

# Faith on the Hill: The Religious Affiliations of Members of Congress

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Dec. 19, 2008

Members of Congress are often accused of being out of touch with average citizens, but an examination of the religious affiliations of U.S. senators and representatives shows that, on one very basic level, Congress looks much like the rest of the country. Although a majority of the members of the new, 111th Congress, which will be sworn in on Jan. 6, are Protestants, Congress - like the nation as a whole - is much more religiously diverse than it was 50 years ago. Indeed, a comparison of the religious affiliations of the new Congress with religious demographic information from the Pew Forum's recent [U.S. Religious Landscape Survey](#) of over 35,000 American adults finds that some smaller religious groups, notably Catholics, Jews and Mormons, are better represented in Congress than they are in the population as a whole. However, certain other smaller religious groups, including Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus, still are somewhat underrepresented in Congress relative to their share of the U.S. population.

The study finds that there is at least one major difference between Congress and the nation as a whole: Members of Congress are much more likely than the public overall to say they are affiliated with a particular religion. Only five members of the new Congress (about 1%) did not specify a religious affiliation, according to information gathered by Congressional Quarterly and the Pew Forum, and no members specifically said they were unaffiliated. By contrast, the Landscape Survey found that individuals who are not affiliated with a particular faith make up about one-sixth (16.1%) of the adult population, making this one of the largest "religious" groups in the U.S.

## The New, 111th Congress

Collectively, Protestants account for more than half (54.7%) of the 111th Congress, about the same proportion as their share of the U.S. adult population (51.3%). But American Protestantism is very diverse and encompasses more than a dozen major denominational families, such as Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians, all with unique beliefs, practices and histories. When these Protestant denominational families are considered as separate religious groups, Catholics are the single largest religious group in the 111th Congress. Catholics, who account for nearly one-quarter of the U.S. adult population, make up about 30% of Congress. Indeed, the number of Catholics in Congress is two-and-a-half times the size of the next largest religious group, Baptists, who make up about 12% of the members.

Although Baptists are the second-largest religious group in Congress after Catholics, the group's share of Congress (12.4%) is less than its share of the national population (17.2%). Indeed, the number of Baptists on Capitol Hill is about the same as the number of Methodists in Congress (10.7%), though Methodists make up a much smaller portion of the American population overall (6.2%). Like Methodists, other Protestant groups also are overrepresented in Congress in relation to their numbers in the general population. For instance, while only 1.5% of American adults identify themselves as Episcopalians, 7.1% of Congress claims this affiliation. In addition, 8.1% of the congressional membership is Presbyterian, far outstripping the 2.7% of American adults who say they are Presbyterians.

Among the nation's smaller religious groups, one group stands out in terms of its numbers in Congress: Jews, who account for just 1.7% of the U.S. adult population, make up 8.4% of Congress, including just over 13% of the Senate.

Another small religious group, Mormons, is about as well-represented on Capitol Hill as it is in the overall population; while members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and other Mormons make up 1.7% of the nation's adult population, they represent 2.6% of Congress.

Among other notable smaller religious groups in the 111th Congress are two Muslim members, both seated for the first time in the 110th Congress. Keith Ellison (D-Minn.) was seated in 2007 and is the first Muslim ever to serve in Congress. Ellison, who is black and a convert to Islam, caused a minor media sensation when he declared that he would take the oath of office on the Koran rather than the Bible. In 2008, Ellison was joined by another African-American Muslim, André Carson (D-Ind.), who won a special election in March of that year. Muslims, who account for approximately 0.6% of the U.S. adult population, make up 0.4% of Congress.

The 110th Congress also saw the arrival of the first Buddhists, Reps. Hank Johnson (D-Ga.) and Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii), who are both also members of the 111th Congress. Johnson is a practicing Buddhist who converted to the religion as a young adult, while Hirono, who was born in Japan, calls herself a non-practicing Buddhist. Buddhists make up 0.4% of Congress and 0.7% of the U.S. adult population.

