

Chapter 10: Congress
Section 2
Lecture Notes

AMERICAN
GOVERNMENT

PEARSON

► Objectives

1. Explain how House seats are distributed and describe the length of a term in the House.
2. Explain how House seats reapportioned among the States after each census.
3. Describe a typical congressional election and congressional district
4. Analyze the formal and informal qualifications for election to the House.

▶ Key Terms

- **apportion:** to distribute seats in the House of Representatives among the States on the basis of their populations
- **reapportion:** to redistribute the seats in the House every ten years, after each census
- **off-year election:** a Congressional election that takes place in-between presidential elections
- **single-member district:** an election district from which voters elect a single state representative to the House of Representatives

▶ Key Terms, cont.

- **at-large:** an election system in which all candidates are elected from the state as a whole, rather than from a single district
- **gerrymander:** drawing the boundaries of an election district so that it gives an advantage to the political party that controls the state legislature
- **incumbent:** the person who currently holds a political office

- How are the seats in the House distributed and what qualifications must members meet?
 - There are currently 435 seats in the House.
 - Seats are distributed based on the population of each state, with each state guaranteed at least one representative.
 - Representatives must be at least 25 years old, have been a U.S. citizen for at least seven years, and reside in the state that they represent.

► Size of the House

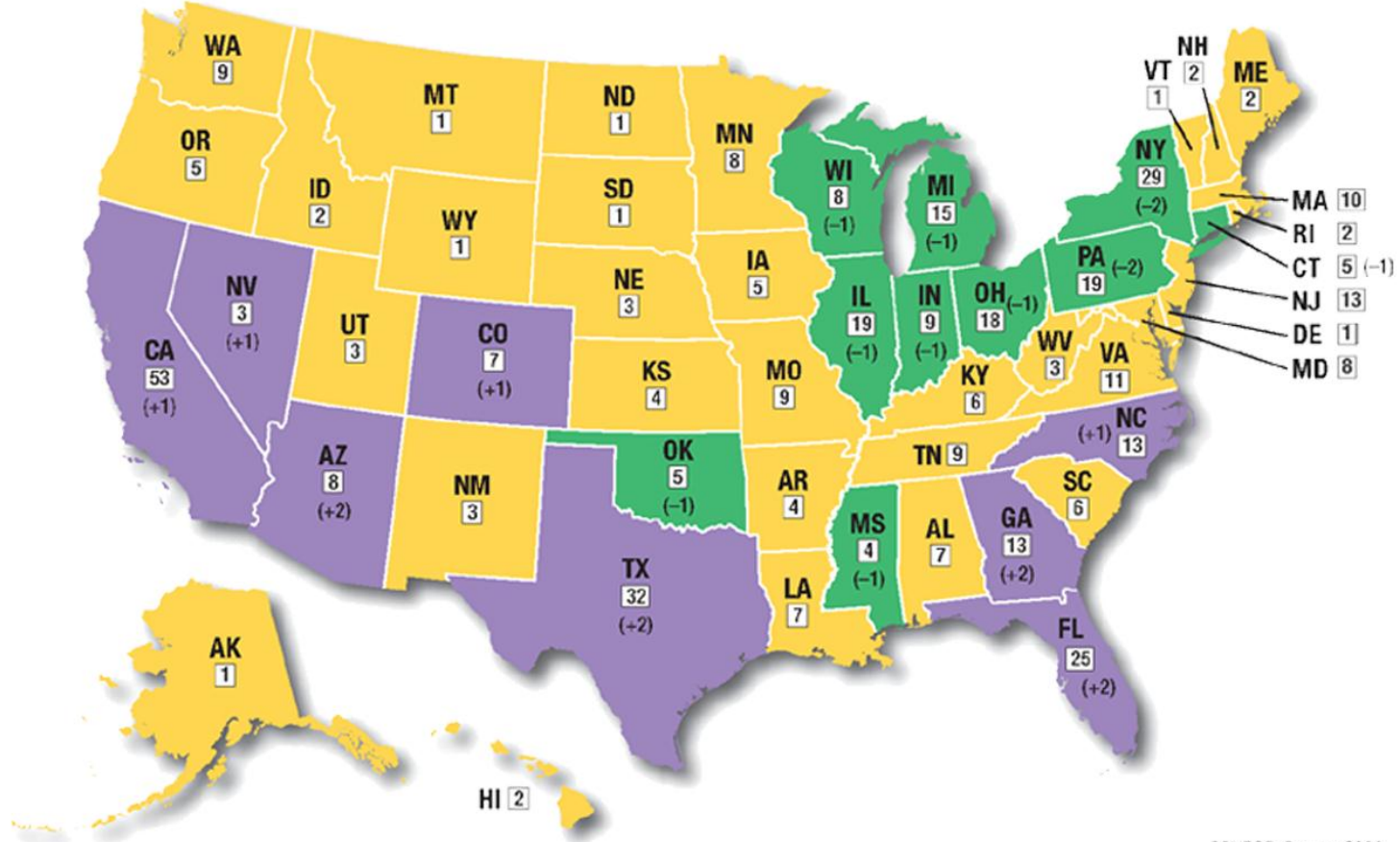
- For many years the number of seats in the House increased as the country grew in population and new states were added.
- The Reapportionment Act of 1929 fixed the size of the House at 435 members.
 - Congress can change this number if it wishes.

