

CRS Report for Congress

Received through the CRS Web

Length of Congressional Service: First Through 107th Congresses

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Summary

This report presents data on the length of service for Representatives and Senators from 1789 to 2002. The data are from a computer file on the biographical characteristics of Members of Congress maintained at the University of Michigan.

The data are presented in nine tables, one for House and Senate service combined, and eight more, four for each chamber. **Table 1** covers the entire period from 1789 to 2002, showing the total number of terms served summing House and Senate service together. **Table 2** (House) and **Table 6** (Senate) also cover the entire period, but they summarize service in the respective chambers. **Table 3** and **Table 7** include data for the 18th and 19th centuries; **Table 4** and **Table 8** cover the 20th and 21st centuries; and **Table 5** and **Table 9** cover the period from 1947 to 2002. Each table is arranged in a similar fashion, showing how many Members served in only one Congress, how many served in two Congresses, etc; the proportion of the total each group represents; a running total (cumulative number of Members) in each category; and a similar cumulative percent.

Efforts to impose limits on the tenure of Members of Congress have not been successful, but many have centered on a 12-year limit.¹ One may contrast the proportion of Members who served more than 12 years for each body for the periods covered. Overall, in the House, 13.9% of the Representatives elected to serve during the period 1789-2002 served more than six Congresses (12 years); the figure was 21.9% in the Senate (see Tables 2 and 6). The comparable figures for the 18th and 19th centuries were 2.8% for the House and 10.9% for the Senate (Tables 3 and 7).

The proportion of Members serving for more than 12 years in the 20th and 21st centuries is 26.9% for the House and 31.7% for the Senate (Tables 4 and 8). The data for the post-WWII period, beginning in 1947, sums to 35.1% for the House and 41.2% for the Senate (Tables 5 and 9).

¹ For a discussion of these efforts, see CRS Report 96-152 GOV, *Term Limits for Members of Congress: State Activity*, by Sula P. Richardson.

Table 1. Congressional Service: 1st-107th Congresses, 1798-2002

Total no. of Congresses served	Number served		Running totals	
	Number of Members	Percent of total Members	Cumulative no. of Members	Cumulative percent
1	3,547	30.4	3,547	30.4
2	2,373	20.4	5,920	50.8
3	1,559	13.4	7,479	64.2
4	898	7.7	8,377	71.9
5	689	5.9	9,066	77.8
6	573	4.9	9,639	82.7
7	411	3.5	10,050	86.3
8	318	2.7	10,368	89.0
9	293	2.5	10,661	91.5
10	240	2.1	10,901	93.6
11	163	1.4	11,064	95.0
12	141	1.2	11,205	96.2
13	100	0.9	11,305	97.0
14	82	0.7	11,387	97.7
15	77	0.7	11,464	98.4
16	50	0.4	11,514	98.8
17	36	0.3	11,550	99.1
18	32	0.3	11,582	99.4
19	16	0.1	11,598	99.6
20	11	0.1	11,609	99.6
21	13	0.1	11,622	99.8
22	13	0.1	11,635	99.9
23	4	0.0	11,639	99.9
24	4	0.0	11,643	99.9
25	4	0.0	11,647	100.0
26	1	0.0	11,648	100.0
27	1	0.0	11,649	100.0
29	1	0.0	11,650	100.0

Note: In this table House and Senate service are summed together (denoted as “congressional service”). The source for all the tables in this report is: McKibbin, Carroll, and the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), *Roster of United States Congressional Officeholders and Biographical Characteristics of Members of the United States Congress, 1789-1996: Merged Data*, ICPSR study no. 7803 (Ann Arbor, MI). Frequencies, percentages, and 1997-2002 data updates are by CRS. These data are for the total number of Congresses served. They make no distinctions for breaks in service, and Members who only served part of a term are counted as having served a complete term.