## How the 111th Congress (2009-2010) Compares With the American Public

	Number in Congress	% Congress	% American adults
Protestant	292	54.7%	51.3%
Baptist	66	12.4%	17.2%
Methodist*	57	10.7%	6.2%
Presbyterian	43	8.1%	2.7%
Anglican/Episcopal	38	7.1%	1.5%
Lutheran	24	4.5%	4.6%
Congregationalist*	6	1.1%	0.8%
Nondenominational Prot.	5	0.9%	4.5%
Restorationist*	4	0.7%	2.1%
Adventist*	2	0.4%	0.5%
Pentecostal*	2	0.4%	4.4%
Reformed	2	0.4%	0.3%
Friends/Quakers	1	0.2%	<0.3%
Holiness	2	0.4%	1.2%
Anabaptist	0	0%	<0.3%
Pietist	1	0.2%	<0.3%
Protestant - unspecified*	39	7.3%	5.2%
Catholic	161	30.1%	23.9%
Jewish	45	8.4%	1.7%
Mormon	14	2.6%	1.7%
Orthodox	7	1.3%	0.6%
Other Christian*	3	0.6%	0.3%
Other Faiths*	3	0.6%	1.2%
Buddhist	2	0.4%	0.7%
Muslim	2	0.4%	0.6%
Jehovah's Witness	0	0%	0.7%
Hindu	0	0%	0.4%
Other World Religions	0	0%	<0.3%
Unaffiliated	0	0%	16.1%
Unspecified/Don't Know/Ref.	5	0.9%	0.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>534</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Data for Congress from Congressional Quarterly; data for American adults from the Pew Forum's U.S. Religious Landscape Survey

Due to rounding, figures throughout the report may not add to 100 and nested figures may not add to the subtotal indicated.

This report reflects congressional seats for the 111th Congress as of Dec. 19, 2008. The analysis excludes the Senate seat vacated by President-elect Barack Obama, for which a replacement had not been named as of Dec. 19, 2008. It includes the undecided Minnesota race, in which both candidates are Jewish.

\*The "Methodist" category also includes members of Congress who identified themselves as African Methodist Episcopal and United Methodist; the "Congregationalist" category also includes those who identified themselves as United Church of Christ; the "Restorationist" category also includes those who identified themselves as Church of Christ and Disciples of Christ; the "Adventist" category also includes those who identified themselves as Seventh-day Adventist; the "Pentecostal" category also includes those who identified themselves as Assemblies of God. For Congress, the "Other Christian" category includes only Christian Scientists, who make up <0.3% of the overall adult population. For all adults, "Other Christian" also includes metaphysical Christians. For Congress, the "Other Faiths" category includes only Unitarians, who make up 0.3% of the overall adult population. For all adults, "Other Faiths" also includes other liberal faiths, people who are "spiritual but not religious," New Age groups and Native American religions. For both Congress and overall population, those who identified themselves as "Christian" are included in the "Protestant - unspecified" category.

## Few Differences Exist Between Chambers, More Variation Between Political Parties

Both houses of Congress have similar shares of various religious groups. For example, nearly the same percentage of the House (54.9%) and Senate (53.5%) are Protestants. The same is true for Catholics, who account for a similar percentage of House members (31%) and Senate members (26.3%).

	House		Senate		% American adults
	Number	%	Number	%	
Protestant	239	54.9%	53	53.5%	51.3%
Baptist	58	13.3%	8	8.1%	17.2%
Methodist	47	10.8%	10	10.1%	6.2%
Presbyterian	31	7.1%	12	12.1%	2.7%
Anglican/Episcopal	32	7.4%	6	6.1%	1.5%
Lutheran	20	4.6%	4	4.0%	4.6%
Congregationalist	2	0.5%	4	4.0%	0.8%
Nondenominational Prot.	5	1.1%	0	0%	4.5%
Restorationist	3	0.7%	1	1.0%	2.1%
Adventist	2	0.5%	0	0%	0.5%
Pentecostal	2	0.5%	0	0%	4.4%
Reformed	2	0.5%	0	0%	0.3%
Friends/Quakers	1	0.2%	0	0%	<0.3%
Holiness	1	0.2%	1	1.0%	1.2%
Anabaptist	0	0%	0	0%	<0.3%
Pietist	1	0.2%	0	0%	<0.3%
Prot. - unspecified	32	7.4%	7	7.1%	5.2%
Catholic	135	31.0%	26	26.3%	23.9%
Jewish	32	7.4%	13	13.1%	1.7%
Mormon	9	2.1%	5	5.1%	1.7%
Orthodox	6	1.4%	1	1.0%	0.6%
Other Christian	3	0.7%	0	0%	0.3%
Other Faiths	2	0.5%	1	1.0%	1.2%
Buddhist	2	0.5%	0	0%	0.7%
Muslim	2	0.5%	0	0%	0.6%
Jehovah's Witness	0	0%	0	0%	0.7%
Hindu	0	0%	0	0%	0.4%
Other World Religions	0	0%	0	0%	<0.3%
Unaffiliated	0	0%	0	0%	16.1%
Unspecified/Don't Know/Ref	5	1.1%	0	0%	0.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>435</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Data for Congress from Congressional Quarterly; data for American adults from the Pew Forum's U.S. Religious Landscape Survey

A few religious groups have lopsided representation in one body or the other. For example, Jews make up 13% of the new Senate but 7.4% of the House. Likewise, Mormons make up 5% of the Senate and 2.1% of the House. Baptists, on the other hand, are more numerous in the House (13.3%) than in the Senate (8%).

