

Source Document

4. What are some problems with public opinion polls?
5. What does the sampling error of a poll represent?
6. **For Critical Analysis:** Explain why supporters of polling argue that it is a tool for democracy and

why critics of polling think that it makes politicians reactors rather than leaders. Then explain which opinion you agree with and why.

SECTION 2

Factors That Affect Public Opinion

Preview Questions:

- 1. What is political socialization?
- 2. What is the difference between informal and formal political socialization?
- 3. What are agents of political socialization, and how do these agents and other factors affect public opinion?

Key Terms:

political socialization, mass media, peer group

When asked, most Americans are willing to express an opinion on political issues. Not one of us, however, was born with these opinions. Most of the attitudes and beliefs that are expressed as political opinions are acquired through a learning process called **political socialization**. This complex process begins in early childhood and continues through a person's life.

Political socialization can be informal or formal. Informal political socialization usually begins with the family. Although parents do not normally sit down and say, "Let us explain to you the virtues of becoming a Republican," children nevertheless come to know their parents' feelings, beliefs, and attitudes. Words such as *acquire*, *absorb*, and *pick up* perhaps best describe the informal process of political socialization. In contrast, formal political socialization involves activities such as taking a government class in high school.

Just the Facts

The authors of the Federalist Papers believed that public opinion was potentially dangerous and that this danger could be reduced by having a large republic.

Studies have shown that most political socialization is informal. There is little evidence that formally learning about political views has a lasting impact on people's political opinions. Rather, the strong early influence of the family later gives way to the multiple influences of school, peers, television, co-workers, and so on. We look here at the major agents of political socialization—groups that influence our political views—as well as at some other factors that affect public opinion.

The Importance of Family !

Most parents do not deliberately set out to form their children's political ideas and beliefs. They are usually more concerned with the moral, religious, and ethical values of their offspring. Yet children first see the political world through the eyes of their families—



▲ *One shift in public opinion that has surprised many observers is the rise in home schooling. What changes in American society may have caused some parents to decide to teach their children "the old-fashioned way"?*

the most important force in political socialization. Children do not “learn” political attitudes the same way they learn to ride a bike. Rather, they learn by absorbing everyday conversations and stories about politicians and issues and by watching the actions of their family members. Families play such a crucial role in political socialization because they dominate a child’s early years in terms of time and emotional commitment. The powerful influence of family is not easily broken.

The family’s influence is strongest when children clearly perceive their parents’ attitudes. In one study, more high-school students could identify their parents’ political party affiliation than any other of their parents’ attitudes or beliefs. It is no wonder, then, that in most cases, the political party of the parents becomes the political party of the child.

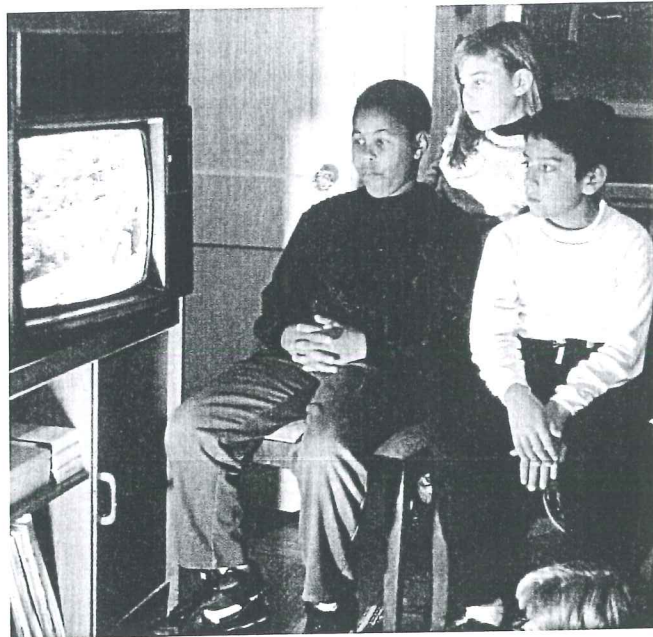
Educational Influence 2.

