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THE CASE FOR ENLARGING THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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AN OUR COMMON PURPOSE REPORT

“The number of which the House of Representatives is to consist, forms another and a very interesting point of view. . . . Scarce any article, indeed, in the whole Constitution seems to be rendered more worthy of attention, by the weight of character and the apparent force of argument with which it has been assailed. . . . No political problem is less susceptible of a precise solution than that which relates to the number most convenient for a representative legislature.

—JAMES MADISON, *THE FEDERALIST*, NO. 55



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OUR COMMON PURPOSE



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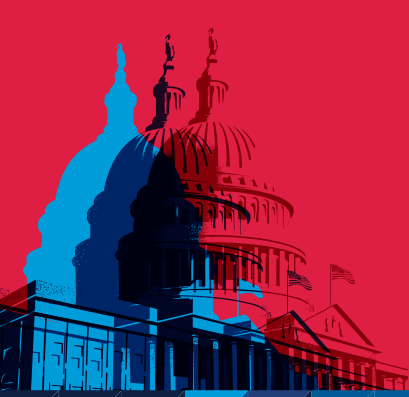
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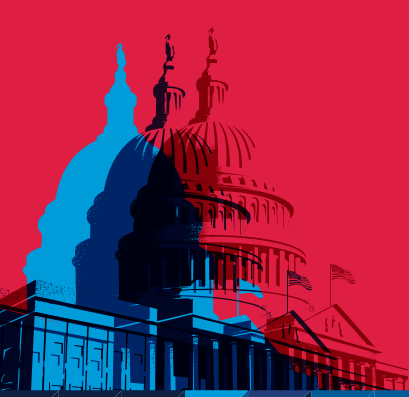
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INTRODUCTION

When the framers of the U.S. Constitution laid out their plans for the federal government, the House of Representatives was designed to be the chamber closest to the American people. The House was by far the largest part of the government and its representatives were the only federal lawmakers elected directly by the populace. Hence the chamber’s nickname: “the People’s House.”

Fundamental to the House’s status as the most purely democratic part of the government were the relatively small sizes of congressional districts. Congressmen (and at the time they were all men) were meant to serve in Washington while also remaining intimately familiar with the issues facing their constituents. To maintain this representativeness, the House grew as the nation grew, from just 59 members in 1789 to 435 in 1913.

In 1929, however, an act of Congress stopped the expansion of the House. Over the last century, this often-overlooked measure has resulted in a House of Representatives that has become less and less connected to the voting public. The average number of constituents per congressional district has exploded: from around 35,000 constituents per district in the 1790s to 210,000 in the 1910s to 762,000 in 2020. Within the next few decades, the average congressional district may boast nearly one million Americans. This trend poses a series of challenges to American government. Congresspeople are meant to represent *all* of their constituents. It is much more difficult for representatives to connect with a significant percentage of their constituents when they represent so many people, and it is much more difficult for constituents to feel that their voice—and their vote—matters when they are just one of 762,000. Congress, too, has more responsibilities than ever before, leaving representatives

overburdened and overscheduled. Many Americans—such as veterans and, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, small business owners and employees—need regular assistance from congressional offices, which are currently inundated with requests from massive constituencies. A smaller supply of seats also intensifies the advantage certain types of congressional candidates have over others. Large districts favor incumbents as well as wealthy and well-funded candidates. Large districts also make it harder for a wide variety of challengers—including racial minorities and third-party candidates—to be elected. The size of congressional districts, then, has helped result in a Congress that falls far short of representing the country’s ideological and demographic diversity.

If the House of Representatives is to live up to its role as the People’s House, something needs to change.

This report makes the case for expanding the House of Representatives to bring the American people a little closer to their government, and their government closer to them. *The Case for Enlarging the House of Representatives* is an independent byproduct of *Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century*, the final report of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences’ Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship.¹ The Commission represents a cross-partisan cohort

INTRODUCTION

of leaders from academia, civil society, philanthropy, and the policy sphere who reached unanimous agreement on thirty-one recommendations to improve American democracy. The report takes as a premise that political institutions, civic culture, and civil society reinforce one another. A nation may have impeccably designed bodies of government, but it also needs an engaged citizenry to ensure these institutions function as intended. As a result, *Our Common Purpose* argues that reforming only one of these areas is insufficient. Progress must be made across all three. To build a better democracy, the United States needs better-functioning institutions as well as a healthier political culture and a more resilient civil society.

The proposal to enlarge the House of Representatives is the very first recommendation in *Our Common Purpose*. Expanding the House would not just reform one of the nation's oldest political institutions: it would help reduce barriers between voters and their representatives, in the process helping to restore trust in American government. Additionally, the Commission notes that an important benefit of House enlargement would be the corresponding expansion of the Electoral College. The addition of seats to the House would help reduce the underrepresentation of larger states in the election of the president. However, while *Our Common Purpose* preliminarily suggests the addition of fifty seats, the report notes that a “precise number” of additional seats “should be established through vigorous discussion and debate.”²

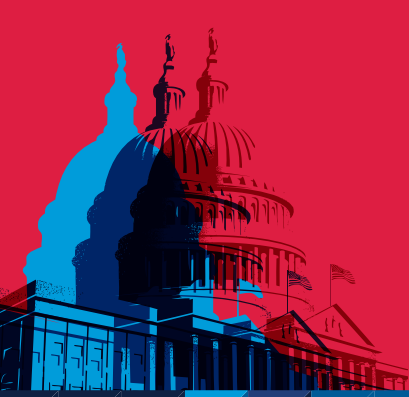
To that end, the American Academy convened a working group of scholars, thought leaders, and former elected officials and congressional staff to investigate proposals to enlarge the House. The working group debated the principles that should undergird a House expansion formula, surveyed extant proposals for House expansion, and discussed the possible outcomes of expansion.

This report was informed by those conversations and by the theory of change outlined in *Our Common Purpose*. [Part I](#) explains the history of the House

and how it was capped at 435 seats. [Part II](#) describes the principles behind representative democracy and how an expansion would help the chamber better embody those principles. [Part III](#) lays out an original proposal for the addition of 150 seats with gradual expansion in future years, while [Part IV](#) outlines other possible expansion formulas. A major concern related to House enlargement is how partisan control of the chamber would be affected. In [Part V](#), we offer modeling of ten thousand simulations of the 2020 election at various House sizes, which indicate almost no change to the partisan control of the House or to Electoral College outcomes following House expansion. [Part VI](#) illustrates the degree to which the capped U.S. House is an outlier compared with other countries, and [Part VII](#) explains four other *Our Common Purpose* recommendations that could be paired with House expansion.

Debates about the size of the House were a common part of American political discourse for the first 142 years of the nation's history. Since 1929, they have largely disappeared. This report makes the case that the expansion of the House should represent a priority for democratic reform, one that would bring the chamber in line with the framers' vision and help build a Congress that can better represent the diversity of the American people.





PART I: HOW WE GOT TO 435

One of the most famous episodes of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 centered around the design of the nation’s legislative branch. The Convention was split over two proposals. Under the Virginia Plan, put forth by delegates from the most populous state, the new nation would have two legislative chambers, with membership in each determined by the states’ proportion of the national population. This proposal drew resistance from delegates of smaller states who would have relatively less power in this structure of government. Under the smaller states’ preferred proposal, dubbed the New Jersey Plan, the United States would have a single legislature, with equal representation for every state, regardless of population.

The Convention reached an agreement in what came to be called the Connecticut Compromise, or the Great Compromise of 1787. The Compromise set up the legislative branch of the federal government as we know it today: an upper chamber with two representatives from each state and a lower chamber with representation based on each state’s population. Well, not their actual population. In the other major compromise to emerge from the Convention, enslaved people were counted as three-fifths of a person, enhancing the power of Southern states in the Electoral College and in the House. Under the same clause in the Constitution, “Indians not taxed” were also excluded from the count. White women, free African Americans, and children—like many non-land-owning white men—could not vote, but they were included in the population tally.³

The House of Representatives was designed to be the branch of government with the closest connection to the people. With the president elected by the Electoral College, senators elected by state legislatures (until the ratification of the Seventeenth Amendment in 1913), and Supreme Court justices appointed by the president, House representatives

were the only lawmakers in Washington chosen directly by those few American white men who were eligible to vote. James Madison wrote with pride in *The Federalist Papers* that “the electors” of the House “are to be the great body of the people of the United States.”⁴

But how big should the House be? “Scarce any article, indeed, in the whole Constitution seems to be rendered more worthy of attention, by the weight of character and the apparent force of argument with which it has been assailed,” Madison wrote. This was a thorny question without an easy answer. He bemoaned: “No political problem is less susceptible of a precise solution than that which relates to the number most convenient for a representative legislature.”⁵ Ultimately, the Constitution stipulated that each representative should have roughly 30,000 constituents, with each state also guaranteed at least one representative. During the Constitutional Convention of 1787, some of the framers proposed larger districts. But George Washington, the president of the Convention who would be elected the nation’s first president two years later, disagreed. Washington’s insistence that House districts be kept small

was the only time he participated in the discussion at the Convention.⁶

When the first U.S. Congress was called into session on March 4, 1789, it had fifty-nine members (six seats were added to the chamber over the course of its first year). Congress was directed to conduct reapportionment within three years and every ten years thereafter.⁷ These measures were explicitly designed to ensure the House grew as the nation's population increased. "The unequivocal objects of these regulations," Madison explained in *Federalist* No. 58, were "to readjust, from time to time, the apportionment of representatives to the number of inhabitants . . . [and] to augment the number of representatives."⁸

In fact, had Madison got his way, the constituent-to-representative ratio would be written into the Constitution. The Bill of Rights—what we now know as the first ten amendments to the Constitution—originally included twelve amendments, the first of which set a formula for regular House expansion. As the average number of constituents per district increased, the House would add seats accordingly (Table 1).⁹

Per Madison's writings in *The Federalist Papers*, such a ratio would ensure representatives had small enough districts that congressional delegates could remain attuned to the issues facing the American people. The amendment was ratified by eleven states but, as states continued to join the union, it remained one state short of adoption (because it was passed by the Senate without a deadline, it can still be ratified by any interested state, though none has done so since 1792). Under the terms of Madison's proposal and based on the current population of the United States, if each House seat in 2021 averaged 50,000 constituents, the chamber today would boast roughly 6,500 seats. However, historian David Kyvig argues that Madison's amendment in fact calls for a graduated formula, one that by 2010 would have raised the size of districts to 190,000 constituents, resulting in a House with 1,625 members.¹⁰

TABLE 1
Madison's Proposed
First Amendment

Number of Constituents per District	Size of the House of Representatives
30,000	≤100
40,000	101–200
50,000	201+

While the amendment did not pass, the House grew, albeit not nearly at the pace Madison wanted. Every ten years, Congress conducted the census, surveyed the results, and made two decisions: 1) how big the House should be for the next ten years and 2) what formula to use to apportion seats among the states. These formulas are important because, based on population calculations, states are invariably owed a fraction of a House seat. Formulas offer a seemingly objective measure of settling on fractions and adjudicating which states should receive the final seats. Of course, the decision as to which formula to use is highly political, and no formula can be truly objective. Congress has used five different formulas over its history. Since 1940, it has used the equal proportions method, also known as the Huntington-Hill method.¹¹

The total size of the House was never relegated to a mathematical formula. The original ratio included in the Constitution of 30,000 constituents per representative was a minimum. The House expanded as the nation grew but surpassed Madison's proposed ratio of 50,000 per representative by 1840 (Table 2). Two factors drove expansion through the early twentieth century: the addition of new states and the preservation of incumbent seats. Thirty-five states were admitted to the union between 1791 (Vermont) and 1912 (Arizona). In the first Congress with 435 seats (1913–1915), 268 House seats (62 percent) were apportioned to states admitted since 1791.