Differences become much more pronounced at the party level. While 70.8% of congressional Republicans are Protestant, fewer than half of Democrats (43.6%) belong to Protestant denominational families. On the

other hand, the share of Democratic members who are Catholic (36.6%) is much greater than the number of Catholic GOP members (21%). And while Jews make up 13.4% of all congressional Democrats (including two independents who tend to caucus with the Democrats), they account for just 0.9% of congressional Republicans, with one Jewish Republican in the House and one in the Senate.

	<b>Democrats</b>			<b>Republicans</b>			<b>% American adults</b>
	<b>House number</b>	<b>Senate number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>House number</b>	<b>Senate number</b>	<b>%</b>	
Protestant	111	26	43.6%	128	27	70.8%	51.3%
Baptist	29	1	9.6%	29	7	16.4%	17.2%
Methodist	26	5	9.9%	21	5	11.9%	6.2%
Presbyterian	15	4	6.1%	16	8	11.0%	2.7%
Anglican/Episcopal	13	4	5.4%	19	2	9.6%	1.5%
Lutheran	11	4	4.8%	9	0	4.1%	4.6%
Congregationalist	0	3	1.0%	2	1	1.4%	0.8%
Nondenominational Prot.	2	0	0.6%	3	0	1.4%	4.5%
Restorationist	2	0	0.6%	1	1	0.9%	2.1%
Adventist	1	0	0.3%	1	0	0.5%	0.5%
Pentecostal	0	0	0%	2	0	0.9%	4.4%
Reformed	0	0	0%	2	0	0.9%	0.3%
Friends/Quakers	1	0	0.3%	0	0	0%	<0.3%
Holiness	0	1	0.3%	1	0	0.5%	1.2%
Anabaptist	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	<0.3%
Pietist	0	0	0%	1	0	0.5%	<0.3%
Prot. - unspecified	11	4	4.8%	21	3	11.0%	5.2%
Catholic	98	17	36.6%	37	9	21.0%	23.9%
Jewish	31	11*	13.4%	1	1	0.9%	1.7%
Mormon	2	2	1.3%	7	3	4.6%	1.7%
Orthodox	4	0	1.3%	2	1	1.4%	0.6%
Other Christian	0	0	0%	3	0	1.4%	0.3%
Other Faiths	2	1	1.0%	0	0	0%	1.2%
Buddhist	2	0	0.6%	0	0	0%	0.7%
Muslim	2	0	0.6%	0	0	0%	0.6%
Jehovah's Witness	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	0.7%
Hindu	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	0.4%
Other World Religions	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	<0.3%
Unaffiliated	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	16.1%
Unspecified/Don't Know/Ref.	5	0	1.6%	0	0	0%	0.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Data for Congress from Congressional Quarterly; data for American adults from the Pew Forum's U.S. Religious Landscape Survey

\*Number for Jewish, Democratic senators includes two independents who tend to caucus with the Democrats.

Note: This chart includes one fewer Jewish senator than the other charts in this report. Both candidates for the disputed Senate seat in Minnesota are Jewish, so the seat cannot be attributed to either party.

## A Look Back

In many ways, the changes in the religious makeup of Congress during the last half-century mirror broader changes in American society. Congress, like the nation as a whole, has become much less Protestant and more religiously diverse. Indeed, the total percentage of Protestants in Congress has dropped from 74.1% in

1961 to 54.7% today, which roughly tracks with broader religious demographic trends during this period. As recently as the early 1980s, nearly two-thirds of Americans identified themselves as Protestants. In the recent Landscape Survey, the number of self-identified Protestants dropped to 51.3%.

Not surprisingly, many of the major Protestant denominational families have lost ground in Congress in the past 50 years. Methodists, who made up nearly one-in-five members (18.2%) of the 87th Congress, which was seated in 1961, make up only 10.7% of the 111th Congress. The share of Presbyterians and Episcopalians also has dropped significantly during this period, from 13.7% and 12.4%, respectively, to 8.1% and 7.1% in the new Congress. Finally, Congregationalists have dropped from 5.1% to 1.1% during this period.

A few Protestant groups have fared somewhat better, however. From 1961 to today, the number of Baptists in Congress has remained roughly the same, at around 12%, as has the Lutheran share (around 4%).