Education is a powerful influence on an individual’s political attitudes. From their earliest days in school, children learn about the U.S. political system. They say the Pledge of Allegiance and sing patriotic songs. They celebrate national holidays such as Presidents’ Day and Veterans Day and learn the history and symbols associated with them. In the upper grades, children learn more about government and democratic procedures through civic education classes and through student government and clubs. They also learn citizenship skills through school rules and regulations.

The level of education a person has influences his or her political knowledge and participation. For example, more highly educated men and women tend to show more knowledge about politics and policy. They also tend to vote and participate more often in politics.

The Mass Media 3.

The **mass media**—newspapers, magazines, television, and radio—also have an impact on political socialization. The most influential of these media is television. Grade-school children spend an average of thirty-two hours per week watching television, more time than they spend in academic classes. Television is the leading source of political and public affairs information for most people.



▲ *Reaching across racial, social, and economic lines, television finds its way into the homes of almost every American. Have television programs influenced your political views in any way?*

The media can also determine what issues, events, and personalities are in the public eye. When people hear the evening’s top stories, they usually assume that these stories concern the most important issues facing the nation. But by publicizing some issues and ignoring others, and by giving some stories high priority and others low priority, the media decide the relative importance of issues. They help determine what people will talk and think about. This, in turn, helps determine on which issues politicians will act.

For example, television played a significant role in shaping public opinion about the Vietnam War, which has been called the first “television war.” Part of the public opposition to the war in the late 1960s came from the scenes and narrative accounts of destruction, death, and suffering that were televised daily. The war to free Kuwait from Iraqi occupation in 1991 also had extensive media coverage, though some critics feel that this coverage may have shown only the better side of U.S. efforts.

Clearly, the media play an important role in shaping public opinion. The *extent* of that role, however, is often debated. Some studies have suggested that the media may be as influential as the family in shaping

opinion. Other studies have shown that the media may not have as much power to influence opinion as has been thought. Generally, people already have ideas about issues they see or hear about in the mass media. These ideas act as a screen to block out any information that does not fit with them. For example, if you are already firmly convinced that being a vegetarian is beneficial to your health, you probably will not change your mind if you watch a TV show that asserts that vegetarians live no longer on average than people who eat meat. Apparently, the media are most influential with those persons who have not yet formed an opinion about the issue being discussed.

Opinion Leaders 4

Every state and community has leaders who can influence the opinions of their fellow citizens. These people may be public officials, religious leaders, teachers, or celebrities. They are persons to whom others listen and from whom others draw ideas and convictions about various issues of public concern. These leaders play a significant role in the formation of public opinion. Martin Luther King, Jr., was a powerful opinion leader during the civil rights movements, for example.

Peer Groups 5.

The influence of peer groups is another factor in political socialization. A **peer group** is a group of people who share a number of social characteristics—for example, close friends, classmates, co-workers, club members, or church group members. Most political socialization occurs when the peer group is involved in political activities. For example, your political beliefs might be influenced by peers with whom you are working on a common political cause, such as controlling pollution in your neighborhood or saving an endangered species. Your political beliefs probably would not be as highly influenced by peers with whom you collected stamps or made pottery.

Economic Status and Occupation 6.

A person's economic status may influence his or her political views. For example, poorer people are more

likely to favor government-assistance programs than are wealthier people.

Where a person works may also affect her or his opinion. For example, individuals working for a non-profit corporation that depends on government funds will tend to support governmental spending in that area. Business managers are more likely to favor tax shelters and aid to businesses than are people who work in factories. People who work in factories are more likely to favor a national health-care program.

Age 7.

Age does not appear to play a central role in determining political preferences. There are, however, some age differences. Young adults are a bit more liberal than older Americans are on most issues. Young adults tend to be more progressive than older persons on such issues as racial and gender equality.

If older Americans are a little more conservative than younger Americans, it may be because individuals tend to maintain the values they learn when they first became politically aware. Forty years later those values may be considered relatively conservative. Additionally, people's attitudes are sometimes shaped by the events that unfold as they grow up. Individuals who grew up during an era of Democratic Party dominance will likely remain Democrats throughout their lives. The same holds true for those who grew up during an era of Republican Party dominance.