PART I: HOW WE GOT TO 435

The other main driver of House expansion, particularly in the early twentieth century, was congressional action to ensure that no state lost a representative. In a highly subjective process, Congress surveyed the decennial census and assessed how many seats were slated to move between states. Instead of removing seats from any state, however, Congress expanded the chamber by exactly the number of seats that would have shifted from one state to another. States that merited bigger delegations received their new seats, and states slated to lose a seat kept the same number of representatives.¹²

Still, not every member of Congress favored the continued expansion of the House. Proposals to limit

House size circulated in Washington as early as the nineteenth century. Congress passed a law in 1850 that implemented a new apportionment formula (known as the Hamilton/Vinton method) and limited the size of the House to 233. The new formula was adopted, but the size restriction was ignored.¹³

The issue of House size came to a head in the 1920s when parts of the nation were rapidly industrializing and urbanizing. At the same time, waves of immigration and a massive migration of African Americans from the South to the Northeast and upper Midwest threw the nation's demographic balance into flux. Based on the 1920 census, reapportionment in 1921 would have shifted the balance

TABLE 2
House Expansion, 1793–1913

Census Year	Size of House under New Apportionment	Average Number of Constituents per House District
1790	105	34,436
1800	142	34,609
1810	182	36,377
1820	213	42,124
1830	240	49,712
1840	223	71,338
1850	234	93,020
1860	241	122,614
1870	292	130,533
1880	325	151,912
1890	356	173,901
1900	386	193,167
1910	435	210,583

of power in Congress: ten rural states were slated to lose a combined eleven seats, which would have gone instead to eight urbanizing states. This helped lead to the capping of the House and automatic apportionment to prevent congressional toying with House size.¹⁴

Other than a brief interlude from 1959 to 1962—when two seats were temporarily added after Hawaii and Alaska received statehood—the House has remained at 435 seats since it landed there in 1913. Four hundred and thirty-five has become, in Bouk’s words, a “nearly sacred number.”¹⁶ Yet it is a

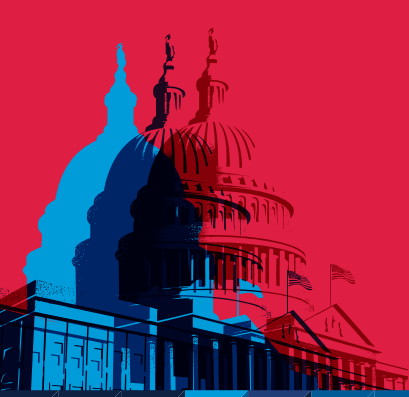
Four hundred and thirty-five represents the number of seats the House happened to have when members decided they were tired of expansion. It is out of whack with the founders’ vision, and it is long overdue for a change.

It is worth noting that a recent study from historian Dan Bouk disputes this standard narrative of the capping of the House. The rural-urban split was, per Bouk, a “statistical illusion,” and rural and urban representatives did not vote significantly differently when it came to apportionment. Bouk challenges the influence of other factors, too, including questions about the veracity of the census and supposedly crippling academic debates over apportionment formulas.¹⁵

number that originates not with the founders, *The Federalist Papers*, the Constitution, or any legislative doctrine. It represents the number of seats the House happened to have when members decided they were tired of expansion. It is out of whack with the founders’ vision, and it is long overdue for a change.

Regardless of the particular importance of the 1920 census, members of Congress were starting to believe that the body was growing too large, was too expensive to operate, and was running out of physical space to accommodate additional members. As Bouk and others have shown, the efficiency of Congress as an institution had become a major concern. In 1921, New York Representative Isaac Siegel proposed the expansion of the House to 483 seats, a size that, per previous apportionments, would ensure no state lost representation. Siegel encountered a new intensity of resistance, especially from his fellow Republicans. He tried to compromise, but failed. In the 1923 apportionment, Congress kept the House at 435 seats; the first time since 1843 and the second time in its history, it did not expand after a census. In 1929, Congress passed the Permanent Apportionment Act, which locked the size of the chamber at 435.





PART II: THE HOUSE AND REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

How big should a legislative assembly be? As our nation’s founders understood, there is no obvious answer. As a general rule, assembly size offers a trade-off between efficiency and representativeness: The smaller the assembly, the more efficiently it can function. But the larger the assembly, the more representative it can be.¹⁷

At the state level, assembly size varies considerably across the nation. Tiny New Hampshire has 400 representatives in its lower chamber, while California, the most populous state, has just 80. Assembly size also varies considerably between countries, though it largely follows a consistent pattern (see [International Comparisons on page 26](#)).¹⁸

Before exploring specifics about chamber size, we might ask a more fundamental question: what is the purpose of a representative legislative assembly? The standard answer is straightforward. Self-governance requires a legitimate lawmaking body. Since it is impractical (and almost certainly undesirable) for every citizen to participate directly in governmental decision-making, a representative assembly offers a means to aggregate the perspectives and interests of a larger society into a single lawmaking body. This body should make laws in a broadly conceived “public interest,” or should at the very least help people feel like they have a voice in the rules that govern them.

Since citizens participate in government through periodic elections, participatory processes, and lobbying, the elected representative becomes the main link between citizens and their government. As a result, the question of representation has long been central to scholars of democracy. The debate dates back to eighteenth-century philosopher Edmund Burke’s distinction between the “delegate” and

“trustee” models of representation. In the delegate model, representatives are mere stand-ins for constituency opinion and should act directly on behalf of their constituents. In the trustee model, representatives are elected for their character and judgment. To this day, contemporary political theory is full of debates over competing ways to conceptualize representation.¹⁹

On a broader level, a representative assembly can also be considered crucial for national cohesion. In this conception, a legislature is much more than the sum of its individual members. Instead, it is the one and only grouping that is truly representative of the entire nation, and the one and only venue in which individuals with perspectives across the ideological and geographic spectrum engage and deliberate with each other. In the process, legislative assemblies help forge the identity of a larger nation. If no one perspective has a monopoly on the truth, and if all perspectives can find themselves somewhere in a national legislature, then the idea of representation is something transformative. Congress becomes more than just a lawmaking body. It becomes a forum that helps Americans see the diversity of the country and that this diversity comes together to build something greater than the sum of its parts.²⁰

There may be no one perfect way to represent a larger group of citizens. But any form of representation must involve at least some fealty to the values and

PART II: THE HOUSE AND REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

interests of the citizens who are represented. And the larger the representative body, the more likely it is able to reflect the nation as a whole.

THE BIGGER THE DISTRICT, THE WEAKER THE ELECTORAL CONNECTION

The standard account of representation in the U.S. Congress is that because members of Congress want to be reelected, they work hard to maintain a constant connection to their constituents.²¹ They show up at community events, hold town halls, and speak to community leaders. Some of these practices amount to little more than campaign stops, some are genuine attempts to connect with constituents. Regardless of representatives' intentions, these appearances can serve a positive function. By trying to maintain a constant presence in front of their voters, representatives hear from their constituents and get a sense of what their concerns are.

However, there can be no guarantee that the constituents who representatives see are typical of their voter base. In a political science classic, "Constituency

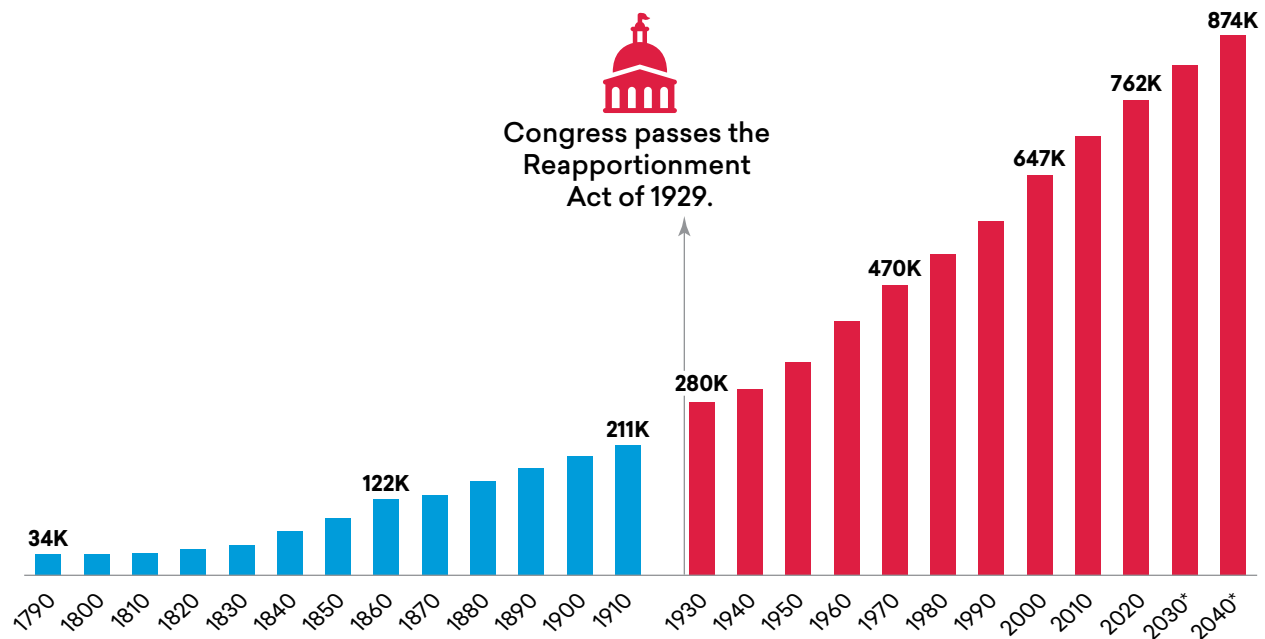
Influence in Congress," Warren Miller and Donald Stokes write:

The Representative knows his constituents mostly from dealing with people who do write letters, who will attend meetings, who have an interest in his legislative stands. As a result, his sample of contacts with a constituency of several hundred thousand people is heavily biased: even the contacts he apparently makes at random are likely to be with people who grossly overrepresent the degree of political information and interest in the constituency as a whole.²²

Or as political scientist Richard Fenno put it in another classic phrasing, "the constituency that a representative reacts to is the constituency that he or she sees."²³ Even in the Internet age, representatives are influenced most by the voters who best make themselves seen and heard.

As a general rule, representatives want to represent their constituencies. But how they define and see

FIGURE 1
Average House District Size, 1790–2040



Note: Dates with an asterisk are projected.

their constituency depends very much on which constituencies they actually see, and which constituencies they most fear upsetting.²⁴ The more constituents a member represents, the more abstract the constituency becomes to them. Someone who represents one hundred people can know and understand the people she is representing very well. A representative for one hundred thousand voters has a more diffuse picture, likely distorted by those who make the most effort to be seen. A representative who represents one million people has an even more diffuse and distorted picture.

“[The] country keeps growing with its population and so it’s a lot harder to get the attention of your congressional representative now than it apparently used to be, way before any of us were born.”

