

Congressional Reform: Proposal in which Addresses the Main Problem and Effects of Too Few Representatives in the House

Paul Shibley

Why do many Americans feel disconnected from our government? According to a recent Gallup Poll, it is because 86% of Americans disapprove of Congress's job, and a record low of only 10% of people who do approve (Newport, Frank). Why do a substantial amount of people think congress is corrupt? Might it be that 48% of voting Americans do believe that congress *is* corrupt, (Rasmussen Reports)? American people are under-represented by our House of Representatives - which is the stem for all those reports and feelings of the American people. We have been under-represented in the House for almost a century now. There are too few Representatives in the House and the effects of that are many. The first of which is non-proportional representation. This is the effect of when a person's vote in one district is stronger than a person's vote in another district. The second, high levels of corruption through the influence of lobbyists and money hungry politicians. And lastly is the disconnection of the people from politics and of their congressmen, which ultimately leads to voter apathy. The proposal in which addresses and analyzes non-proportional representation, the negative influence of lobbyists, and the disconnection of the people, provides solutions to each problem by a single change in congress - raise the number of Representatives.

Too Few Representatives

The US Constitution recommends a ratio the House should adhere to or at least consider greatly, and that set ratio is expressed in Article 1, Section 2, "The number of Representatives shall not exceed one for every thirty thousand, but each state shall have at least one Representative". It recommends that there shall be 1 representative for every 30,000 people. The Constitution does not demand it but any person can infer this suggestion by the simple fact that the original draft of Article 1, Section 2, said "forty thousand" rather than the now 30,000. The arguments at the Constitutional Convention displays this as David P. Currie stated in *The Constitution in Congress: The second Congress, 1791-1793*. The people within the convention debated against either having 30,000 be the limit or 40,000. Critics opposed the limit "Representative shall not exceed 40,000", because they believed too few representative would

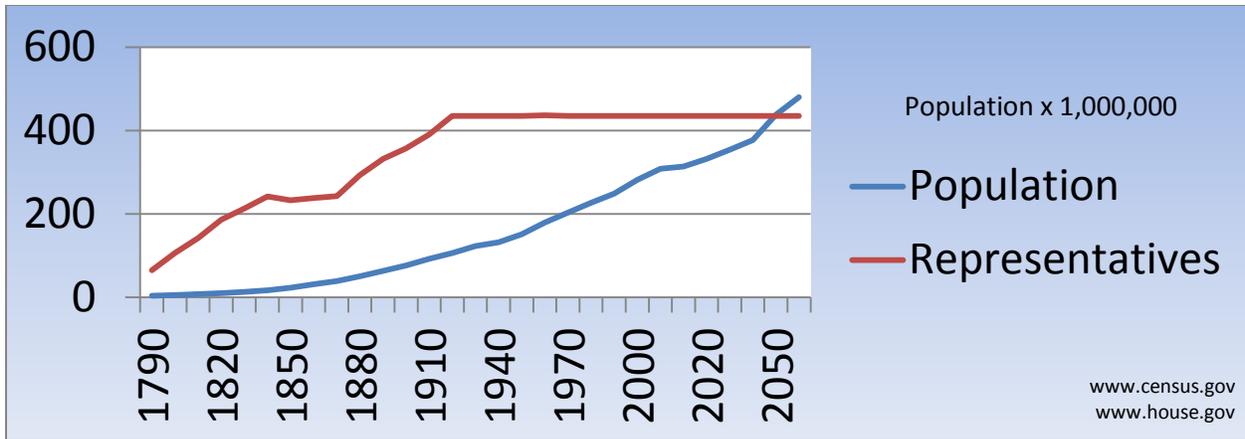
occur, so eventually they settled on 30,000. Even George Washington stood up and spoke in solidarity with the decrease from 40,000 to 30,000. The Constitutional recommendation suggests itself because the Founding Fathers accepted the possibility of too few representatives if it was at 40,000, therefore the implication is on having more rather than less Representatives in the House.

The Framers intended the census' sole purpose is to ensure an accurate number of Representatives be allotted to each state by the growing inhabitants of each state; and they stated the rule of how many Representatives each state receives within the Constitution in Article 1, and concurred in Federalist No. 56, " ...there will be one representative only to maintain the rights and explain the situation [of 30,000] constituents," and by doing so " a valuable portion of freedom has been preserved... to give the fullest assurance, that a representative for every THIRTY THOUSAND INHABITANTS will render...both a safer and competent guardian of the interest which will be confided to it." They, the Founding Fathers, believed that by having this ratio, one for every thirty thousand, will provide and ensure that the liberties of each American will be safe and that each representative will be "acquainted with the interests and circumstances of his constituents".