SECTION 2 REVIEW

1. What is political socialization?
2. Name four agents of political socialization.
3. What is the strongest influence on a person's political attitudes?
4. How do economic status, occupation, and age affect a person's political attitudes?
5. **For Critical Analysis:** Every year, events occur in other countries that would never occur in the United States. Yet only a small percentage of these events are ever publicized in this country. What do you think determines which world events receive widespread media coverage?



◀ Senior citizens in America are a large, vocal, and powerful group. Here a proud member of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) looks on as others lobby on behalf of older Americans. What issues might be of particular interest to senior citizens?

Supreme Court has defended this important right over the years.

What Is an Interest Group?

Defining the term *interest group* seems simple enough. *Interest* in this sense refers to objectives and policy goals. A *group* is an accumulation of people with something in common. An **interest group** is an organization made up of people who share common objectives and who actively attempt to influence government policymakers through direct and indirect methods.

Whatever their goals—more or fewer social services, higher or lower prices—interest groups pursue them on every level and in every branch of government. On any given day in Washington, you can find national interest groups in action. If you eat breakfast in the Senate dining room, you might see congressional committee staffers reviewing testimony with representatives from women's groups. Later that morning, you might visit the Supreme Court and watch a lawyer from a civil rights group arguing on behalf of a client in a discrimination suit. Lunch in a popular Washington restaurant might find you listening in on a conversation between an agricultural lobbyist and a representative. That afternoon you might visit the Department of Labor, and watch

bureaucrats working out rules and regulations with representatives from a labor interest group. Then you might stroll past the headquarters of Common Cause, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), and the National Wildlife Federation (NWF).

Interest groups are often criticized in the United States, but they do serve several purposes in American politics:

- Interest groups help bridge the gap between citizens and government and enable citizens to explain their views on policies to public officials.
- Interest groups help raise public awareness and inspire action on various issues.
- Interest groups often give specialized and detailed information to public officials that might be difficult to obtain otherwise. This information may be useful in making public policy choices.
- Interest groups serve as another check on public officials to make sure that they are carrying out their duties responsibly.

Just the Facts

Interest groups often concentrate on preventing legislation, rather than promoting it.

dent are elected through the electoral college, and Supreme Court members are appointed by the president with the approval of the Senate. Thus, among this nation's leaders, members of Congress are most directly accountable to its citizens. Because of this, Congress is sometimes called "the voice of the people."

Bicameral Legislature

The founders of this nation did not agree about the organization of Congress. In fact, one of the most serious conflicts at the Constitutional Convention was a long and heated debate between the large and small states over congressional representation. After a month of struggle, the delegates finally adopted the Great Compromise, which you read about in Chapter 2.

By a narrow margin, the Convention voted for a **bicameral legislature**, a Congress of two chambers. The chambers were to be called **the Senate and the House of Representatives**. Each American state, large or small, would be represented by two senators, so all states would have equal power in the Senate. In the House, however, the number of representatives from each state would be determined by the size of each state's population. The larger a state's population, the more representatives it would have. The Constitution requires that each state, no matter how small, have at least one representative.

Besides providing the needed compromise, the bicameral legislature had another advantage. With this structure, the two chambers could serve as checks on each other's power and activity. The House was to represent the people as a whole—the will of the majority—since its members would be distributed according to population. Because the House was to be elected directly by the people, it was to be the "common person's" chamber. The Senate was to represent the states, and the interests of the small states would be protected because they would have the same number of representatives as the larger states. The Senate, originally to be chosen by the elected representatives sitting in state legislatures, was to protect the elite interests against the tendencies of the House to protect the masses. (This was similar to the division between the House of Commons and the House of Lords in the English Parliament, with which the founders were familiar.) The Senate was to be a safeguard against the passage of "emotional" legislation by the House. As George

Washington was said to have remarked, "We shall pour House legislation into the Senatorial saucer to cool it."

Congressional Meetings

Each Congress lasts for a meeting period, or a **term**, of two years. The terms are numbered consecutively, with the first term dating back to March 4, 1789. The date for the **convening**, or formal opening, of each term was reset by the Twentieth Amendment in 1993, and the terms now begin on January 3 of odd-numbered years unless Congress sets another date.

