



## America's Largest and Smallest Voting Districts

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The United States House of Representatives, along with the Senate, is part of the federal government's legislative branch. Representation in the House is meant to be proportionate to the population. Each congressman or a congresswoman represents a district with a set number of constituents. This is where things get tricky.

The House had 65 representatives in 1790. As the population kept growing, so did the House. In 1913, lawmakers set the number of districts, or voting representatives in the lower Chamber of Congress, at no more than 435. "They felt if Congress kept getting bigger, it would be too difficult to handle," Walter Olson, senior fellow at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, told 24/7 Wall St. in an interview.

In 1913, the national population was just over 97 million. It is close to 326 million today. The average size of a congressional district based on the Census is around 710,000, more than triple the average district size of 210,000 based on the 1910 Census apportionment.

The size of each district is based on the Census. This means that maps get redrawn every 10 years.

The difference between the largest and smallest districts in some states on national level is significant. One example is Texas. District 22, the most populous in the Lone Star State, has 897,080 residents, compared to 713,480 residents in the smallest congressional district in Texas. This is a difference of almost 184,000 people, or about 20%. Another example is California. The difference between the largest and smallest district in the Golden State is just over 121,000 people, or about 14% of the most populous district.

Despite constant redistricting to balance district sizes, it is not uncommon for district sizes to vary by more than 10%. The reason is often simply people moving from one place to another. "Texas, for example, is a rapidly growing state," Olson says. "The difference can easily get 20% or more."

The frequent movement of people and changing population estimates is one strategy political parties have used to manipulate districts' boundaries to influence elections, Olson added. Since most states determine who will draw district lines for both state and federal legislators,

redistricting can have a huge impact, especially on who wins elections. Lawmakers across the United States have filed over 130 bills addressing redistricting procedures in 2018 alone.

The set number of districts in combination with the growing population is a problem with no clear solution. “We could have 600 [districts] and Congress may still function, but eventually we’ll come back to the same issue,” Olson said. Making districts smaller would give representatives a better chance to stay in touch with their constituents. The House has lost this closeness and it would be nice to get it back, Olson says. However, increasing their number will result in individual officials having half as much power, and this is something no one wants to lose, he added. Another solution is to have districts cross over state lines, Olson says. This will result in a more equal representation, but smaller states’ power can get diminished, and they will not be willing to give that up either. “So this means we have a dilemma that is almost impossible to avoid.”