There are too few members in the House of Representatives because the ratio is not 1 representative to every 30,000; the ratio is not even 1 representative for every 100,000 people, nor 200,000 people. It is currently 1 representative for every 721,000 people. That is over *24 times* greater than the Constitutions' recommendation. Representation has superfluously exceed the Framers intentions and the Constitutions' spirit of representation. By fraying this far from effective representation leads to the three detrimental effects aforementioned.

Why Do Our Representatives Have So Many Constituents

Each member in the House has on average 721,000 constituents. To begin with some history, in 1929 Congress passed legislation titled "The Permanent Apportionment Act of 1929" which fixed the number Representatives by the 1920 Census to a sheer 435 members ("The Permanent Apportionment Act of 1929"). Almost a century has passed and the House still remains at 435 while the US. Population has more than tripled. The American people are underrepresented.



As you all can see, since 1790 US population has exploded - exponentially. In 1920, the population was only 106 million, on average that is 243 thousand per representative. Now, the population is 314 million, the representatives have over 721 thousand constituents. That is almost 3 times as many people per Representative compared to 1920. The amount of constituents to each Representative is increasing as each year passes.

At the founding of this nation there were 65 representatives, which averaged about 60,000 people per representative. The very first census was conducted in 1790, the population fluxed to over 5.3 million people and the representatives grew to 106. This averaged an even lower ratio, only 50,000 people per representative. From the beginning of our country until 1920, there was an increase of 370 representatives in a 130 years. For the last 90 years, there hasn't been a single increase. The House is about 100 years behind adequate Representation.

This problem will only get worse if nothing is done. In ten years, each Representative will have *an additional* 50,000 constituents. And as you can see where the lines meet, by year 2050, each member in the House will be representing over a million people. I thought the representatives are supposed to represent us. How can they when they have so many constituents?

.Non-Proportional Representation

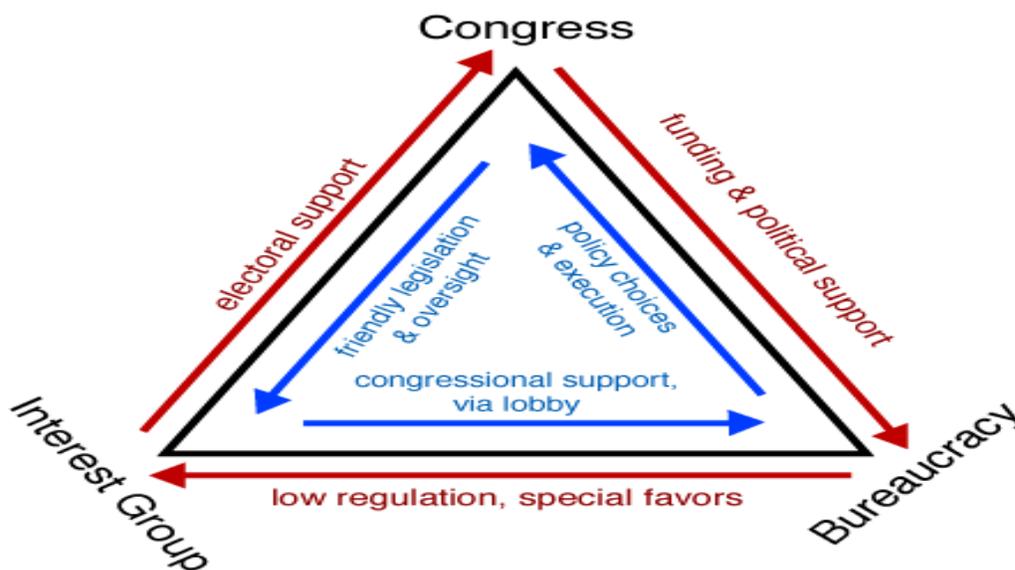
Now we go onto the effects of the main problem. The first effect of too few representatives is that Non-proportional representation is extremely prevalent. For example, Rhode Island has a population of about 1 million and they have two representatives which

average 500,000 per Representative. Montana, on the other hand, has about 1 million people but only 1 representative. The vote of one person in Rhode Island is twice as strong as one persons' vote in Montana. It is written on the Constitution, 14th Amendment, Section 2, "Representatives shall be apportioned among the several states according to their respective numbers...", I do not see how Montana and Rhodes Island's Representatives are apportioned according to "their" respective numbers. I see it as apportioned to an arbitrarily fixed number - that 435.