In the twenty-first century, it is both easier and harder for members to understand their constituency and what it wants. There is far more high-quality polling available (at least theoretically high quality), and members are responsive to such polling.²⁵ But it is also easier for small groups to organize and flood offices with calls and emails and social media engagements, thus creating an unrepresentative picture of the constituency. Indeed, this distorted view is increasingly becoming the reality, as sophisticated grassroots lobbying organizations are adept at making themselves seem larger and more influential than they really are.²⁶

It is possible, even likely, that a representative of one hundred thousand people could present herself before a decent percentage of her constituents over the course of several terms. Likewise, these constituents could get a sense of who their representative really is and feel like they know her. However, the likelihood that citizens will be able to assess their

representative directly declines as district size increases. Instead, they are left to evaluate their representatives more indirectly: through partisan affiliation, campaign advertising, media coverage, and other stand-ins. In a world of limited resources, representatives prioritize services for the constituents they consider most important to them and their chances of reelection.²⁷

Numerous studies have found that the bigger the state, the less likely citizens are to have direct contact with their senators and the more likely they are to consider their senators as unhelpful.²⁸ Though there is less variation in House district size, political scientist Brian Frederick found in a 2008 study that the smaller the district size, the more likely citizens were to have contact with their representatives, the more likely citizens were to reach out to representatives for help, the more likely they were to feel like their representatives did a good job keeping in touch with the district, and the more likely citizens were to approve of their representative. As Frederick concludes, “it becomes progressively more challenging” for citizens to gain access to a representative “as the number of citizens each representative serves rises, and voters appear to notice. There is a measurable cost to allowing an unchecked district constituency population growth.”²⁹ One Spokane, Washington, resident told the American Academy’s Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship: “[The] country keeps growing with its population and so it’s a lot harder to get the attention of your congressional representative now than it apparently used to be, way before any of us were born.”³⁰

Critics may contend that, even with smaller districts, representatives would focus on only their loudest constituents. It is unlikely the House would be expanded to the point at which any district would have fewer than 200,000 or 300,000 residents, so there is no hope of returning to a full-on retail-politics style arrangement that was possible early in the nation’s history. However, there is a meaningful difference between a voter who is 1 of 700,000 or even one million and a voter who is 1 of 400,000 or 500,000, particularly

in the arena of constituent services. Constituents frequently make requests of their representative's office, which is also charged with making sure voters feel their voice is heard. According to the Congressional Management Foundation, Congress receives between twenty-five million and thirty-five million messages a year from the American people, an average of between 46,000 and 65,000 per congressional and Senate office.³¹ Any reduction in district size—without a corresponding decrease in the funding of congressional staff—would increase the chamber's capacity to respond to these requests and let the American people feel they are being well—or at least better—represented.

As *Our Common Purpose* explains, part of the crisis of American democracy today is a crisis of trust in government. Building a closer connection between individual citizens and their representatives could be a significant step toward restoring some of that trust.

EXPANDING THE TALENT POOL OF REPRESENTATIVES

District size also affects who runs for office. An obvious advantage of enlarging the House is that the regular addition of new districts would create open seats, offering opportunities for a new generation to serve in Congress. At the very least, an expansion of the House would be the quickest way to make Congress more diverse without resorting to term or age limits. Smaller districts do more than create opportunities for more people to serve in Congress. They lower the obstacles to run for Congress in the first place.

Running for Congress is a big deal. Campaigning and fundraising pose barriers and put tremendous demands on candidates. Anyone running for Congress who does not have access to significant fundraising resources is discouraged from launching a campaign. This privileges wealthier candidates and especially candidates who have access to networks of wealthy potential donors. It also privileges candidates who have strong ideological and partisan commitments that can keep them motivated through the long, uncertain slog of campaigning.³²

Smaller districts, then, can help make running for office more accessible to a more diverse talent pool. Smaller districts help reduce the personal costs of running for office (less fundraising, fewer voters to reach out to) and create more opportunities for parties to recruit more diverse candidates. This can help candidates who might otherwise be deterred from running for office given the relatively few opportunities and the higher personal cost required under the current size of House districts.³³

VOTER INFLUENCE

For voters, the larger the district size, the less important any single voter is in deciding the election. To put it another way, the probability of any individual casting the deciding vote decreases as the number of voters increases. To put it a third way, in a larger district, representatives can afford to ignore more voters.

As districts become larger, they tend to become more heterogeneous. On the one hand, this flattens out the diversity of representation, making it harder for more extreme candidates to win. On the other hand, it also makes it harder for more idiosyncratic candidates and diverse candidates to win, as they may have a naturally more limited base of support. It also makes it harder for particular constituencies to elect their candidates of choice unless they are intentionally drawn into districts for the sole purpose of electing certain types of representatives. This is the theory behind majority-minority districts: without districts drawn specifically to ensure racial minority representation, minority candidates could be unlikely to win elections (though recent years have seen a growing trend of minority members elected from non-majority-minority districts). However, racial minority representation is a unique case. There are no districts drawn, for example, to ensure representation of lower-income voters. And few predominately nonwhite neighborhoods are located in areas that are sufficiently self-segregated to have even a chance at becoming a majority-minority district. Similarly, given the size of districts today, many rural areas are not populous enough to form distinct districts. As a result, rural areas are

occasionally drawn into the same district as suburban or urban neighborhoods, often resulting in the voices of rural Americans being drowned out.

As districts become smaller and the threshold for victory becomes lower, it is possible for more groups to elect their candidates of choice: the smaller the district, the easier it is for a minority group to become a pivotal voting bloc. This is especially significant in the case of lower-income voters. Political scientist Karen Long Jusko has estimated that even if the poorest 33 percent of Americans voted as a unified bloc, they could still only elect their preferred representative in 5 percent of districts. In France, by contrast, one-third of the districts have a low-income majority. “The size of a U.S. congressional district is much larger—by a factor of almost seven—than the average French district,” Jusko notes. “This undoubtedly contributes to the heterogeneity of American congressional districts, and dilutes the electoral power of low-income voters.” Meanwhile, she finds a consistent pattern: the more electoral power poor voters have across countries (and across U.S. states), the higher the level of government social spending.³⁴

CONGRESSIONAL DELIBERATION

The trade-off in having more representatives, of course, is that it changes how representatives work together. In a small assembly, it is easier for representatives to get to know each other and to have deliberative group discussions. But as assembly size increases, the ability of representatives to deliberate together in a single assembly dissipates. Back in the 1910s and 1920s, advocates for capping the size of the House argued that 435 was big enough. Any bigger and it would be difficult to have meaningful deliberation. As noted above, this was an arbitrary number, yet it captured the idea that the ability of a legislature to function properly can be undermined by the legislature’s size.

Anyone who has sat through any organizational decision-making meeting understands that deliberation in large groups is difficult. Large organizations solve this problem through committees and

subgroups. This is also how Congress operates. The House as a whole does not deliberate. Members give speeches, mostly to empty rooms and watchful cameras, with little interest in discussion with each other. Committees and subcommittees hold hearings to debate and develop specific legislative proposals. Party leaders structure voting. The United States passed the point of a single legislative assembly operating as a whole long ago. Whether we like it or not, this is an age of specialization. And in this respect, a larger Congress—possibly paired with changes to deliberative rules and structures—would make deliberations within the committees and subcommittees more robust and representative.

Questions of deliberation are especially important given how much Congress has on its plate. Concerns about congressional efficiency led to the capping of the House at 435, and the issue is only more pressing today. Simply put, Congress has more to do than ever and, as political scientist Kevin Kosar writes, it cannot keep up with its current workload.³⁵ It manages roughly 180 executive agencies. The House hosts hundreds of hearings per year—417 in 2020—and members are so overscheduled that they cannot attend hearings for their own committees.³⁶ Representatives have scarce time even to read all the legislation slated to come up for a vote.³⁷ The 63rd Congress (1913–1915)—the first with 435 seats—managed a budget roughly equivalent to \$19.7 billion in 2021 dollars. The 116th Congress (2018–2020), also with 435 seats, managed a national budget of \$4 *trillion*.³⁸ Even before the budgetary and administrative growth that surely lies in the federal government’s future, at its current size, Congress can barely handle all of its duties.³⁹

There is another, related issue that shapes the question of House enlargement: where are all these new congresspeople going to sit? Anyone who has spent time in the Capitol knows how jam-packed it is and how small congressional offices are. Physical space was one reason Congress opted to keep the House at 435 seats a century ago, and the Capitol has certainly not been significantly expanded since then.

PART II: THE HOUSE AND REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

Whether or not the House is expanded, Congress should consider changing its strategies for deliberation. The COVID-19 pandemic saw the adoption of a variety of new forms of participation, including virtual hearings as well as proxy voting. These rule changes have their critics, to be sure. But their widespread use signals that there is an appetite and an opportunity for Congress to think creatively about how it functions. In this context, concerns about office space may be less pressing, or even moot. Over the long term, Congress may consider building or renting new space near the Capitol to accommodate new members. In the meantime, new members could use makeshift offices outside of the Capitol complex or employ virtual participation tools. The argument that the House should not expand because it does not have enough room has the formulation exactly backward. The nation should not constrain its political institutions because of office space. Instead, we should forge the political institutions we need, and then figure out the logistical considerations.

As for current members of the House, aside from concerns about losing already-scarce office space, many may fear that with every additional seat, their voting power will diminish. Yet, in the modern Congress, individual members have little power as it is. A larger House could offer members more benefits in exchange for a decline in relative power: a closer connection to constituents and perhaps more opportunities for substantial subcommittee work, since subcommittees could become more significant in a larger chamber. These are the trade-offs. But the current size of the House seems to offer the worst of both worlds. The House is not small enough to function as a reasonably deliberative body. Nor is it big enough to allow for a truly effective division of labor in policy-making, or for districts small enough to facilitate meaningful member-constituent connections.

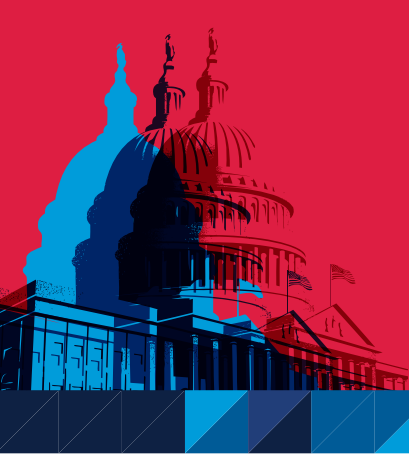
PARTIES AND PARTISANSHIP

The complicator in all of this is nationalized partisanship, and especially hyperpartisan polarization.⁴⁰ The foundational premise of constituent-member relations in the American tradition is

the idea that geographic constituency offers some kind of meaningful unit of representation. However, the nationalization of politics and the metastasizing of the two political parties as distinct “mega-identities” pose a barrier to this vision of representative democracy.⁴¹ If Democrats cannot feel represented by Republicans and vice versa, how should one think about the delegate-trustee distinction? And if representatives simply discount the view of constituencies with whom they disagree (largely for partisan reasons), how does that square with our conception of representatives trying to reflect the views of their entire constituency?⁴²

Should representation instead be thought of through the lens of political parties? After all, the single-member district is relatively rare across advanced democracies. It assumes a direct connection between citizens and their representatives. Though this is mediated by party, it is not the same as voting for a party. However, given that so much of voting is now thoroughly nationalized, and given that so many voters are reliably partisan voters, the ideal of dyadic representation—namely, the connection between members of Congress and their constituents—is increasingly difficult to square with reality.⁴³ As a result, it may be time for a broader rethinking of the single-constituency, single-winner district.