Table 2. House Service: 1st-107th Congresses, 1798-2002

Total no. of Congresses served	Number served		Running totals	
	Number of Representatives	Percent of total Representatives	Cumulative no. of Representatives	Cumulative percent
1	3,409	32.8	3,409	32.8
2	2,354	22.7	5,763	55.5
3	1,294	12.5	7,057	67.9
4	854	8.2	7,911	76.1
5	619	6.0	8,530	82.1
6	412	4.0	8,942	86.1
7	326	3.1	9,268	89.2
8	260	2.5	9,528	91.7
9	197	1.9	9,725	93.6
10	190	1.8	9,915	95.4
11	116	1.1	10,031	96.6
12	85	0.8	10,116	97.4

13	70	0.7	10,186	98.0
14	54	0.5	10,240	98.6
15	49	0.5	10,289	99.0
16	32	0.3	10,321	99.3
17	23	0.2	10,344	99.6
18	13	0.1	10,357	99.7
19	8	0.1	10,365	99.8
20	4	0.0	10,369	99.8
21	7	0.1	10,376	99.9
22	4	0.0	10,380	99.9
23	2	0.0	10,382	99.9
24	3	0.0	10,385	100.0
25	2	0.0	10,387	100.0
26	1	0.0	10,388	100.0
27	1	0.0	10,389	100.0

**Table 3. House Service: 1st-56th Congresses, 1798-1901
(18th and 19th Centuries)**

Total no. of Congresses served	Number served		Running totals	
	Number of Representatives	Percent of total Representatives	Cumulative no. of Representatives	Cumulative percent
1	2,398	42.9	2,398	42.9
2	1,685	30.1	4,083	73.0
3	718	12.8	4,801	85.9
4	354	6.3	5,155	92.2
5	181	3.2	5,336	95.5
6	100	1.8	5,436	97.2
7	55	1.0	5,491	98.2
8	35	0.6	5,526	98.9
9	30	0.5	5,556	99.4
10	13	0.2	5,569	99.6
11	6	0.1	5,575	99.7
12	3	0.1	5,578	99.8
13	3	0.1	5,581	99.8
14	4	0.1	5,585	99.9
15	3	0.1	5,588	100.0
16	2	0.0	5,590	100.0

**Table 4. House Service: 57th-107th Congresses, 1901-2002
(20th and 21st Centuries)**

Total no. of Congresses served	Number served		Running totals	
	Number of Representatives	Percent of total Representatives	Cumulative no. of Representatives	Cumulative percent
1	1,016	21.1	1,016	21.1
2	671	14.0	1,687	35.1
3	576	12.0	2,263	47.1
4	500	10.4	2,763	57.5
5	439	9.1	3,202	66.6
6	312	6.5	3,514	73.1
7	271	5.6	3,785	78.7
8	225	4.7	4,010	83.4
9	167	3.5	4,177	86.9
10	177	3.7	4,354	90.6
11	110	2.3	4,464	92.9
12	82	1.7	4,546	94.6

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13	67	1.4	4,613	96.0
14	50	1.0	4,663	97.0
15	46	1.0	4,709	98.0
16	30	0.6	4,739	98.6
17	23	0.5	4,762	99.1
18	13	0.3	4,775	99.3
19	8	0.2	4,783	99.5
20	4	0.1	4,787	99.6
21	7	0.1	4,794	99.7
22	4	0.1	4,798	99.8
23	2	0.0	4,800	99.9
24	3	0.1	4,803	99.9
25	2	0.0	4,805	100.0
26	1	0.0	4,806	100.0
27	1	0.0	4,807	100.0

Table 5. House Service: 80th-107th Congresses, 1947-2002

Total no. of Congresses served	Number served		Running totals	
	Number of Representatives	Percent of total Representatives	Cumulative no. of Representatives	Cumulative percent
1	367	15.2	367	15.2
2	258	10.7	625	25.9
3	265	11.0	890	36.8
4	257	10.6	1,147	47.5
5	252	10.4	1,399	57.9
6	170	7.0	1,569	64.9
7	142	5.9	1,711	70.8
8	137	5.7	1,848	76.5
9	103	4.3	1,951	80.8
10	112	4.6	2,063	85.4
11	72	3.0	2,135	88.4
12	57	2.4	2,192	90.7
13	53	2.2	2,245	92.9
14	42	1.7	2,287	94.7
15	42	1.7	2,329	96.4
16	27	1.1	2,356	97.5
17	17	0.7	2,373	98.2
18	12	0.5	2,385	98.7
19	8	0.3	2,393	99.0
20	4	0.2	2,397	99.2
21	7	0.3	2,404	99.5
22	4	0.2	2,408	99.7
23	1	0.0	2,409	99.7
24	3	0.1	2,412	99.8
25	2	0.1	2,414	99.9
26	1	0.0	2,415	100.0
27	1	0.0	2,416	100.0