Each term of Congress is divided into two regular **sessions**, or meetings—one for each year. Until about 1940, Congress remained in session for only four or five months, but the complicated legislation and increased demand for services from the public in recent years have forced Congress to remain in session through most of each year. Both chambers, however, schedule short **recesses**, or breaks, for holidays and vacations.

Congress remains in session until its members vote to adjourn. Neither chamber may adjourn a session without the consent of the other. Only the president may call Congress to meet during a scheduled recess. Such meetings are called **special sessions**, and only twenty-six of them have ever been held. The fact that Congress now meets nearly year-round makes the need for a special session unlikely.

Apportionment of the House of Representatives

The Constitution provides that the total number of House seats shall be **apportioned**, or **distributed**, among the states on the basis of population. Because representation in the House is based on population, the more people a state has, the more representatives it sends to the House. California, for example, with an estimated population of over 36 million, has fifty-two representatives. Georgia, with a population of

Just the Facts

After the British Army burned the Capitol in 1814, Congress used the Patent Office as its temporary headquarters.

THE GLOBAL VIEW

The Structure of the Russian Legislature

Russia, like the United States, has a bicameral legislature. The lower chamber is the State Duma. The upper chamber is the Federation Council.

The State Duma The State Duma is the more powerful of the two chambers, and it bears most of the responsibility for passing laws. The Duma has 450 seats. Half of these seats are divided proportionately among members of political parties that received at least 5 percent of the vote. The other half go to representatives, or deputies, who are elected in contests among candidates in Russia's 225 local voting districts—similar to the way in which members of the U.S. Congress are elected.

The Federation Council The upper chamber of Russia's legislature, the Federation Council, is the weaker of the two chambers but still has considerable authority. For example, the council has the authority to schedule presidential elections, to impeach the president, and to approve the appointment of Supreme Court judges. Most laws passed by the Duma do not need to be approved by the council before being sent to the president. Some laws must be approved by both chambers, however, such as laws concerning international treaties, declarations of war and peace, taxes and the budget, and certain financial matters.

THINKING GLOBALLY

In what ways does the Russian legislature differ from the U.S. Congress?

over 6.5 million, has eleven representatives. In contrast, Wyoming, with an estimated population of 522,000, has one representative. Each state is guaranteed at least one seat, no matter what its population. Today, seven states have only one representative. In addition, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, and the American Virgin Islands each send nonvoting delegates to the House. Puerto Rico, a self-governing possession of the United States, is represented by a nonvoting resident commissioner.

If representation in the House is to be based on population, it is necessary to know what the population is. The Constitution directs Congress to take a census, or official count of the population, every ten years. This was originally meant to allow Congress to increase the number of House seats according to changes in the population. For a time, the number of representatives in the House grew with each census. By 1910, the number had reached 435.

In the census year of 1920, as the population swelled, House leaders and many Americans expressed concern about the size of the House. Many thought the House was growing too big for effective action. When the official census figures were revealed in 1921, the House waited for eight years before taking any action concerning its membership.

In 1929, President Herbert Hoover called a special session of Congress to address the situation and urged Congress to provide apportionment guidelines for the upcoming 1930 census. As a result, Congress passed the Reapportionment Act of 1929. The act provided that the number of representatives would remain fixed at 435. It also established a permanent system for reapportionment, or redistribution, of the 435 House seats following each census. The law provides the following:

1. The size of the House remains stable at 435.
2. After each census, the Census Bureau determines the number of seats each state should receive according to the census results.
3. The Census Bureau presents a plan to the president that shows the distribution of seats.
4. The president submits this information in a message to Congress. If Congress does not voice its opposition within sixty days, the plan goes into effect.

Thus, shifts in the U.S. population greatly affect the distribution of House seats. In the last few decades,

increasing numbers of Americans have moved from northeastern and midwestern states to states in the South and the West. The map in Figure 14-1 below illustrates this trend by showing the changes made in each state's House seats after the last census.



◀ Every ten years, the Census Bureau takes an official count of the U.S. population using data processing equipment such as this. How does the census affect congressional representation?