PART III: OUR PROPOSAL FOR HOUSE EXPANSION

As James Madison well knew, there is no perfect House size. However, to help restore the connection between voters and representatives and to address the other challenges of representation outlined above, the nation needs a larger chamber than it has today.

Since the capping of the House in 1929, when seats have been reapportioned, any state’s gain has meant another’s loss. And as states lose seats, their ratio of constituents per representative grows higher and the distance between voters and congresspeople grows accordingly. Under the 2010 apportionment, for example, West Virginia had three congressional seats, each with roughly 620,000 constituents. After losing a seat in the 2020 apportionment, each of the state’s two remaining congresspeople represents 897,000 constituents, a 45 percent increase in the number of people represented by these offices.

It has become increasingly common for states to lose seats and voters to lose representation. In the ten apportionments between 1930 and 2020, there were twice as many instances of a state losing at least one congressional seat as there were in the thirteen apportionments between 1790 and 1910. Over the last ninety years, in 86 percent of cases when a state lost at least one seat, it did so even when its population stayed flat or increased.

In total, 149 seats have shifted between states since 1931. The addition of 149 seats to the House would yield a chamber with 584 seats. Unlike the Senate, the Constitution does not lay out a mechanism for breaking ties in the House. In today’s era of hyperpolarization and party-line votes, the House should be kept at an odd number to prevent the controversy that might surround a split vote. As a result, we recommend the **addition of 150 seats**.

TABLE 3
Number of Reapportioned Seats by Census Year

Census Year	Number of Reapportioned Seats
1930	27
1940	9
1950	14
1960	21
1970	11
1980	17
1990	19
2000	12
2010	12
2020	7
Total	149

The expansion of the House by 150 seats would help restore the representation that has been lost over the last ninety years. To be clear, these seats should not be returned specifically to the states that have lost congressional districts. Instead, the House

PART III: OUR PROPOSAL FOR HOUSE EXPANSION

should be expanded to 585 seats (435 + 149 + 1) and apportioned under the usual method. This increase would result in an average of 566,000 constituents per district, a 26 percent reduction from the current average ratio of 761,000 constituents per district. This is slightly smaller than the average district size that followed the 1993 reapportionment.

The expansion of the House by 150 seats would help restore the representation that has been lost over the last ninety years.

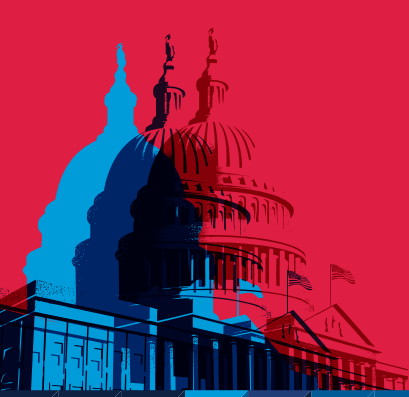
Going forward, the House should continue to expand as the population grows. Specifically, Congress should endeavor to increase by the number of seats necessary to ensure that no state loses a representative, as used to be the norm (while also adding additional seats as needed to ensure that the House has an odd number of total seats). This number is *not* the same as the number of seats that shifted between states. After each state receives its standard apportionment of a single seat, remaining seats would be divvied-up using a population-based formula. All this is to say, the seven states that lost a seat in 2020 would not be the first seven states to gain under House expansion. As a result, the House would need to add more than seven seats to ensure no state lost representation. In 2020, West Virginia was nineteenth in line for another seat, so preserving its third seat would mean the addition of 19 total seats to the House. This expansion also entails new seats for states not slated to lose a representative.⁴⁴

A potential drawback of this proposal is that, over time, the House might expand too quickly, leading to another arbitrary cap. To mitigate this issue, Congress could set a maximum number of seats to be added each cycle (but no fewer than ten, for example). Additionally, Congress could set certain benchmarks that states would have to meet

to preserve their current levels of representation. One guideline could be that if a state loses population over two consecutive cycles, then it could, in fact, lose a seat. For example, West Virginia's population declined between the 2010 and 2020 apportionments. If it declined again between 2020 and 2030, the House would not be obligated to add sufficient seats to ensure West Virginia preserved its delegation size.

Any proposal for expansion will include trade-offs. But Americans, especially those who live in states with growing populations, should not periodically *lose* representation in Washington. Our plan for House expansion represents an enlargement of Congress that would make a significant improvement to the chamber's ability to represent the American people, is politically feasible, and is rooted in the House's tradition as the People's House.





PART IV: ALTERNATIVE PROPOSALS FOR HOUSE ENLARGEMENT

1. Wyoming Rule: Add 139 Seats

The Wyoming Rule calls for increasing the size of the House to bring the average representative-to-constituent ratio as close as possible to that of the least populous state, which is currently Wyoming. Every ten years, the formula would be adjusted based on the population of the least populous state, and the size of the House would be adjusted accordingly. Based on the 2020 census, implementation of the Wyoming Rule would increase the House to 574 seats, leaving every state other than Wyoming, Alaska, North Dakota, and Vermont with at least two representatives. Nationwide, each representative would have an average of 572,000 constituents, helping end representation disparities and bringing Congress closer to the ideal of “one person, one vote.”

A potential problem with the Wyoming Rule is that if the population of the smallest states increased, constituent-to-representative ratios would increase nationwide. Conversely, if the population of the smallest state decreased, the size of the House might increase dramatically. In short, pegging the ratio to a varying denominator would generate instability in House and district size. Under some apportionment years (most recently 1990), enactment of the Wyoming Rule could have resulted in *wider* disparities between states. Implementation of this proposal would need to be combined with other proposals to ensure it fulfills its mission of reducing state representation disparities.

2. Cube Root Law: Add 258 Seats

In many nations, the number of seats in the lower legislative chamber adheres roughly to the cube root of the population. The cube root of a number is a smaller number that, multiplied by itself three times, produces the number. For example, the cube root of 8 is 2, because $2 \times 2 \times 2 = 8$. The cube root of 331,449,281 (the U.S. population according to the 2020 census) is 692.05. Under the Cube Root Law, the U.S. House would have 692 seats.

As explained in greater detail in Part VI ([page 26](#)), the cube root is a fairly strong indicator of the size of lower legislative chambers across global democracies. In fact, the United States has one of the largest gaps between chamber size and the cube root of its population. Implementation of the Cube Root Law would result in an adjustment of the size of the House every ten years based on population.

Detractors point to a few issues with the Cube Root Law, particularly the fact that its initial implementation would add too many seats to the House at once (a critique that would also apply to all of the other proposals outlined below). This could be mitigated by adopting a formula of expansion that would bring the House in line with the cube root of the population gradually. Another concern is district size. Following the one-time addition of seats to bring the House in line with the cube root, future expansions would still result in an increase in average district size over time.⁴⁵ A final concern is one of messaging: because it uses a formula based on mathematical calculation, the Cube Root Law is simply not as easy to market to lawmakers or the American public as some of the other proposals for House expansion.

3. Least Variation: Add between 474 and 579 Seats

The current apportionment method results in disparities between state representative ratios. Rhode Island’s population is only slightly larger than Montana’s but, under the 2010 apportionment, Rhode Island had two seats while Montana had one, meaning Rhode Island representatives had almost half the number of constituents as Montana’s lone congressperson. In *Wesberry v. Sanders* (1963), the Supreme Court ruled that, within states, districts must be roughly equal in population. Could the same standard be applied across states? Based on the 2020 census, the ideal size for least variation would be a House between 909 and 1,014 seats, which would mean each representative averaged between 364,000 and 326,000 constituents.

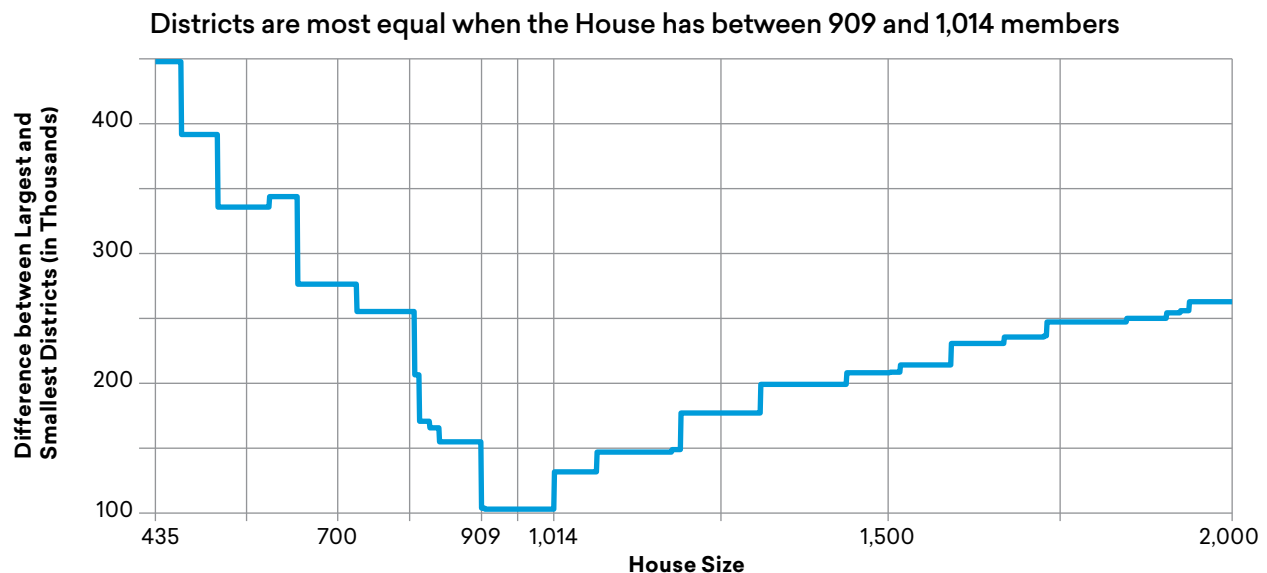
Such an expansion, though, would be too large to sell politically. The appeal of this proposal is to reduce variation as much as possible but, in most circumstances, the Wyoming Rule represents a more feasible solution to expand the House while ensuring relatively even district size.

4. Restore Historical Ratios: Add 1,165/6,065/8,965 Seats

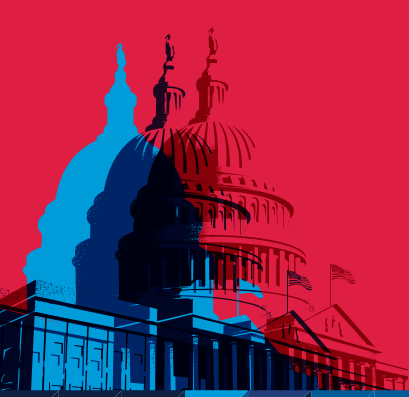
In the 1st Congress, each representative had about 35,000 constituents. Under James Madison’s first proposed amendment to the Constitution, once the House reached 200 members, it would retain a ratio of 50,000 people per representative. In 1913, when the House was expanded to 435, each representative had 211,000 constituents. Restoring any of these formulas would entail a dramatic expansion that would bring the House closer in line with the vision of the nation’s founders. A return to the 1790 ratio would yield a House of roughly 9,400 seats; Madison’s first amendment would yield roughly 6,500 seats; while the 1913 ratio would yield roughly 1,600 seats.

