

Increase the number of Representatives in the House of Representatives.

We have 435 Representatives in Congress because of a historical anomaly. Throughout most of American history Congress grew in size as the nation grew in population. That changed in 1920, when Congress failed to pass a re-apportionment bill after the 1920 census. The number 435 was set in the Apportionment Act of 1911. Actually the 1911 Act set the number of Representatives at 433, but said that Arizona and New Mexico would each get one seat when they became states, which they did in 1913.

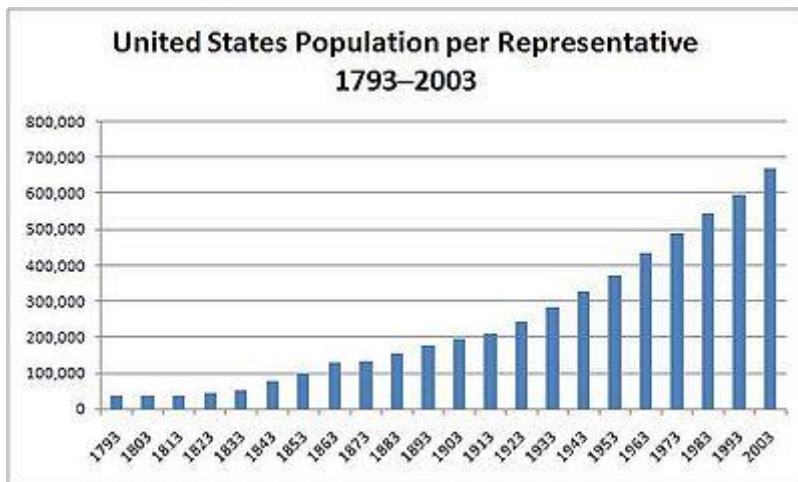
Congress failed to pass a Reapportionment Act after the census of 1920. The, before the 1930 Census, Congress passed a Reapportionment Act which reallocated seats based on 435 total Representatives. That number has remained ever since.

As the U.S. population has increased, the ratio of representatives to citizens has changed dramatically, and our government has become increasingly less representative. In the First Congress there was one elected Representative for every 33,000 constituents. Today there are on average just over 710,000 constituents for each elected Representative. This means that we are roughly 20 times less representative then at the founding.

Here are two charts (which I nicked from Wikipedia) that show this change:

Ratio of representation in the House, 1789–1913		
Years	Source	Constituents per Rep.
1789	U.S. Const.	×30,000
1793&1803	1790 Census	33,000
1803&1813	1800 Census	33,000
1813&1823	1810 Census	35,000
1823&1833	1820 Census	40,000
1833&1843	1830 Census	47,700

184361853	1840 Census	70,680
185361863	1850 Census	93,425
186361873	1860 Census	127,381
187361883	1870 Census	131,425
188361893	1880 Census	151,912
189361903	1890 Census	173,901
190361913	1900 Census	194,182
191361923	1910 Census	212,407



Not only has Congress grown less representative by lack of reapportionment, it has also created vast disparities in representation. Montana has one Representative for a population of roughly 990,000 citizens, while Rhode Island has two Representatives for a population of 1.1 million, or one Representative for every 550,000 citizens. While there will always be disparities, such a vast difference in representation is unfair, and makes hash out of the idea of equal representation.

Some of the founders understood this potential for unfairness and attempted to amend the Constitution to establish a minimum level of Representation. The first Constitutional

Amendment proposed by James Madison was to establish the number of representatives at one for every 50,000 citizens. It said:

After the first enumeration, required by the first Article of the Constitution, there shall be one Representative for every thirty thousand, until the number shall amount to one hundred, after which the proportion shall be so regulated by Congress, that there shall be not less than one hundred Representatives, nor less than one Representative for every forty thousand persons, until the number of Representatives shall amount to two hundred, after which the proportion shall be so regulated by Congress, that there shall not be less than two hundred Representatives, **nor less than one Representative for every fifty thousand persons.** [Emphasis added]

This was the first proposed amendment in the first twelve amendments sent to the states, but this particular amendment didn't pass, in large part because the smaller states felt that this would give the larger states added political power. If this had passed, and had not been amended, the House of Representatives would now have over 6,000 members. Clearly this number is unworkable, and it would appear likely that Congress would have, over the years, altered the number of citizens per representative.

I think that we should set the number of Representatives based on the population, and not based on an arbitrary number set over 100 years ago. If we set the number based on the proportion at the last re-apportionment, there would be one Representative for every 200,000 people. This would increase the size of the House to just over 1500 Representatives.

The smallest state, by population, is Wyoming, with roughly 580,000 people. If we set the apportionment number at 500,000, then Wyoming, Vermont, North Dakota, Alaska, South Dakota, and Delaware would have 1 Representative, and the total number of Representatives would increase to approximately 620.

If we set the number at 300,000 (my choice) then only Wyoming would have one Representative, and the other five listed above would go up to two. This would also increase the total number of Representatives to a bit over 1000.

