



# Size of the U.S. House of Representatives

Updated January 8, 2025

The size of the U.S. House of Representatives is set by [federal statute](#) at [435 Representatives](#) (excluding [nonvoting seats](#) held by Delegates and the Resident Commissioner). This number has been constant since the start of the [63<sup>rd</sup> Congress in 1913](#), aside from a temporary increase to 437 seats to accommodate the additions of Alaska and Hawaii as states in 1959 (see [P.L. 85-508](#), July 7, 1958; [P.L. 86-3](#), March 18, 1959) until the apportionment that followed the 1960 census.

## Requirements Affecting House Size

[Article I, Section 2](#) of the U.S. Constitution, as amended by [Section 2 of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment](#), provides that [representation in the House](#) is based on state population size. To determine the population of each state, Article I, Section 2 requires that the national population be counted at least once every 10 years through what is known as the [decennial census](#). Article I, Section 2 also contains broad parameters for House size, stating that there can be no more than one Representative for every 30,000 persons, provided that each state receives at least one Representative. Within these constitutional parameters, the House could in theory be as small as 50 Representatives or as large as about 11,000 Representatives, based on the [2020 census apportionment population](#). The number of House seats to be apportioned across states is set by [2 U.S.C. §2a](#).

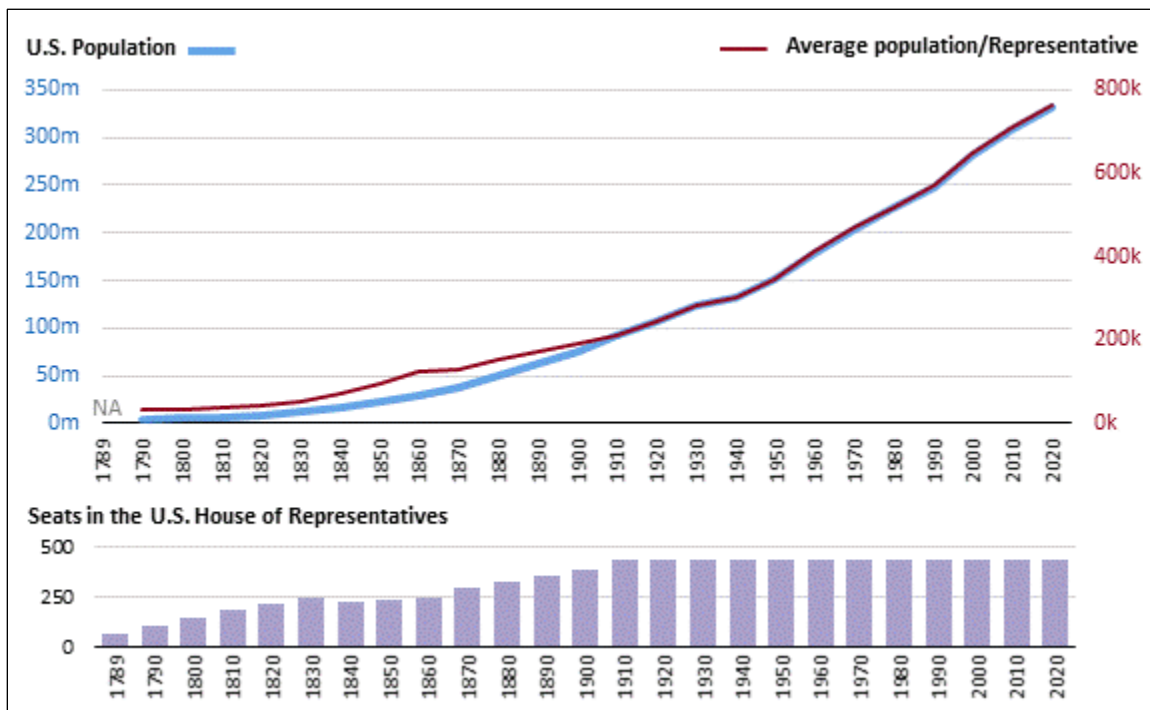
## Historical House Size

**Figure 1** displays the number of House seats and the U.S. population over time, along with the average district population size nationwide (or *representation ratio*). In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Congress generally increased the size of the House with each apportionment so no state would lose seats. The only exception followed the 1840 census, when [Congress decreased](#) the number of seats from 242 to 232. The [1911 apportionment act](#) set the House size at 433 and allowed for the addition of one seat each to accommodate the anticipated statehoods of Arizona and New Mexico. The [Permanent Apportionment Act of 1929](#) established that seats would be apportioned based on “the then existing number of Representatives,” which was 435, beginning with the 1930 census. This language from the 1929 act remains at [2 U.S.C. §2a](#).

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IN11547

**Figure I. U.S. Population, House Size, and Average District Population, 1789-2020**

**Source:** CRS analysis from U.S. Census Bureau data at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/decade.html>; <https://www.census.gov/about/history/historical-censuses-and-surveys/census-programs-surveys/decennial-census.html>; <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/dec/popchange-data-text.html>; and <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/dec/apportionment-data-text.html>.

**Note:** Graphic created by Amber Hope Wilhelm, CRS Visual Information Specialist.

## Recent Legislative Proposals Addressing House Size

Proposals related to House size are, at times, considered by Congress and could increase or decrease the size of the House. In the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress, for example, H.R. 643 and H.R. 622 proposed increasing the size of the House. Some measures in recent Congresses would have created an entity to study and recommend possible changes to the number of seats in the House, such as H.Res. 1573 from the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress and H.R. 996 from the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress. Bills that would provide statehood to Puerto Rico or Washington, DC, also generally contain adjustments to the size of the House, as constitutionally required to provide a seat to each state; these measures are often temporary, adding to the total number of House seats only until the next apportionment. In the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress, H.R. 7181 proposed reducing the number of Representatives to 400.

## Considerations

The particular considerations and implications of changing the size of the House may depend on whether Congress seeks to increase or decrease the House size, and by how many seats. A larger House would generally lead to less populous House districts and a smaller House would generally lead to more populous House districts, though not necessarily for all states, due to the method by which [apportionment](#) is calculated. Any change to the size of the House might cause certain states to gain or lose existing seats. Seat gains or losses would also affect a state's representation in the [Electoral College](#), which, under the

U.S. Constitution, consists of the number of Senators and Representatives for each state ([Article II, Section 1, clause 2](#)).

In 2018, [Pew Research found](#) that a plurality of Americans surveyed thought the House size should remain the same, with others supporting a decrease or increase to its size. Discussions about the size of the House, both historically and contemporarily, often involve normative questions about the nature of representative democracy and how many constituents a Representative ought to serve, which can be difficult to resolve. The [Framers debated](#) House and district size at the Constitutional Convention, for example, and James Madison proposed a related [constitutional amendment](#). As a more recent example, proponents of what has been termed the “Wyoming Rule” suggest districts should approximate the size of the state with the smallest population size. The sizes and representation ratios of national legislatures in [other nations](#) may also provide ideas and options for discussions about the U.S. House size. Institutional considerations, such as House size [relative to the Senate size](#), or the ability to maintain [legislative efficiency](#), could also shape views.

Changes to the House size, and increases in particular, might introduce logistical and administrative considerations. For example, the size of the House chamber and existing congressional office space might be viewed as a constraint on House size, or lead to additional considerations, such as whether or how to provide additional physical space in the Capitol Complex, or if certain work might be conducted remotely. The annual cost of operating each House office, including the [Members’ Representational Allowance](#) and [salary](#), as well as other accounts or services that apply to the entirety of the House, might also factor into decisions regarding House size.

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