Arguments against these proposals are fairly simple: each would be too dramatic of an expansion to be feasible. While they would restore one founder’s vision of the chamber, an expansion to a House of more than 1,000 seats would need to be undertaken extremely gradually and with a dramatic rethinking of how the chamber functions.

FIGURE 2
Gap between Largest and Smallest Districts by Potential House Size



Source: Author calculations of projected district allocation and size based on 2020 census data using the Huntington-Hill method.



PART V: IMPACT OF HOUSE EXPANSION ON THE PARTISAN CONTROL OF CONGRESS AND THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE

How might adding members to the House affect the partisan balance of Congress? And, as expanding the House gives larger states more Electoral College votes, how could expansion change the partisan slant of presidential elections?

Given the current partisan balance of the states, we can simulate potential outcomes as the size of the House increases. In our modeling, we found very little partisan advantage to either Democrats or Republicans as the size of the House increases.

HOUSE SIZE AND PARTISAN BALANCE

To estimate whether increasing the size of the House would change the likelihood of one party controlling it, we simulated ten thousand elections at each possible House size from 435 to 700 members, with the 2020 election results as a baseline.

For each simulation, we generated two random shocks (variances in the potential outcomes):

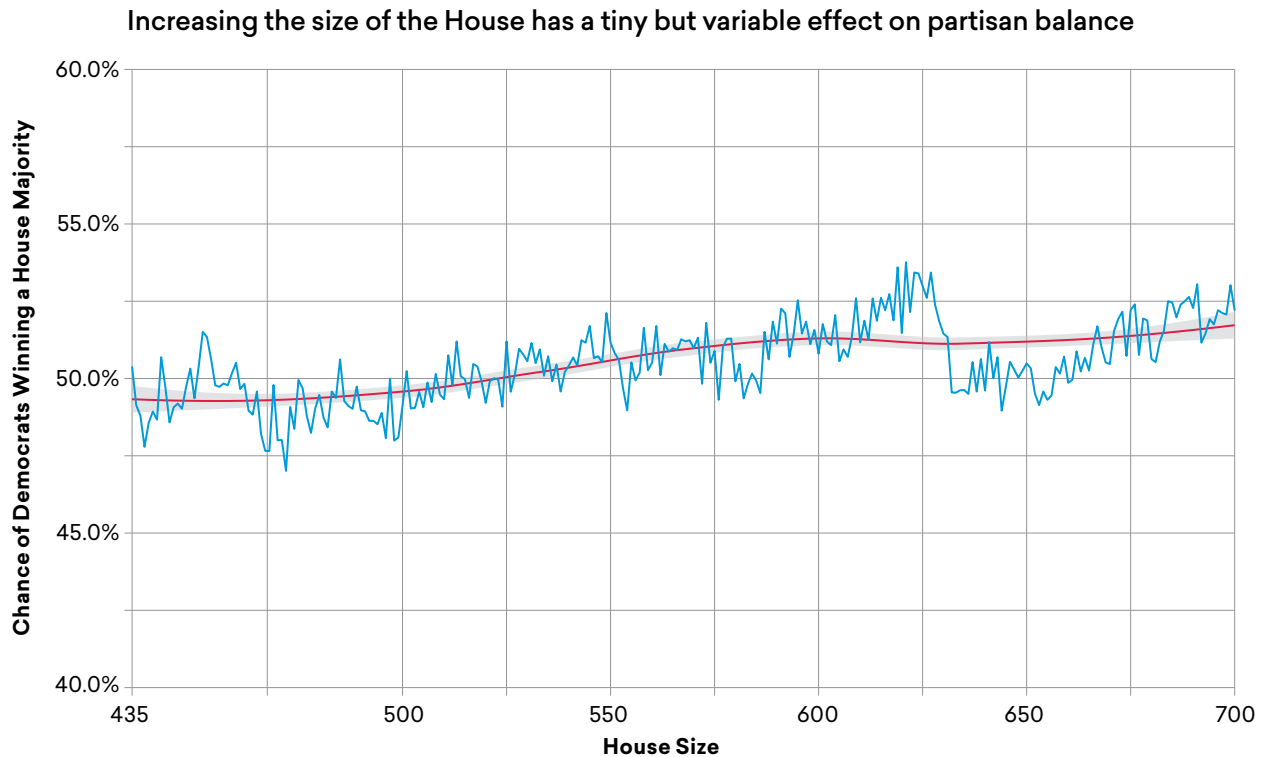
- **VARIATION 1:** A national shock in the two-party vote, with a standard deviation of 3 percentage points. This reflects the possibility that any election could be a “Democratic” or “Republican” year, and the national vote will shift a little in one direction or the other.
- **VARIATION 2:** A state-specific shock, with a standard deviation of 5 percentage points. This reflects the possibility that individual states might swing more strongly in one direction or the other, based on state-level factors including districting and individual candidates and races.

With the combination of shocks, we can estimate a baseline expectation for the share of Democratic votes in the state.⁴⁶

In [Figure 3](#), the blue line indicates the projected partisan control of the House. When the blue line is above 50 percent at the House size noted in the x-axis, the model predicts that Democrats have a greater than 50 percent chance of controlling the House. When the blue line is below 50 percent, the model predicts Republican control. For example, the model predicts that, if the House had exactly 450 seats, Democrats would have a roughly 47.5 percent chance of controlling the House in the 2020 election, while at 700 seats they would have an almost 52.5 percent chance. The red line is a trend line, offering a picture of the overall average.

The model estimates a slight Democratic advantage from a growing House in the 2020 election. An expansion with no partisan impact would remain flat at 50 percent. In our model, though, certain House sizes increase the odds of Democratic control. Generally, if the 2020 election had been held with a House of more than 525 seats, the odds of Democratic control would have increased, though never by more than roughly 2.7 percent. The model does indicate quite a bit of random variation as House size increases. In fact, at many House sizes, especially between 436 and 524 seats, Republicans would benefit by 2 to 3 percentage points. These fluctuations derive from the fact that each incremental increase helps one party, and sometimes multiple sequential increases help one party repeatedly (hence the Republican advantage from a House with roughly 640 seats).

FIGURE 3
House Expansion and Partisan Balance



Source: Author calculations of projected district allocation based on 2020 census data using the Huntington-Hill method; simulations of balance of power based on actual 2020 House election results.

EFFECTS ON THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE

A second uncertainty of increasing the size of the House is the extent to which it would impact the Electoral College. Each state receives one Electoral College vote for each House seat, plus two votes for each senator. Additionally, Washington, D.C., is granted three Electoral College votes, even though it is not a state. Since each state is guaranteed two Senate seats, the design of the Electoral College gives smaller states a slight boost in their relative voting power.

As noted in *Our Common Purpose*, recent demographic trends have shaped the dynamics of the Electoral College in a way that “cast[s] doubt on the legitimacy of presidential elections.”⁴⁷ Specifically, recent trends have increased the likelihood that the winner of the popular vote will not win the presidency. This occurred just twice in the forty-four elections between 1824 and 1996. In the six elections since, it has also happened twice.

The gap between the largest and smallest states has grown tremendously since the nation’s founding, and the overrepresentation of small states in the Electoral College means residents of small states have much more voting power when it comes to picking the president. Increasing the size of the House would give bigger states even more Electoral College votes. While it would not wholly solve the overrepresentation of small states, enlarging the House would help reduce the College’s small-state bias.

But what would the partisan impact be?

As with partisan control of the chamber, we simulated ten thousand elections at each House size from 435 to 700, with seats allocated using the current Huntington-Hill method based on the 2020 election results.

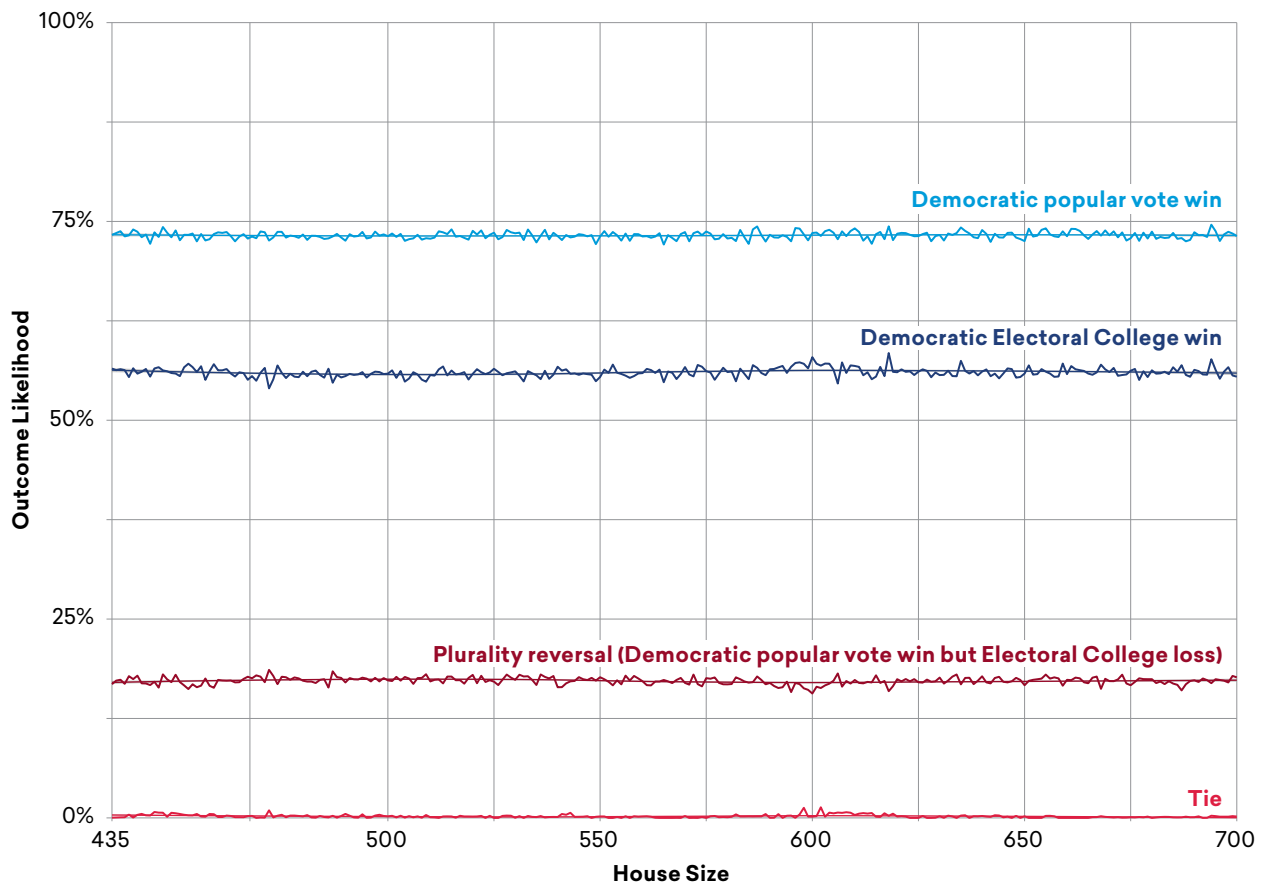
PART V: IMPACT OF HOUSE EXPANSION ON THE PARTISAN CONTROL OF CONGRESS AND THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE

For each simulation, we generated three random shocks:

- **VARIATION 1:** A national swing in the two-party vote share, with a standard deviation of 3 percentage points. This captures the extent to which issues and/or candidates might impact the potential outcomes.
- **VARIATION 2:** A state-specific swing in the two-party vote share, with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of 1 percentage point. This smaller-level state variation reflects the fact that in a nationalized election, like the presidential election, state-by-state performance is highly correlated and unlikely to vary much.
- **VARIATION 3:** A national swing in turnout, with a mean of 8 percentage points. We began with a baseline participation rate at 90 percent of the 2020 turnout, since 2020 turnout was exceptionally high. The reason for varying this turnout is because, when evaluating the impact on the Electoral College, we care about the relationship between the popular vote and the Electoral College vote.