This may seem like a lot, but compared to other modern democracies, it is still not very representative. The British House of Commons has 650 Members representing a population of roughly 63 million. Canada has 308 Members in the Lower House of Parliament, with a population of roughly 35 million. In both cases their legislative bodies are significantly more representative than in the United States, with roughly one member for every 100,000 citizens. Americans pride themselves on their democracy, so one might think that it is the most democratic, or representative democracy in the world, but it is neither.

Here's a chart showing the states with the current number of Representatives, and the number if the apportionment is set at 500,000 or 300,000.

State	Population	Reps Current	Rep @ 500K	Reps @ 300K
All United States	308,745,538	435	616	1026
California	37,253,956	53	74	124
Texas	25,145,561	32	50	83
New York	19,378,102	29	38	64
Florida	18,801,310	25	37	62
Illinois	12,830,632	19	25	42
Pennsylvania	12,702,379	19	25	42
Ohio	11,536,504	18	23	38
Michigan	9,883,640	15	19	32
Georgia	9,687,653	13	19	32
North Carolina	9,535,483	13	19	31
New Jersey	8,791,894	13	17	29
Virginia	8,001,024	11	16	26
Washington	6,724,540	9	13	22
Massachusetts	6,547,629	10	13	21
Indiana	6,483,802	9	12	21
Arizona	6,392,017	8	12	21
Tennessee	6,346,105	9	12	21
Missouri	5,988,927	9	11	19
Maryland	5,773,552	8	11	19

Wisconsin	5,686,986	8	11	18
Minnesota	5,303,925	8	10	17
Colorado	5,029,196	7	10	16
Alabama	4,779,736	7	9	15
South Carolina	4,625,364	6	9	15
Louisiana	4,533,372	7	9	15
Kentucky	4,339,367	6	8	14
Oregon	3,831,074	5	7	12
Oklahoma	3,751,351	5	7	12
Connecticut	3,574,097	5	7	11
Iowa	3,046,355	5	6	10
Mississippi	2,967,297	4	5	9
Arkansas	2,915,918	4	5	9
Kansas	2,853,118	4	5	9
Utah	2,763,885	3	5	9
Nevada	2,700,551	3	5	9
New Mexico	2,059,179	3	4	6
West Virginia	1,852,994	3	3	6
Nebraska	1,826,341	3	3	6
Idaho	1,567,582	2	3	5
Hawaii	1,360,301	2	2	4
Maine	1,328,361	2	2	4
New Hampshire	1,316,470	2	2	4
Rhode Island	1,052,567	2	2	3
Montana	989,415	1	1	3
Delaware	897,934	1	1	2
South Dakota	814,180	1	1	2
Alaska	710,231	1	1	2
North Dakota	672,591	1	1	2
Vermont	625,741	1	1	2
Washington, D. C.	601,723	0	0	0
Wyoming	563,626	1	1	1

From the chart it's obvious that the larger states gain the greatest number of representatives. This makes sense since it is the largest states that are currently the most underrepresented based on the current system. Some people and politicians in small states will certainly argue that this is unfair, but we need to keep in mind that the purpose of the House of Representatives is to represent people and not land area. The purpose of the Senate is to represent land area (as defined by state borders) alone.

There are a number of benefits to increasing the number of Representatives, and setting their number based on population and not an arbitrary number. First, Representatives will be closer to the people. This will make it much easier for them to know their constituents, and deal directly with their concerns. Districts will be smaller, which should make elections cheaper. (Though with more candidates and seats, the overall cost may go up.) Smaller districts may make elections less reliant on expensive television advertisement, which might reduce the cost. Districts may even be small enough for a poorly funded candidate to win by meeting the voters directly, by walk door to door, shaking hands at county fairs, etc. Second, with the number of Representatives increasing with population, few states will be forced to redistrict because of the loss of Representatives. It is possible that this will result in Congressional districts that don't change appreciably for a number of decades, as was the case before 1911. Finally, with more representatives there will be more opportunities for new people to enter politics. New people will bring new ideas, viewpoints, and possible solutions to national problems.

While I think that this proposal (alone or in conjunction with multi-seat districts) has the potential to eliminate many of the current structural problems causing extreme partisanship, there is no doubt that there are some drawbacks. Chief among them will be the size of the House. 620 members may not be unwieldy, but 1000 might be. It may be physically difficult to accommodate them all in the current chamber. Most likely a system of "backbenchers" will develop, where less adept or vocal legislators will essentially take a back seat to older and more active representatives on the House floor. This is quite common in England, and in most parliamentary systems. The increase in numbers of Representatives would increase the cost, both in legislative pay, and the cost of legislative staff. One way to minimize this would be to decrease the size of the staff, particularly for new members. Congressional staff has grown

dramatically over the past few decades, and the result seems to be that Representatives themselves are less involved and knowledgeable about legislation and the legislative process. One way to fix this problem would be for new legislators have minimal staff. Another possible solution is for new members to work for older members, not unlike in the British House of Commons.

I am certain that there are other problems associated with this plan, but on balance I think that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

If we believe in democracy (and most Americans say they do) if we believe in Representative democracy (and most people say they do) then we should increase the number of members of the House of Representatives to make our system both more representative and more democratic.