These aren't the only states: West Virginia, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, Rhode Island are the states that are the most over represented states. These states have the lowest representative ratio - to a low of 526,000, which is almost 200,000 below the average. The most under-represented states are that of Montana, Utah, Nevada, Delaware, and South Dakota where the highest is a few thousand shy of 1 million people for one single House Representative.

Corruption and the Iron Triangle

The next effect I have identified is corruption. Rasmussen Reports shows that 48% of likely U.S. voters believe that most members of Congress are corrupt ("New High: 48% Say Most Members of Congress Are Corrupt"). That is an astounding high percentage - given that the House is supposed to represent the people. First off, not all congressmen are corrupt, some are out there for the right reason, the reasons they were voted into office. Others, however, are corrupt and use their power and influence to get what they want. The prime example of corruption is the Iron Triangle.



There is a tight fix between the lobbyists, the congressmen, and the bureaucracy. Auburn University defines the Iron Triangle as, "The closed, mutually supportive relationships... between the government agencies, the special interest lobbying organizations, and the legislative committees... with jurisdiction over a particular... area of government policy" (Johnson, Paul M.). The "Triangle" goes as follows: lobbyists contribute funds to the campaign coffers of the congressmen, whom in turn slant legislation or votes that allow specific bureaucratic-rule-implementation intended to only benefit the organizations whom hired the lobbyists. The cycle continues today. It is happening right now. How can American be corrupt? Why would congressmen "sell" their votes?

The reason being, congressmen have so many constituents, they have a massive district and a large geographical area to campaign. They need as much money as possible to travel, advertise and campaign effectively. Congressmen spend 25% up to 50% of their time in office, solely for fundraising (Scherb, Aaron). Therefore they will accept contributions and in favor, vote a specific way on legislation.

Disconnection of People - Voter Apathy

This brings us to the last effect of too few Representatives, the disconnection of the people - voter apathy. Again, because there are so many constituents, us, underneath one representative, people begin to give up and even stop bothering to ask questions. For example, look at our past election, barely 60% of people actually voted in 2008. What happened to the other 40%, do the math, that is over 125 Million people who are lost, or just don't care anymore.

A quick hypothetical situation provided by Lawrence Lessig, in his book, "Republic, Lost": Lets us say a congressmen gets to his/her office at the end of the day and they have 100 voicemails waiting for them. 95 of them are constituents who are complaining about their district, the other 5 are people who want to contribute to the congressmen's cause. The congressmen does not have time to call back all those people, he is only going to call back the 5 who are going to contribute. But don't get me wrong, the congressmen is only acting in his best interest, trying to secure his next election - to beat the other guy running against him - and that is fine, no wrong is done there. The wrong that *is* done, is not calling back the other 95 people, those people get the hint that their own congressmen, some whom even donated and voted for him, does not have time for them. They give up, activism turns into apathy.

The Solution

Now you are all wondering, what is the solution to all this. If one digs deep enough they will find the connection to all these problems. Increase the House of representatives to a Directly Proportional Representation. Critics might say, "how could we afford this, even more taxes will be taken". Yes, that is true, and we do need to consider this. However, the advantages of greater representation, the people's voice heard in Congress, far outweigh the costs. Because without proper representation, taxes may be taken without our voice being heard.

That Representative ratio should be, "For every 200,000 people, there shall be one representative." This will bring the constituent and representative ratio back to the time right before the Permanent Apportionment Act of 1929, back to a time when representation really meant representation.

Considering the costs, what about this: US population has tripled since 1920 while representation has stayed the same. At 1 representative per 200,000 each member in the house will have less than a third of the amount of constituents they originally had. Since a congressman will have a third of their constituents, their salary and benefits should be reduced by a third; thus, in effect, not increasing any costs at all.

You may wonder, why 200,000? What is so special about that number? The number could also be between 100,000 or 150,000; I have read arguments for both numbers. The main point is that the number must stay between the two sides of the Representative Spectrum: on one side there is avoiding the "confusion of a multitude" - as James Madison said and the Hemlock as an example. On the other side there is avoiding too few Representatives - that result in the problems aforementioned. Any less *100,000* per Representative will result in the former. Any more than *200,000* per Representative will result in the latter. With costs taken into consideration, I prefer 200,000.

By having directly-proportional representation at 200,000: 1 it will solve the *cause* and all of its effects. The number of Representatives in the House go from mere 435 to an adequate 1544. Both, population and representation, grow equally-proportional as the Constitution's intention. This is the number of Representatives that should have been correctly apportioned in the first place.