With these parameters, we can see that the partisan advantage is consistent even as the size of the House increases.

FIGURE 4
House Expansion and Partisan Impact on the Electoral College
 Increasing the size of the House has no partisan impact on the Electoral College



Source: Author calculations of projected district allocation based on 2020 census data using the Huntington-Hill method; simulations of Electoral College results based on actual 2020 state election votes for president.

PART V: IMPACT OF HOUSE EXPANSION ON THE PARTISAN CONTROL OF CONGRESS AND THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE

However, if we zoom in closer on the probability of a Democratic Electoral College win, we observe that there are very slight variations at different sizes of the House. But these do not appear to be much of a pattern. They look very much like random noise (Figure 5).

Notably, this simulation predicts that Democrats win the popular vote about 73 percent of the time. Under the current House size, Democrats also win the Electoral College about 56 percent of the time. In all of these cases, Democrats also win the popular vote. In 17 percent of cases, Republicans win the Electoral College and lose the popular vote. In just 27 percent of the simulations did Republicans win both the popular vote and Electoral College. Under the current partisan alignments, there are

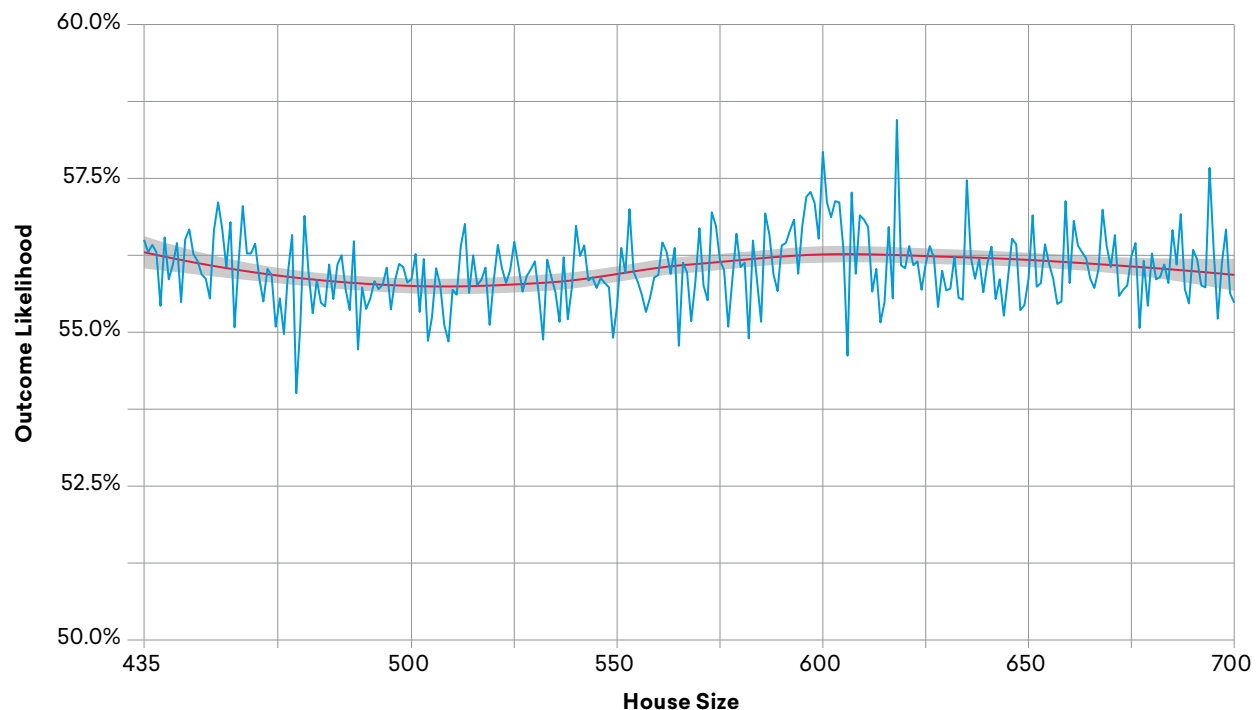
no scenarios, even in ten thousand simulations, in which Democrats win the Electoral College but lose the popular vote. Scholars have long documented a partisan bias in the Electoral College, but that bias shifts from election to election as the partisan affinities of particular states change.⁴⁸

This modeling is based only on simulations of the 2020 election. To provide a deeper look at the effects of House expansion on the Electoral College, Table 4 shows the outcomes of each of the last twelve presidential elections with a House of 585 seats.

Other than the highly contentious 2000 election, increasing the House size to 585 would not have changed the outcome of any of the last twelve presidential elections.

FIGURE 5
Impact of House Expansion on Likelihood of 2020 Democratic Electoral College Win

Increasing the size of the House has no partisan impact on the Electoral College



Source: Author calculations of projected district allocation based on 2020 census data using the Huntington-Hill method; simulations of Electoral College results based on actual 2020 state election votes for president.

PART V: IMPACT OF HOUSE EXPANSION ON THE PARTISAN CONTROL OF CONGRESS AND THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE

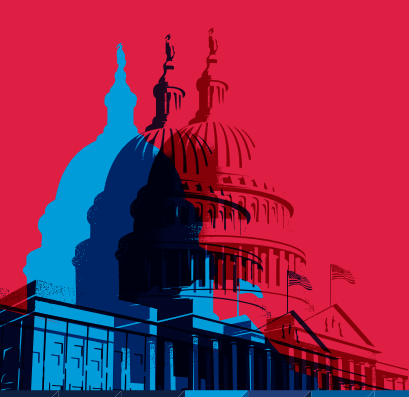
CAVEATS

The predictions that emerge from the above simulations are based on the 2020 election. Since it is hard to predict future shifts in partisan balance, these results are time-bound. By allowing parameters to vary, these models are meant to incorporate a wide range of possible scenarios. Because we do not know which one is most likely, the average provides the best estimate. Generating ten thousand simulations at each House size produces

many extreme scenarios. Absent a crystal ball, the strong conclusion at this juncture is that *changing the size of the House would not generate a strong partisan shift in either control of the House or the outcome of the Electoral College*. Certainly, different geographical configurations of partisan balance could have different effects. At this moment, however, no particular configuration is any more likely than any other.

TABLE 4
Presidential Election Outcomes with a 585-Seat House

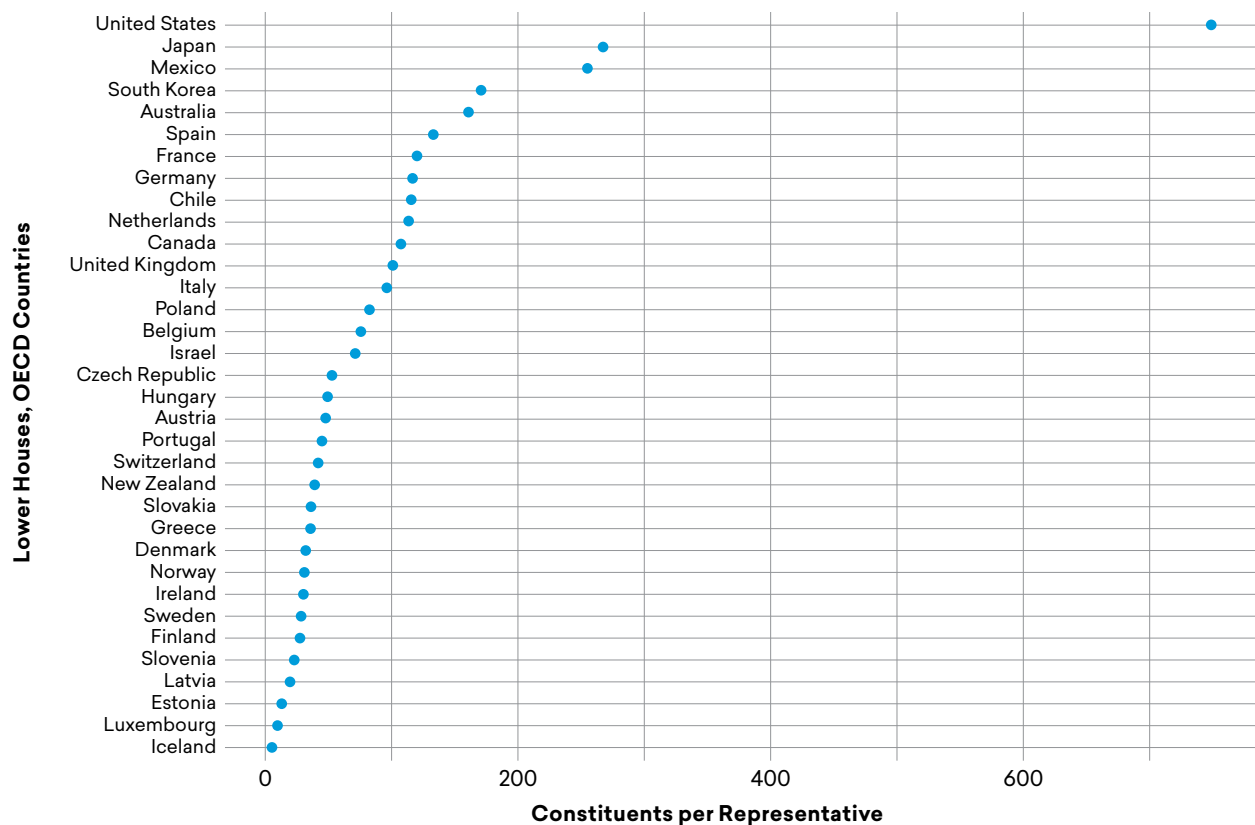
Year	Republican Electoral Votes: 435-Seat House	Democratic Electoral Votes: 435-Seat House	Republican Electoral Votes: 585-Seat House	Democratic Electoral Votes: 585-Seat House	Actual Winner	Winner with 585-Seat House
1976	240	297	304	384	Jimmy Carter	Jimmy Carter
1980	489	49	573	115	Ronald Reagan	Ronald Reagan
1984	525	13	672	16	Ronald Reagan	Ronald Reagan
1988	426	111	546	142	George H. W. Bush	George H. W. Bush
1992	168	370	212	476	Bill Clinton	Bill Clinton
1996	159	379	200	488	Bill Clinton	Bill Clinton
2000	271	266	344	344	George W. Bush	Tie
2004	286	251	364	324	George W. Bush	George W. Bush
2008	173	365	221	467	Barack Obama	Barack Obama
2012	206	332	259	429	Barack Obama	Barack Obama
2016	304	227	389	299	Donald Trump	Donald Trump
2020	232	306	295	393	Joe Biden	Joe Biden



PART VI: INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

When it comes to House size, the United States is an outlier, with a ratio of 762,000 constituents per representative. In the United Kingdom (population sixty-six million), the House of Commons has 650 members, one for every 101,000 Brits. Germany's Bundestag has 709 members, one for every 116,000 Germans. Among member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the country with the next-largest average district size is Japan, with roughly 270,000 citizens per representative.

