

THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

TEXT SUMMARY

Today the House of Representatives has 435 members. Congress **apportions**, or distributes, the House's seats among the States according to their populations. Each State sends at least one representative to the House.

Every ten years the House's seats are **reapportioned**—redistributed—when the United States counts its population. This count is called a census. After each census has been conducted, the number of representatives of any State may change based on changes in its population.

Once Congress tells each State how many House seats it has, the State draws the boundaries of its electoral districts.

States must follow guidelines and avoid **gerrymandering**, or drawing districts

in a way that is advantageous to the State legislature's controlling party.

Since 1842, the use of the **single-member district** arrangement has allowed the voters of each congressional district to choose one representative from a pool of candidates associated with that district. Before 1842, voters in some States chose their representatives **at-large**, or from the State as a whole.


To become a representative, a person must be at least 25 years of age, have been a citizen of the United States for seven years, and live in the State that he or she wishes to represent. Representatives serve two-year terms and may be elected an unlimited number of times. Congressional elections are held in November of even-numbered years. An **off-year election** is a congressional election that is held between presidential elections.

THE BIG IDEA

Members of the House, who serve an unlimited number of two-year terms, represent districts of roughly equal populations.

GRAPHIC SUMMARY: Reapportionment

How Are House Seats Distributed?



- ★ The permanent size of the House is 435 members.
- ★ The number of Americans is counted every 10 years.
- ★ States with more people have more representatives.
- ★ After each census, the House seats are apportioned, or divided up among the States.

Congress periodically reapportions its seats so that each State is represented fairly.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe the single-member district arrangement of selecting a representative.
2. **Diagram Skills** What is the basis for apportioning House seats?