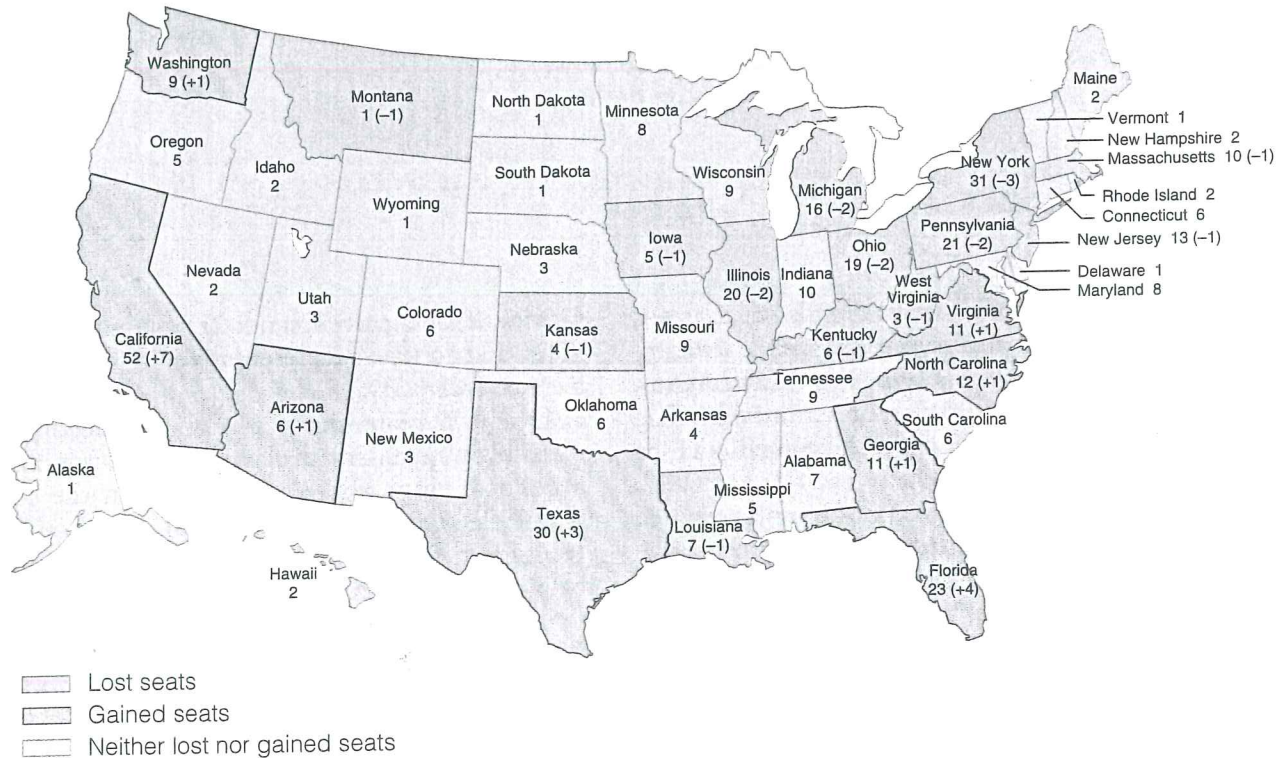
voters of a particular area known as a congressional district. The 435 members of the House are chosen by the voters in

Congressional Districting

Senators are elected to represent all of the people in the state. In contrast, representatives are elected by the

435 separate congressional districts across the country. If a state's population allows it to have only one representative, such as in Wyoming and Vermont, the entire

FIGURE 14-1 Reapportionment of House Seats Following the 1990 Census The map below shows the apportionment of House seats for each state based on the population figures from the 1990 census. Based on this map, what region of the country lost the most seats?



SOURCE: United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

Gerrymandering Since the early 1800s, the practice of drawing district boundaries to benefit a certain party, group, or candidate has been called **gerrymandering**. Gerrymandering often results in very oddly shaped election districts. This practice took its name from Elbridge Gerry, governor of Massachusetts. In 1812, the Massachusetts state legislature carved up Essex County in a way that favored Gerry's party. A cartoonist, observing a map that detailed the strange shape of the district, penciled in a head, wings, and claws and commented that the map now resembled a salamander. A news editor replied, "Better say a gerrymander!"