FIGURE 6
Constituents per Representative in OECD Countries



Source: Data from the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, <https://aceproject.org/>.

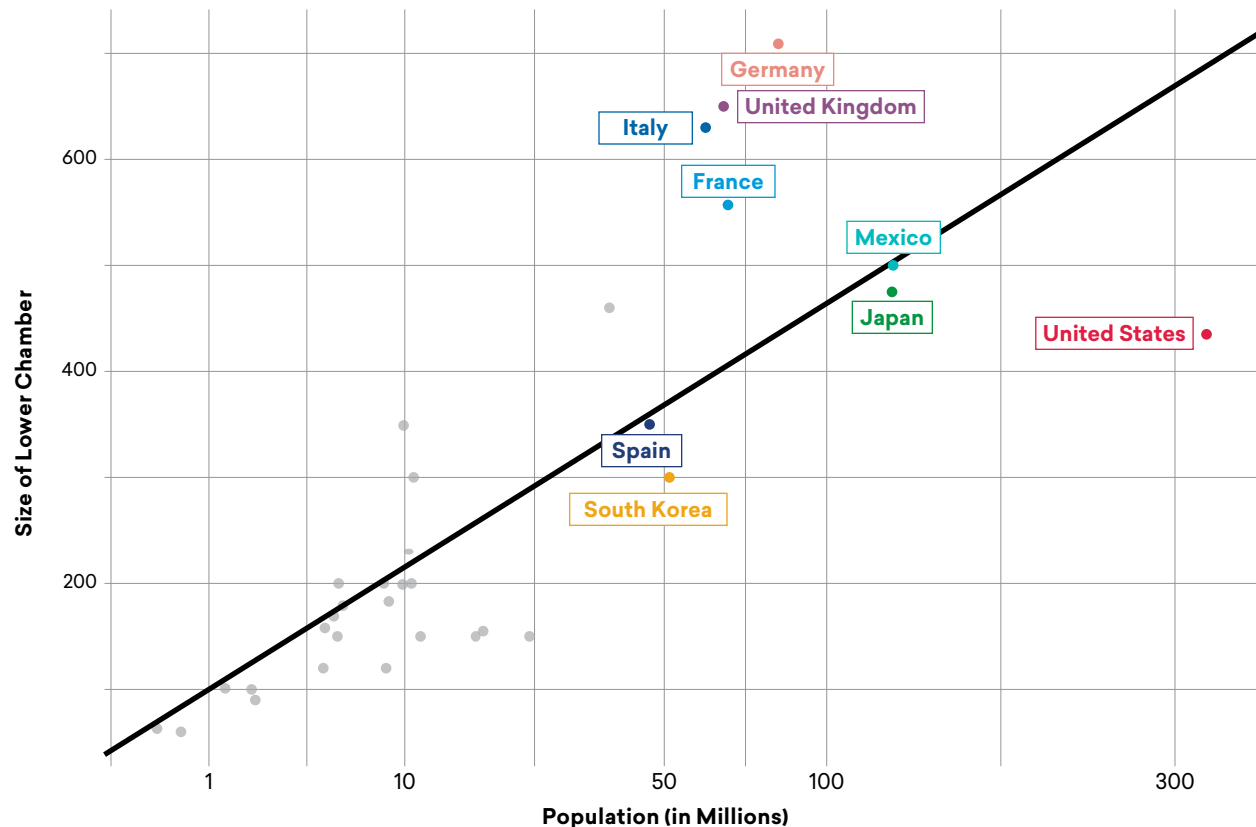
Certainly, the United States has a larger population than any other OECD country. And the more populous countries tend to have larger constituent-to-representative ratios. This is the cube root ratio discussed above. Remarkably, almost every other OECD country maps closely to its cube root prediction. The United States is again the outlier in having far fewer representatives than the cube root would suggest (692 House seats). Germany, by contrast, has *more* representatives than the cube root of its population.

In Figure 7, the black line represents a perfect one-to-one ratio between the cube root of a population and lower-legislative chamber size.

Over time, democracies change the size of their lower houses, often in response to changing populations, though other considerations also drive change.⁴⁹ Compare the United States with five other major Western democracies (Figure 8), all of which have changed the size of their lower legislative bodies over the last sixty years. While the United States is by far the most populous, it barely has more representatives than Canada, even though the United States has more than nine times as many residents (notably, the size of Canada’s House of Commons remains close to the cube root of the country’s population).

FIGURE 7
Cube Root Prediction and Lower-Legislative Chamber Size

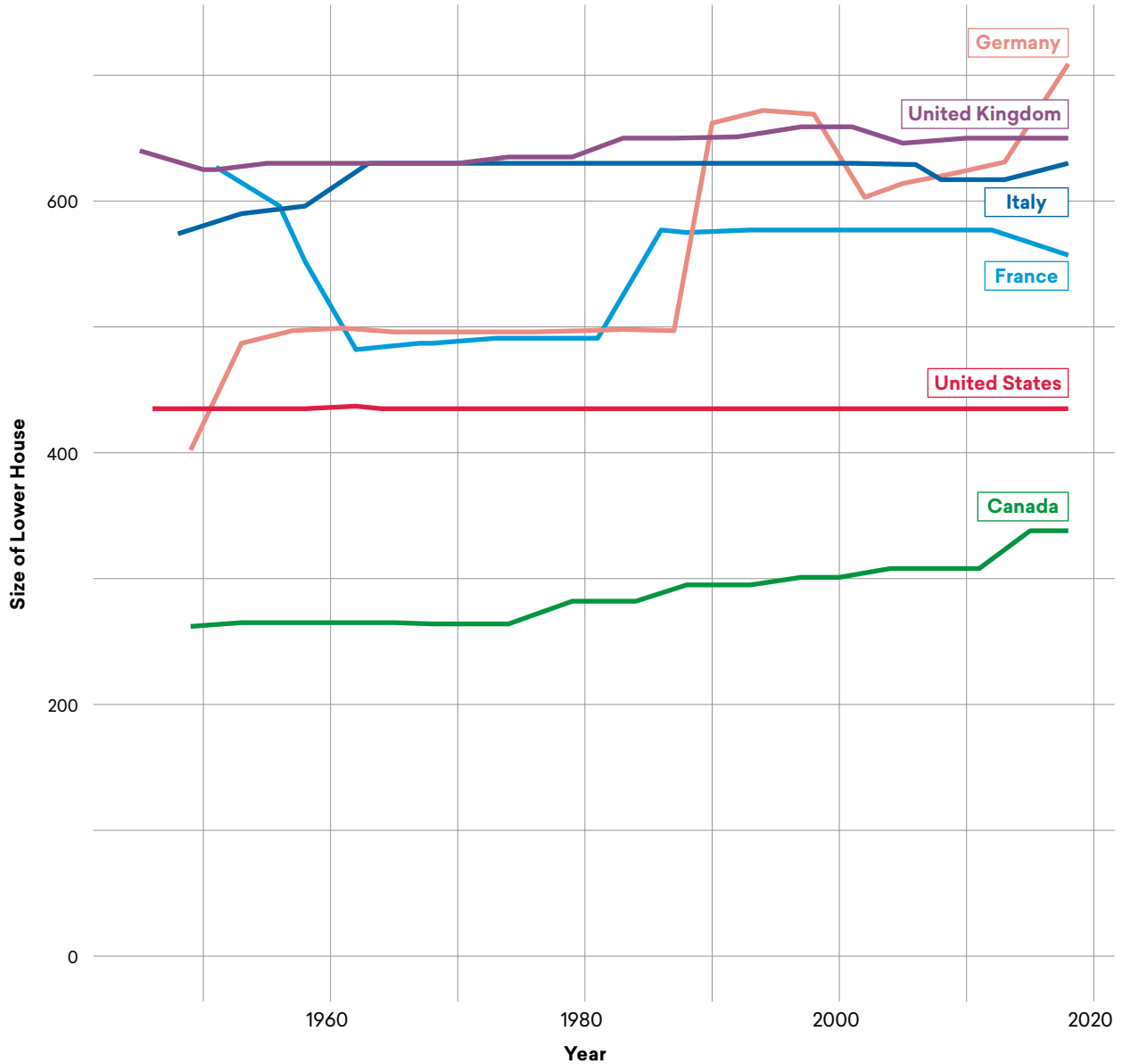
The black line represents predicted chamber size based on the Cube Root Law; the United States has a very small lower house for such a populous nation



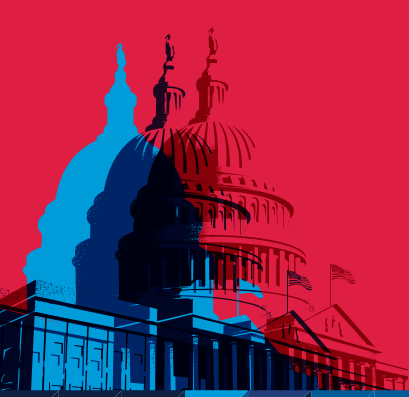
Note: X-axis is scaled by the cube root of the population. **Source:** Data from the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, <https://aceproject.org/>.

FIGURE 8
Size of Lower Houses in Populous Western Democracies

The United States is the only Western democracy that does not regularly adjust the size of its lower legislative chamber



Source: Data from Cory Struthers, Yuhui Li, and Matthew Shugart, “National and District Level Party Systems Datasets,” Harvard Dataverse, V2 (2018), <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/ME2W6U>.



PART VII: OTHER REFORMS TO PAIR WITH ENLARGING THE HOUSE

Our *Common Purpose* offers other recommendations to ensure that a newly expanded Congress brings representatives closer to the American people and gives voters a stronger say in congressional elections.⁵⁰

Recommendation 1.2:
Introduce ranked-choice voting in presidential, congressional, and state elections.

Ranked-choice voting means more choices for voters, and with more choices, voters will need to evaluate more candidates. Smaller districts would make it easier for voters to evaluate a larger range of candidates directly, since candidates will have fewer voters they need to connect with. This means that voters could more effectively rank candidates. In larger districts, where voters may have a harder time directly evaluating candidates, they will be more likely to fall back on partisan cues and advertising.

Recommendation 1.3:
Allow states to use multi-member districts on the condition that they adopt a non-winner-take-all election model.

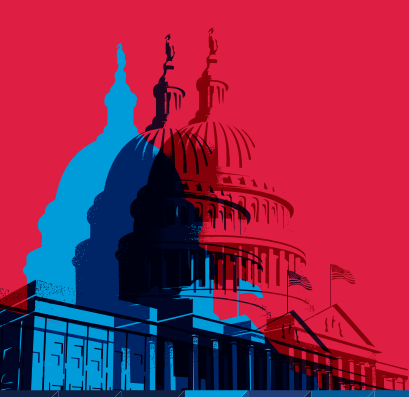
With multi-member districts, two or more House districts would be combined into a new, larger district, which would send multiple representatives to Washington. When paired with a proportional voting rule, multi-member districts would prevent the drowning out of minority votes (both demographic and ideological minorities) and signal a victory for equal voice and representation.

