

CONGRESS

Constitution

- ⦿ “All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives.”
 - Article I, Section 1

Bicameral (Two Houses)

◎ Why?

- Historical—British Parliament had two houses since the 1300s
- Practical—Helped solve problems with forming the Constitution (Great Compromise)
- Theoretical—checks the power of the branch compared with the Executive and Judicial

Congress Designed to Lead

- ◎ “In a republican government, the legislative authority necessarily predominates....”
 - Federalist No. 51

Terms

- ⦿ Terms of Congress last for two years
- ⦿ Why?
 - House elections occur every two years
- ⦿ Current Term: 112th Congress

Sessions

- ⦿ Session: Period of time when Congress assembles and conducts business
- ⦿ One Session per year
 - Congress “adjourns” or suspends until the next session
- ⦿ Special Sessions—meetings to deal with emergencies

House of Representatives

◎ 435 Members

- Not set by the Constitution, but by Congress
- Apportioned (distributed) among the States based on population
- Each state is guaranteed at least one Representative (example: Alaska, Delaware, Vermont)

◎ Elections every two years

Reapportionment

- House seats are reapportioned after each census
- Number of 435 was made permanent in 1929
- Each of the 435 seats in the House represents an average of 700,000 people

Congressional Elections

- Held on the Tuesday following the first Monday in November of each even-numbered year
- “Off-year elections” are elections that are held in non-presidential years

Districts

- ⦿ Drawn by the state legislatures
- ⦿ Often drawn in strange shapes
- ⦿ “Gerrymandered”:
 - In 1812, Gov. Elbridge Gerry of Mass. drew districts to favor the Democratic Republicans



Source: Ohio Secretary of State

- ⦿ Cannot Gerrymander districts based solely on race
 - Gomillion v. Lightfoot (1960)

Huffington Post, 9-13-11

- ◉ WASHINGTON -- Under a new redistricting plan that will be unveiled by Ohio's GOP-controlled state legislature Tuesday afternoon, 12 of the state's 16 congressional districts are expected to become more favorable to Republicans, while currently serving Democrats may find their constituencies split up into multiple districts, according to reports about the plan.
- ◉ Ohio currently has 18 U.S. House seats, 13 of which are held by Republicans. But because of the population losses recorded by the 2010 U.S. Census, the state will lose two congressional districts and the borders of the remaining districts will be redrawn. The new map will make many Republican districts safer for incumbents while forcing Democrats into tough reelection battles.

Qualifications for House Members

- ① 1: must be 25 years old
- ② 2: must have been a citizen of the United States for at least 7 years
- ③ 3: must be an inhabitant of the State from which he or she is elected
- ④ Customary: must live in the district he or she represents

Informal Qualifications

- Party identification
- Name familiarity
- Gender
- Ethnic characteristics
- Political experience

Senate

- ⦿ Often called the “Upper House”
- ⦿ More prestigious than the House of Representatives
- ⦿ Smaller than the House
 - 100 Senators (2 from each State)

Goal for the Senate

- Founders thought the Senate should be a smaller, more deliberative body
- Senators have a longer term (6 years)
- Qualifications tougher
- Madison thought that the Senate would be a “necessary fence” against the “fickleness and passion” of the House

Original Plan

- Originally, the Senators were not elected by the people
- State Legislatures selected the Senators
- 17th Amendment in 1913 changed this—now Senators are directly elected by every voter in their state
 - Why?

- ◎ Why the 17th Amendment?
 - Sometimes the process of selection was corrupt

Term

- ⦿ 6 years
- ⦿ No term limits
- ⦿ Terms are staggered so that everyone is not up for election at once
 - One third are up for election at any given election cycle

- Goal of longer terms and larger constituencies is intended to make them less susceptible to the politics of the moment and special interests