Two different methods of gerrymandering have been used. One way, called "packing" by politicians, involves drawing congressional district boundaries so that districts include as many of the political party's voters as possible. The other method, called "cracking," involves drawing the boundaries so that the opponent's strength is divided among two or more districts. In this way, the opponent has a more difficult time getting enough votes to win an election.

Because gerrymandering has not been specifically outlawed, it is still used today, although much less frequently. The "compact and contiguous" requirements, combined with the one person-one vote ruling, usually have prevented the worst forms of gerrymandering.

Racial Gerrymandering In the early 1990s, the U.S. Department of Justice required all of the states to draw the boundaries of congressional districts in a special way. Specifically, the districts were to be drawn to maximize the voting power of minority groups. The result was often bizarre. North Carolina's newly drawn Twelfth Congressional District was 165 miles long. It was a narrow strip that followed Interstate 85. Georgia's new Eleventh District stretched from Atlanta to the Atlantic Ocean, splitting eight counties and five municipalities.

Many of these districts were challenged in court. In a series of cases, the United States Supreme Court sided with the opponents of what came to be called "racial gerrymandering." For example, in 1995, the Court attacked the concept of race-based redistricting by declaring that Georgia's Eleventh District was unconstitutional. The Court stated that assigning voters on the basis of race was offensive and demeaning to racial minorities. In two cases decided in 1996, the Supreme Court ruled that the Twelfth District of



▲ In 1812, Elbridge Gerry redrew the boundaries of this Massachusetts district to ensure the election of a Republican. A cartoonist added a head, wings, and claws to the drawing of the new district, commenting that it resembled a salamander. What term is still used to describe the drawing of electoral boundaries to the advantage of one political party?

North Carolina and three Texas districts were also unconstitutional for this reason.

SECTION 1 REVIEW

1. With what basic governmental power is Congress charged?
2. Why did the founders create a bicameral legislature?
3. What is apportionment? What was the significance of the Reapportionment Act of 1929?
4. How have congressional districts been determined in the past? How are they determined today?
5. **For Critical Analysis:** Does the fact that a census is only taken every ten years cause problems of unfair representation for those states whose populations are growing rapidly? Explain.

House and Senate Terms and Qualifications

Preview Questions:

- What are the terms of office for members of the House of Representatives?
- What are the terms of office and qualifications for members of the Senate?
- Why are incumbents so successful in getting reelected?

Key Terms:

franking privilege, casework, pork barrel

There are several differences between the two chambers of the U.S. Congress. (See Figure 14-2 on page 380.) Here we look at some of those differences, including those relating to terms of office and qualifications.

The House of Representatives

With its 435 members, the House of Representatives is over four times larger than the Senate. Still, it is referred to as the lower chamber of Congress.

Term of Office Members of the House of Representatives are elected for two-year terms. The framers believed that such a short term of office would make representatives more responsive to the people. Many people still believe this. Others argue that a two-year term is impractical because representatives spend too much time during the second year campaigning for the next election. A constitutional amendment to lengthen the term for House membership has been proposed several times but has never been successful.

Congressional elections are held in November of even-numbered years, and representatives begin their terms of office on January 3 following the November election. This means that all 435 members must run for reelection at the same time, and the House begins anew following each election.

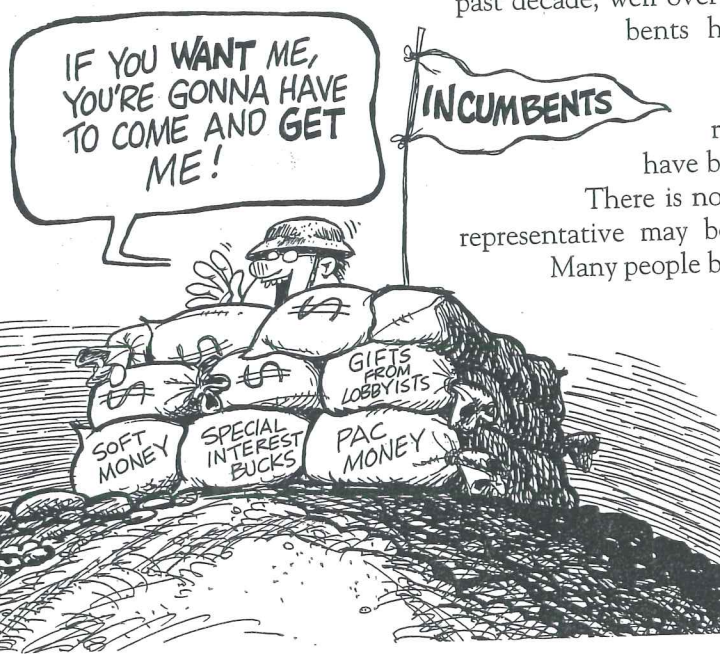
Despite the short terms of office, there is still a great deal of continuity among members of the House. In the past decade, well over 90 percent of all House incumbents have been reelected. In 2000,