Recommendation 1.4:
Support adoption, through state legislation, of independent citizen-redistricting commissions in all fifty states.

Independent redistricting commissions are designed to ensure fairness in the drawing of congressional districts. Districting involves balancing myriad values, including partisan fairness, compactness, competitiveness, keeping communities of interest together, and fair representation for racial minorities. The more districts in a given state, the more potential plans an independent redistricting commission can draw up and compare. The more potential plans, the more likely such a commission can find a plan that balances these competing values.

Recommendation 1.7:
Pass “clean election laws” for federal, state, and local elections through mechanisms such as public matching donation systems and democracy vouchers, which amplify the power of small donors.

A public matching and voucher system of small donor empowerment depends on voters being engaged and being able to evaluate candidates. The smaller the district, the more likely voters will be able to assess the qualities of their representatives directly, and thus the more likely they will be motivated to make small donor contributions and use their vouchers wisely.



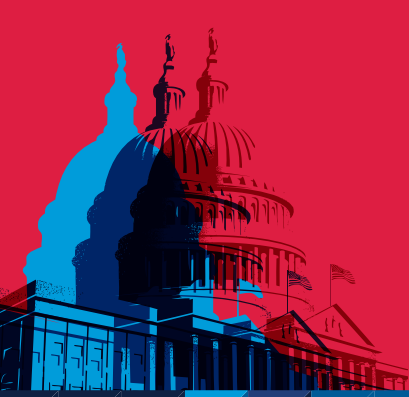
CONCLUSION

In this report, we have presented the case for expanding the House of Representatives. The chamber's lack of growth over the last ninety years has had serious and harmful consequences for both representatives and the voting public. As districts have tripled in constituency size, the House has remained locked at 435. One result has been that the connection between constituents and their congresspeople has attenuated, leading to worse representation and bolstering the feeling among voters that their voice does not matter.

Further, some citizens periodically lose representation in Washington, even when their state grows in population. Every apportionment means reconstituting House districts and increasing distances between constituents and their representatives in the People's House.

Our modeling shows that the expansion of the House need not be a partisan enterprise. Neither party would stand to gain significantly from expansion. The biggest beneficiaries would be the American people, who would benefit from improved representation, as well as the representatives themselves, who would be able to share some of their already massive workload with their new colleagues.

When policy-makers, scholars, and activists think about how American democratic institutions might be reformed, the size of the House has long been overlooked. We hope this report helps correct this oversight. Expanding the House would be a small but consequential step in improving the quality of American representative democracy and in reinventing our political institutions for the twenty-first century.



ENDNOTES

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be expected to be smoother as fewer people will have to be heard in the political discussion and fewer people will have to compromise before an agreement can be reached. This, however, has to be weighed against the reduction in the number of voices allowed to be heard in the assembly if only a small number of seats are decided on. A reduction in the number of seats raises the natural electoral threshold, which will hurt small factions of interest. So the smaller the legislature, the more efficiently it should conduct its affairs; the larger the legislature, the more representative it will presumably be.” Robert Alan Dahl and Edward R. Tufte, *Size and Democracy*, 1st ed. (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1973). See also Rein Taagepera, “The Size of National Assemblies,” *Social Science Research* 1 (4) (1972): 385–401, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0049-089X\(72\)90084-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/0049-089X(72)90084-1).

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46. Because U.S. states use single-member districts instead of proportional representation, the translation of votes to seats is distorted. Typically, this distortion follows an S-curve in a two-party system. The S-curve translates Biden’s performance in the state into an expected share of Democratic votes. We use Biden’s performance rather than individual members’ vote shares to take away any personal effects of individual candidates or races, and rather get as close as we can to a generic Democratic vote.

Though the S-curve does not generate a perfect translation from Biden's share of the state's two-party vote, it generates a good-enough prediction, one that is consistent with the broader literature on the translation of votes into seats in single-winner districts. Since the deviations are in both directions, any additional attempts to generate a better fit would likely be a consequence of over-fitting, and thus undermine the predictive capacity.

Taking the S-curve transformation of the predicted state-level Democratic presidential vote share gives us a predicted balance of Democratic and Republican congressional seats in a given state. Adding up across all states gives us a prediction for the share of Democratic and Republican seats in the entire Congress. Running ten thousand simulations for each size of the House makes us confident that our predictions are robust.

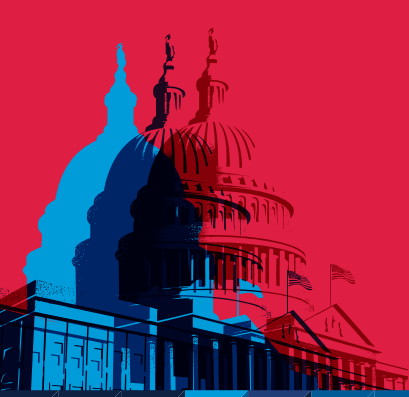
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48. What this analysis suggests is that the current bias in the Electoral College is not due to Republican advantages in small states, since increasing the size of the House does not alter that bias. Rather, the bias is a function of Republicans having a slight advantage in the pivotal states, and Democrats over-concentrating their votes in a few large solidly Democratic states. Put another way, Republican votes are more efficiently distributed right now. Obviously, this could change, as it has numerous times in the course of U.S. history. Electoral College reversals have occurred only in periods in which two-party competition is very close at a national level (1876, 1888, 2000, and 2016). See Robert S. Erikson, Karl Sigman, and Linan Yao, "Electoral College Bias and the 2020 Presidential Election," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117 (45) (2020): 27940–27944; Phillip J. Ardoin and Bryan M. Parsons, "Partisan Bias in the Electoral College: Cheap States and Wasted Votes," *Politics & Policy* 35 (2) (2007): 342–364; and Andrew Gelman, Jonathan N. Katz, and Gary King, "Empirically Evaluating the Electoral College," in *Rethinking the Vote: The Politics and Prospects of American Electoral Reform*, ed. by Ann N. Crigler, Marion R. Just, and Edward J. McCaffery (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 75–88.

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It may not have taken 435 people, but much like the bills that come before the House of Representatives, this report benefited from deliberation, compromise, consultations with experts, and a dedicated staff whose names are not featured on the cover.

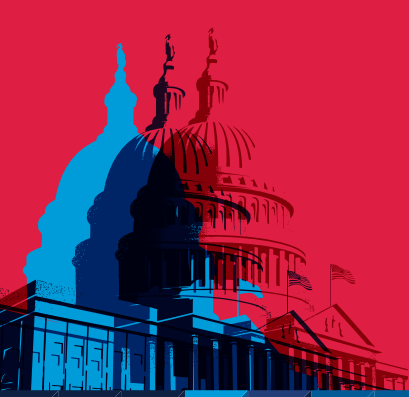
We appreciate the help of a wide variety of thought partners who we met with to discuss the issue of House enlargement, many of whom also provided their feedback on drafts of the report: Kim Alexander, Dan Bouk, danah boyd, Kathryn Piper Crespin, Carlos Curbelo, Moon Duchin, Landon Glover, Kevin Kosar, John Lawrence, Laura Maristany, Ruth Bloch Rubin, and Matthew Shugart.

Thank you, as well, to the members of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences' Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship, particularly cochairs Danielle Allen, Stephen Heintz, and Eric Liu, for their work on the *Our Common Purpose* report, their guidance, and their continuing efforts to implement all thirty-one recommendations, including the recommendation to enlarge the House.

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APPENDIX

Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century

Our *Common Purpose* is the final report of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences’ Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship. Members of this bipartisan Commission are drawn from academia, civil society, politics, and business, and they hosted nearly fifty listening sessions around the country to develop recommendations to strengthen American democracy.

The report presents a sweeping and comprehensive proposal for reforms to how our country is governed. It offers thirty-one achievable recommendations aimed at political institutions, civil society, and civic culture. The Commission issued the report in the firm belief that significant change is not only necessary, but also possible, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences is working to advance the recommendations to help reinvent American democracy for the twenty-first century.



OUR COMMON PURPOSE RECOMMENDATIONS

STRATEGY 1: **Achieve Equality of Voice and Representation**

- 1.1** Enlarge the House of Representatives.
- 1.2** Introduce ranked-choice voting in presidential, congressional, and state elections.
- 1.3** Give states the option to use multi-member districts.
- 1.4** Require independent citizen-redistricting commissions.
- 1.5** Amend the Constitution to authorize the regulation of election contributions.
- 1.6** Pass strong campaign-finance disclosure laws.
- 1.7** Pass “clean election laws.”
- 1.8** Establish eighteen-year terms for Supreme Court justices.

STRATEGY 2: Empower Voters

- 2.1** [Make it easier to vote.](#)
- 2.2** [Change federal election day to Veterans Day.](#)
- 2.3** [Establish same-day registration and universal automatic voter registration.](#)
- 2.4** [Enable voting preregistration for sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds.](#)
- 2.5** [Establish that voting in federal elections be a requirement of citizenship.](#)
- 2.6** [Establish paid voter orientation.](#)
- 2.7** [Restore voting rights to citizens with felony convictions.](#)

STRATEGY 3: Ensure the Responsiveness of Government Institutions

- 3.1** [Make public meetings more accessible.](#)
- 3.2** [Design mechanisms for members of Congress to interact with their constituents.](#)
- 3.3** [Promote experimentation with citizens' assemblies.](#)
- 3.4** [Increase participatory governance.](#)

STRATEGY 4: Dramatically Expand Civic Bridging Capacity

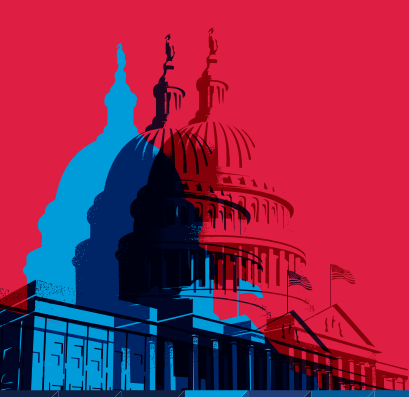
- 4.1** [Establish a National Trust for Civic Infrastructure.](#)
- 4.2** [Support civic leaders.](#)

STRATEGY 5: Build Civic Information Architecture that Supports Common Purpose

- 5.1** [Assess social media's civic value.](#)
- 5.2** [Reinvent the public functions that social media have displaced.](#)
- 5.3** [Establish a public-interest mandate for for-profit social media platforms.](#)
- 5.4** [Require of digital platform companies: interoperability, data portability, and data openness.](#)
- 5.5** [Improve data on democratic engagement.](#)

STRATEGY 6: Inspire a Culture of Commitment to American Constitutional Democracy and One Another

- 6.1** [Establish a universal expectation of a year of national service.](#)
- 6.2** [Engage communities in conversations about the complex American story.](#)
- 6.3** [Develop civic faith.](#)
- 6.4** [Promote our common purpose.](#)
- 6.5** [Invest in civic educators and civic education.](#)



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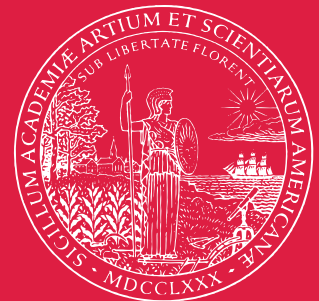
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