Qualifications

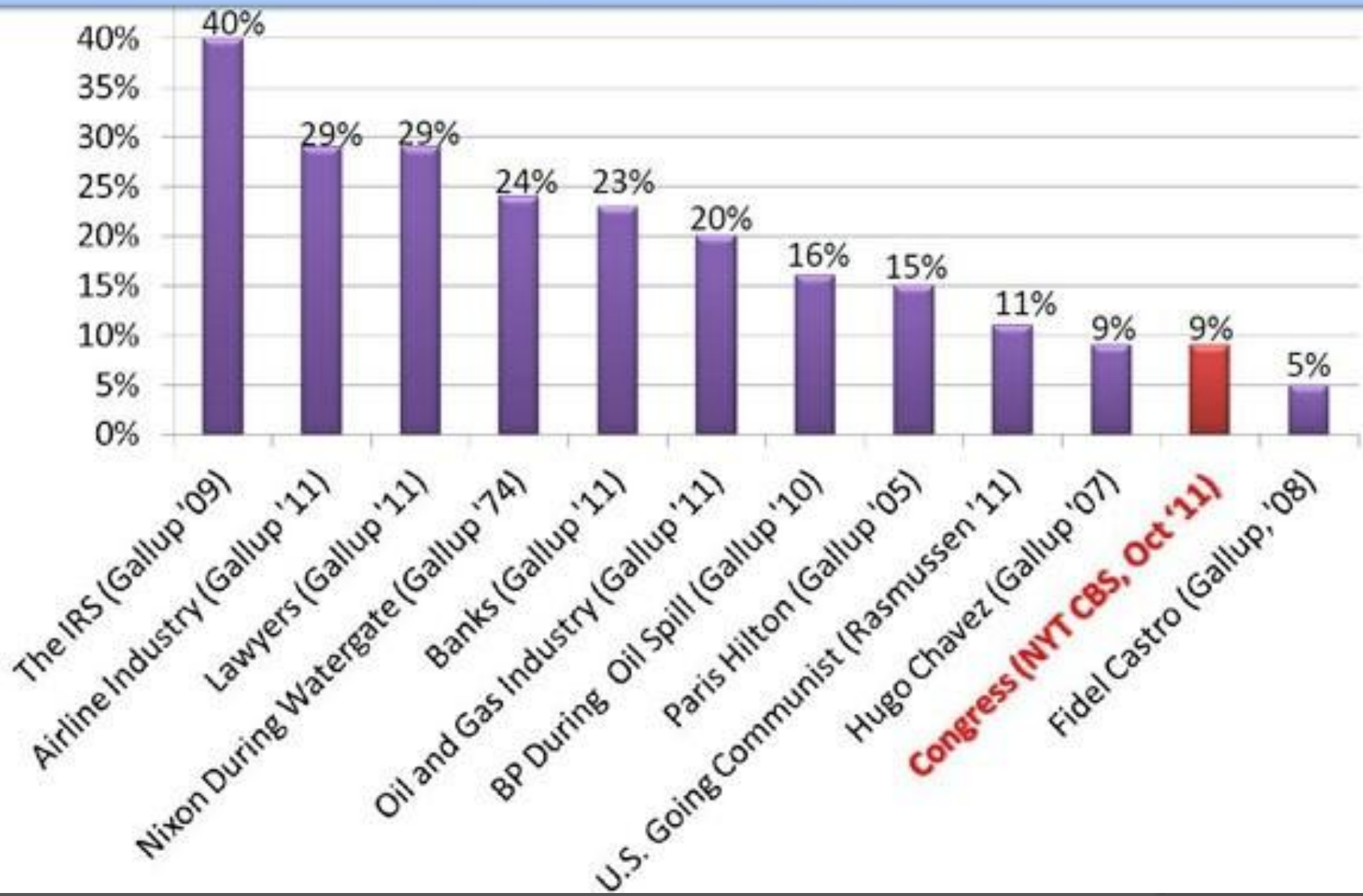
- 30 years old
- Citizen of the US for at least 9 years
- Inhabitant of the state from where he or she is elected

Is the Senate less connected from Politics?

- Sen. Michael Bennet does not think so.....

The Popularity of Congress Today

Other Approval Ratings, Compared Against Congressional Approval at 9%



Capitol Building







Senate Chamber



House Chamber



Chuck Kennedy/White House