By having a Directly Proportional Representation, non-proportional representation is addressed and solved. Circuit court judge O'Scannlain argued that proportional representation among the several states will be impossible with only 435 members. 1 Representative for every 200,000 people will ensure that each state has not perfect equality, but the most close-to-perfect equality. It is said, "[N]ot being able to achieve perfect equality 'is no excuse for ignoring our Constitution's plain objective of making equal representation for equal numbers of people the fundamental goal for the House of Representatives'" (Clemons V. USDC.). All districts will, in every single state, be recalibrated to have an equal 200,000 people every census that is conducted. Thus, non-proportional representation is so minimal it hardly exists.

Furthermore, by having a Directly-Proportional Representation, corruption is addressed and solved. Since Congressmen do not have large districts anymore they need not to travel a wide geographical area. Extreme amounts of funds are not necessary in order to campaign effectively. This act, destroys the Iron Triangle in the House. The reason why Lobbyists can "buy" a congressmen's vote, is because there are so few Representatives. For example, take an instructor's curve grading into view. In a class room of 5 people one could convince the rest to only answer the letter "A" on all questions, thus each student will get an A on the test because of the curve grading. That one student corrupted the rest because of the gain they all would receive. Now take a class room of 100 students. Not every person knows each other nor trust each other, the same corruption tactic will not work on a larger group - it would be impossible for one to convince the other 99. A few people can be bought, many cannot. Therefore, potential congressmen looking for a quick buck or in it for the wrong reasons will be discouraged. Honesty, virtue and most importantly, integrity, is encouraged and the only thing accepted. Having more representatives does limit deception and promote credibility.

Finally, by having a Directly Proportional Representation, people will feel more connected with their congressman. Constituents' congressmen's office will be right around the corner because the districts are small. Also, one will be more inclined to go visit their congressmen's office and voice their concern and have a greater chance to receive some feedback because now the congressmen has a manageable amount of people to converse with. This will add greater perspective diversity from the people on federal issues. People need an outlet. Look at this Occupy Movement all over the nation, and also look at the middle east; when people get fed-up with society, or some aspect of it, they protest. They need a place to vent and voice their

concern. Not a place where it goes on a piece of paper and into a file folder, but a place to where the person who hears the concern has the power and influence to make it change. If we increase the House of Representatives, political apathy will be diminished while political activism will be the result among many Americans.

Conclusion

The proposal in which addresses and analyzes non-proportional representation, the negative influence of lobbyists, and the disconnection of the people, provides solutions to each problem by a single change in congress - raise the number of Representatives. As you can tell, just by increasing the number of representatives with a directly-proportional ratio of 200,000: 1, provides the solutions for: too few representatives, non-proportional representation, corruption, and lastly, disconnection of people. The most ironic aspect of this argument is in *The Federalist Paper* No. 55, James Madison predicted over 200 years ago that these *exact* problems would occur if the House had too few Representatives. His prediction has come true.

You must understand this, our generation will inherit this country, with all of its positives and negatives. If we don't increase the House as soon as possible, and implement a Directly Proportional Representation, this problem will become uncontrollable and uncontainable. If we cannot control the effects, we must control the cause. *We must increase the Representatives now.* And to follow through with this, there are only four possible ways: 1) Convince our current Congressmen to implement a Directly Proportional Representative Ratio; 2) only elect or re-elect representatives who will; 3) petition and put it on the ballot; 4) and lastly, conduct a State Convention. All four of these are possible. But for it to work, we need to focus on one. My favorite? Petition, get it on the ballot and let the *people* decide. We, The People, can insure that American Representation is proper, adequate, and equal. Go to Change.org and search for: House of Representatives: Directly Proportional Representation.

Sign up, petition, and make a difference.

Work Cited

- Clemons, John Et. al, United States Department of Commerce Et. al. "IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF MISSISSIPPI". [apportionment.us](#). USDC. 7/8/10. Web. 5/8/12
- Johnson, Paul M. "Iron Triangle". A Glossary of Political Economy Terms. *Auburn.edu*. Auburn University. 2005. Web. 3/29/12.
- "New High: 48% Say Most Members of Congress Are Corrupt". [rasmussenreports.com](#). Politics. 12/31/11. Web. 3/21/12.
- Newport, Frank. "Congress Job Approval at New Low of 10%". [Gallup.com](#). Gallup. 2/8/12. Web. 3/21/12.
- Scherb, Aaron. "Member of Congress need to spend less time raising funds. [Thehill.com](#). 7/7/11. Web. 3/29/12.
- "The Permanent Apportionment Act of 1929". [artandhistory.house.gov](#). Historical Highlights. Office of the Clerk. N.D. Web. 3/25/12.
- "U.S. Population, 1790 - 2000: Always Growing". [u-s-history.com](#). *United States History*. ND. Web. 6/14/12.