

The House of Representatives

When the Constitution was being drafted, a debate broke out between states with large populations and those with smaller populations. Each had a different opinion about how the states should be represented in the new government. To be fair to each group, a compromise was reached. By dividing Congress into two houses, the House of Representatives would favor states with larger populations, while the Senate would favor those states with smaller populations.

There are a total of 435 members in the House of Representatives. Each member represents an area of a state, known as a congressional district. The number of representatives is based on the number of districts in a state. Each state is guaranteed one seat. Every ten years, the U.S. Census Bureau counts the population of the states to determine what number of districts should be in each state.

Representatives, elected for two-year terms, must be 25 years old, a citizen for at least seven years, and a resident of the state from which they are elected. Five additional members—from Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia—represent their constituencies in the House. While they may participate in the debates, they cannot vote.

The House has special jobs that only it can perform. It can:

- Start laws that make people pay taxes.
- Decide if a government official should be put on trial before the Senate if s/he commits a crime against the country. This is known as impeachment.

The Senate

There are a total of 100 members in the Senate. The Constitution states that the vice president has formal control over the Senate and is known as the president of the Senate. The vice president is only present for important ceremonies and to cast a tie-breaking vote.

Senators, elected for six-year terms, must be 30 years old, a citizen for at least nine years, and a resident of the state from which they are elected.

As in the House, the Senate also has special jobs that only it can perform. It can:

- Say yes or no to any treaties the president makes.
- Say yes or no to any people the president recommends for jobs, such as cabinet officers, Supreme Court justices, and ambassadors.
- Can hold a trial for a government official who commits a crime against the country.

Source: *Ben's Guide to U.S. Government*, U.S. Government Publishing Office (<https://bensguide.gpo.gov>).