► Census

- Every 10 years the Census Bureau counts the national population.
 - The Census figures are then used to decide how many representatives each state will have until the next Census is taken.
 - Currently, each seat in the House represents about 700,000 people.

Congressional Apportionment 2003-2013

► **Interpreting Maps** The 435 seats in the House are reapportioned among the States every ten years. *What regions are gaining or losing population?*



SOURCE: Census 2000

KEY

- Gained Representation
- Lost Representation
- No Change
- 12 Number of Representatives
- (+1/-1) Number of seats gained/lost

► Congressional Elections

- Representatives, like Rep. John Conyers (D., Mich.) pictured here, are elected every two years.
 - There are no limits on how many two-year terms representatives can serve.
- Each state holds elections in November of even-numbered years.



► Congressional Elections, cont.

- Elections held in nonpresidential years are called off-year elections.
- Usually the party that holds the presidency loses seats in an off-year election.

► Congressional Districts

- Representatives are elected from single-member congressional districts.
 - The voters in each district can elect only one representative to the House.
 - The *Westberry v. Sanders* Supreme Court ruling in 1964 requires each district in a state to have similar-sized populations.
 - High population states have more districts than small population states.
 - Seven states have only one representative, so their district consists of the entire state.

▶ Gerrymandering

- Checkpoint: What is gerrymandering and what are its purpose and result?
 - Gerrymandering involves drawing the borders of districts to favor one political party.
 - Tactics include clustering the opposing party's voters in a few districts or spreading them out thinly over many districts.
 - Due to gerrymandering, only a few congressional districts in any election are actually at risk to switch their support from one party to the other.

Gerrymandering: Choosing Their Voters



Each State's congressional districts must be redrawn every ten years, to bring the districts into line with the federal census. This gives State legislatures the opportunity to redistrict the State to the advantage of the majority party. *Why do some people think gerrymandering should be outlawed?*



- Registered Green Party voter
- Registered Orange Party voter
- ★ Each star represents incumbent



PACKING Packing happens when the State legislators "pack" as many voters from the opposing party into a single district as possible. This makes the other districts "safe" for the party in power.

Result: Two districts are safe for the Orange Party.

CRACKING Cracking happens when the party in power splits up the voters from the opposing party. This results in the minority party winning fewer seats.

Result: The Orange Party wins three districts.



KIDNAPPING Kidnapping happens when the party in power redraws the district lines to move a minority-party incumbent into a different district where she or he is unlikely to win re-election.

Result: The Orange Party wins three seats. The Green Party incumbent “loses” his district.

► Formal Qualifications

- Custom requires representatives to live in the districts they represent.
- Representatives must:
 - Be at least **25 years old**
 - Have been a **U.S. citizen** for at least 7 years
 - Be an **inhabitant of the state** from which he or she is elected.
- The House has the power to refuse to seat an elected member, to punish members, and to expel them.

▶ Informal Qualifications

- Checkpoint: What “informal qualifications” affect a candidate’s electability?
 - They include factors such as **gender**, **ethnicity**, **political experience**, **name recognition**, and **party affiliation**.
 - Being an **incumbent** is a big advantage—more than 90 percent of those seeking reelection to the House win.
 - Being able to **raise money** is also a key. In 2008 the average cost of running a winning campaign for a seat in the House was over \$1 million.

▶ Paths to Congress

- **Heath Shuler** (D., NC) had no political experience before his election to the House in 2006.
 - Shuler had been an NFL quarterback and owned a real estate business.
 - He was approached by both parties to run for office.



▶ Paths to Congress, cont.

- **Ileana Ros-Lehtinen** (R., FL) was the first Cuban American and Hispanic woman elected to the House in 1989.
 - She holds a doctorate in education and founded a private elementary school.
 - She was elected to the Florida State legislature in 1982.



▶ Review

- Now that you have learned how the seats in the House are distributed and what qualifications members must meet, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question.
 - Whose views should members of Congress represent when voting?