Table 6. Senate Service: 1st-107th Congresses, 1798-2002

Total no. of Congresses served	Number served		Running totals	
	Number of Senators	Percent of total Senators	Cumulative no. of Senators	Cumulative percent
1	332	17.6	332	17.6
2	202	10.7	534	28.4
3	500	26.6	1,034	54.9
4	127	6.7	1,161	61.7
5	108	5.7	1,269	67.4
6	201	10.7	1,470	78.1
7	72	3.8	1,542	81.9
8	54	2.9	1,596	84.8
9	94	5.0	1,690	89.8
10	21	1.1	1,711	90.9
11	23	1.2	1,734	92.1
12	56	3.0	1,790	95.1
13	16	0.8	1,806	95.9
14	18	1.0	1,824	96.9
15	21	1.1	1,845	98.0
16	11	0.6	1,856	98.6
17	5	0.3	1,861	98.8
18	10	0.5	1,871	99.4
19	4	0.2	1,875	99.6
20	2	0.1	1,877	99.7
21	4	0.2	1,881	99.9
22	1	0.1	1,882	99.9
25	1	0.1	1,883	100.0

**Table 7. Senate Service: 1st-56th Congresses, 1798-1901
(18th and 19th Centuries)**

Total no. of Congresses served	Number served		Running totals	
	Number of Senators	Percent of total Senators	Cumulative no. of Senators	Cumulative percent
1	158	17.9	158	17.9
2	144	16.3	302	34.2
3	282	31.9	584	66.1
4	67	7.6	651	73.6
5	62	7.0	713	80.7
6	75	8.5	788	89.1
7	33	3.7	821	92.9
8	17	1.9	838	94.8
9	22	2.5	860	97.3
10	8	0.9	868	98.2
11	5	0.6	873	98.8
12	4	0.5	877	99.2
13	2	0.2	879	99.4
14	1	0.1	880	99.5
15	1	0.1	881	99.7
16	2	0.2	883	99.9
18	1	0.1	884	100.0

**Table 8. Senate Service: 57th-107th Congresses, 1901-2002
(20th and 21st Centuries)**

Total no. of Congresses served	Number served		Running totals	
	Number of Senators	Percent of total Senators	Cumulative no. of Senators	Cumulative percent
1	174	17.4	174	17.4
2	58	5.8	232	23.2
3	218	21.8	450	45.0
4	60	6.0	510	51.1
5	46	4.6	556	55.7
6	126	12.6	682	68.3
7	39	3.9	721	72.2
8	37	3.7	758	75.9
9	72	7.2	830	83.1
10	13	1.3	843	84.4
11	18	1.8	861	86.2
12	52	5.2	913	91.4
13	14	1.4	927	92.8
14	17	1.7	944	94.5
15	20	2.0	964	96.5
16	9	0.9	973	97.4
17	5	0.5	978	97.9
18	9	0.9	987	98.8
19	4	0.4	991	99.2
20	2	0.2	993	99.4
21	4	0.4	997	99.8
22	1	0.1	998	99.9
25	1	0.1	999	100.0

Table 9. Senate Service: 80th-107th Congresses, 1947-2002

Total no. of Congresses served	Number served		Running totals	
	Number of Senators	Percent of total Senators	Cumulative no. of Senators	Cumulative percent
1	74	14.8	74	14.8
2	24	4.8	98	19.6
3	74	14.8	172	34.4
4	37	7.4	209	41.8
5	24	4.8	233	46.6
6	61	12.2	294	58.8
7	21	4.2	315	63.0
8	24	4.8	339	67.8
9	55	11.0	394	78.8
10	5	1.0	399	79.8
11	13	2.6	412	82.4
12	36	7.2	448	89.6
13	10	2.0	458	91.6
14	9	1.8	467	93.4
15	7	1.4	474	94.8
16	4	0.8	478	95.6
17	4	0.8	482	96.4
18	7	1.4	489	97.8
19	4	0.8	493	98.6
20	1	0.2	494	98.8
21	4	0.8	498	99.6
22	1	0.2	499	99.8
25	1	0.2	500	100.0