98 percent of the incumbents who ran were reelected. Some representatives have been reelected over a dozen times.

There is no limit on the number of terms a representative may be reelected to the same office. Many people believe, however, that the number

Just the Facts

The dome of the Capitol is topped by a bronze statue representing freedom. The statue was installed on December 2, 1863.



◀ Feeling that congressional members had too much of a built-in advantage when it came time for reelection, many citizens joined the wave of anti-incumbent sentiment that swept the nation in the early 1990s. Based on the cartoon, what protects incumbents from political challengers?

Just the Facts

Nearly half of the states limit the number of terms that state legislators can serve.

House of Representatives. Members of the House must be at least twenty-five years of age, citizens of the United States for at least seven years prior to the election, and legal residents of the state from which they are elected.

Although not required to do so by the Constitution, representatives have traditionally lived in the districts they represent. This practice is rooted in the belief that representatives should be familiar with the needs of the people they represent in Congress.

The Constitution also gives the House the power to judge the qualifications of its members and to refuse a seat to an elected member. From 1823 to 1967, the House refused to recognize nine members as legitimate lawmakers and denied them their seats. This power, however, was limited by the Supreme Court in 1969 in *Powell v. McCormack*. In that decision, the Court ruled that Congress cannot exclude any member-elect who meets the Constitution's requirements relating to age, citizenship, and residence.

The Senate

The Senate is known as the upper chamber of Congress. The Constitution calls for each state to have two senators, regardless of the state's size or population. Article V of the Constitution specifies that "no state without its consent shall be deprived of its equal suffrage in the Senate." This provision guarantees that the states' equal representation in the Senate cannot be changed by amendment. Thus, as long as the original Constitution is in effect, each state will always have two senators to represent it.

Before the adoption of the Seventeenth Amendment in 1913, senators were chosen by state legislatures. Since that time, senators have been chosen by the people at large in the November general elections of even-numbered years.

of terms a representative can serve should be limited. (This issue is discussed further in the *America at Odds* feature on page 395.)

Qualifications The Constitution sets forth the qualifications for election to the

Term of Office Senators are elected for six-year terms. The terms are staggered, so that the terms of one-third of the senators end every two years. In addition, the two senators from each state never run for election in the same year unless a vacancy occurs because of death, retirement, or resignation. If such a vacancy does occur, the governor of the state may call a special election to choose a replacement, or the state legislature may allow the governor to appoint a replacement until an election is held.

The founders designed the Senate as they did to give stability to the legislative branch. Because Senate seats do not all come up for election at the same time, the Senate is considered a "continuous body." Because

Differences

FIGURE 14-2 Differences between the House and the Senate* This table lists the differences between the United States House of Representatives and the Senate. In which of these two chambers of Congress would most politicians prefer to serve? Why?

House	Senate
Members chosen from local districts	Members chosen from entire state
Two-year term	Six-year term
Always elected by voters	Originally (until 1913) elected by state legislatures
May impeach (indict) federal officials	May convict federal officials of impeachable offenses
Larger (435 voting members)	Smaller (100 members)
More formal rules	Fewer rules and restrictions
Debate limited	Debate extended
Floor action controlled	Unanimous consent rules
Less prestige and individual notice	More prestige and media attention
Originates bills for raising revenues	Power of "advice and consent" on presidential appointments and treaties
Local or narrow leadership	National leadership

*Some of these differences, such as term of office, are provided for in the Constitution. Others, such as debate rules, are not.