Meanwhile, other religious groups have seen their share of congressional seats grow, in some cases quite dramatically. Catholics, for instance, have gone from 18.8% of the congressional membership in 1961 to 30.1% today. Furthermore, the percentage of Jewish members of Congress has gone from 2.3% in 1961 to 8.4% today.

The first Jewish member of Congress did not arrive until 1845, when Lewis Charles Levin of the American Party began representing Pennsylvania in the House. The first Mormon member of Congress, John Milton Bernhisel, began serving in Congress in 1851, after Utah was officially recognized as a territory. Other firsts include California Democrat Dalip Singh Saund, the first and so far only Sikh to serve in Congress, who served three terms starting in 1957. (See a short [religious biography of Saund](#).) In 2007, Representative Pete Stark (D-Calif.), a Unitarian who joined Congress in 1973, became the first and so far only member of Congress to publicly declare that he does not believe in a Supreme Being.

Not every religious group present in the U.S. has had a presence in Congress. For instance, there has yet to be a Hindu elected to the House or Senate. Still, given the growing religious diversity of the country, Congress is likely to continue to see new members with different religious affiliations.

## Changes in the Religious Makeup of Congress (1961-2009)

	87th (’61-’62)	91st (’69-’71)	96th (’79-’80)	101st (’89-’90)	106th (’99-’00)	111th (’09-’10)	Net change 87th-111th*
Protestant	394 74.1%	375 70.2%	337 63.2%	322 60.2%	310 58.1%	292 54.7%	-19.4%
Baptist	62 11.7%	53 9.9%	55 10.3%	55 10.3%	70 13.1%	66 12.4%	+0.7%
Methodist	97 18.2%	88 16.5%	78 14.6%	78 14.6%	64 12.0%	57 10.7%	-7.5%
Presbyterian	73 13.7%	80 15.0%	65 12.2%	51 9.5%	48 9.0%	43 8.1%	-5.6%
Anglican/Episcopal	66 12.4%	64 12.0%	68 12.8%	63 11.8%	43 8.1%	38 7.1%	-5.3%
Lutheran	21 3.9%	13 2.4%	20 3.8%	24 4.5%	22 4.1%	24 4.5%	+0.6%
Congregationalist	27 5.1%	25 4.7%	12 2.3%	12 2.2%	9 1.7%	6 1.1%	-4.0%
Nondenominational Prot.						5 0.9%	
Restorationist	18 3.4%	16 3.0%	9 1.7%	9 1.7%	4 0.7%	4 0.7%	-2.7%
Adventist			1 0.2%	1 0.2%	3 0.6%	2 0.4%	
Pentecostal			1 0.2%	1 0.2%	3 0.6%	2 0.4%	
Reformed	1 0.2%	1 0.2%		1 0.2%	2 0.4%	2 0.4%	+0.2%
Friends/Quakers	2 0.4%	3 0.6%	2 0.4%			1 0.2%	-0.2%
Holiness						2 0.4%	
Anabaptist	2 0.4%	2 0.4%	2 0.4%	1 0.2%			
Pietist	2 0.4%	2 0.4%	1 0.2%			1 0.2%	-0.2%
Prot. - unspecified	23 4.3%	28 5.2%	23 4.3%	26 4.9%	42 7.9%	39 7.3%	+3.0%
Catholic	100 18.8%	109 20.4%	129 24.2%	139 26.0%	151 28.3%	161 30.1%	+11.3%
Jewish	12 2.3%	19 3.6%	30 5.6%	39 7.3%	34 6.4%	45 8.4%	+6.1%
Mormon	7 1.3%	10 1.9%	11 2.1%	11 2.1%	17 3.2%	14 2.6%	+1.3%
Orthodox		3 0.6%	6 1.1%	7 1.3%	6 1.1%	7 1.3%	
Other Christian	4 0.8%	4 0.7%	3 0.6%	3 0.6%	5 0.9%	3 0.6%	-0.2%
Other Faiths	9 1.7%	7 1.3%	12 2.3%	10 1.9%	3 0.6%	3 0.6%	-1.1%
Buddhist						2 0.4%	
Muslim						2 0.4%	
Other World Religions	1 0.2%						
Not Given/Unspecified/ Unavail./Don't Know/Ref.	5 0.9%	7 1.3%		4 0.7%	8 1.5%	5 0.9%	0%
Unaffiliated			5 0.9%				
<b>Total</b>	<b>532</b>	<b>534</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>535</b>	<b>534</b>	<b>534</b>	

Source: 1961 data from the Library of Congress; other data from Congressional Quarterly