjourn. Where an important opportunity would be lost unless acted upon immediately, the members present can, at their own risk, act in the emergency with the hope that their action will be ratified by a later meeting at which a quorum is present. If a committee of the whole finds itself without a quorum, it can do nothing but rise and report to the assembly, which can then proceed as already described in this paragraph. A quasi committee of the whole or a meeting in informal consideration of a question can itself take any of the four actions permitted an assembly in the absence of a quorum, but a quasi committee of the whole is thereby ended (see 52).

Manner of Enforcing the Quorum Requirement

Before the presiding officer calls a meeting to order, it is his duty to determine, although he need not announce,