



Deconstructing the Dais: House Committees in the 117th Congress

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Introduction

Much of Congress' most meaningful work happens in its committees. Committees are where members comb through legislation and debate its finer points, wield their oversight authority to demand accountability from government and industry officials, and much more. As a result, the question of which members sit on which committees are hugely important. Moreover, Committees' composition can determine the direction bills take and the extent to which leaders in the public and private sectors are held responsible for their actions.

Seats on the 25 House committees in the 117th Congress¹ are divided between Democrats and Republicans according to House rules, which party is in the majority, and the size of that majority. However, there is significant ideological diversity within each party. Some committees include more of the House's most progressive and conservative members. Others are composed mostly of centrists. Understanding committees' ideological compositions helps predict the types of bills a committee may advance, the likely targets of its oversight work, prospects for bipartisan cooperation, and more. As Senators generally do not hold membership in ideological caucuses, this explainer focuses exclusively on the House of Representatives in which ideological caucus membership is more prevalent.

This explainer details the committee assignment process and analyzes how members of major ideological caucuses in the House are represented across committees in the 117th Congress. Ideological caucuses are formal or informal groups of members that work to advance goals in line with a shared political philosophy. As there are diverse viewpoints among each respective party's members, ideological caucuses approximate a members' ideology relative to their colleagues. The explainer uses a number of terms that, while common on Capitol Hill, may be unfamiliar to some readers. For a breakdown of jargon used when discussing Congress' committees, see [Understanding Capitol Hill Jargon: Committee Edition](#).

¹ This explainer looks at 25 House committees, including 21 permanent committees and four select committees. Select committees are not guaranteed to continue operating in the 118th Congress.

House Committees: An Overview

Standing Committees and Select Committees

Congressional committees play a key role in the legislative process. Committees are composed of a subgroup of members of Congress and focus on specific topics. For example, the House Education and Labor Committee has primary jurisdiction over issues that concern elementary, secondary, and higher education; labor and workers' rights; workforce development; and more. Committees' core functions include: holding hearings, amending bills before they are considered in the full House of Representatives, and providing oversight of federal agencies and private industries.

Committees can be permanent (sometimes called "standing" committees) or temporary (known as "select" committees). There are currently 25 permanent House committees and four select committees.² Select committees are established by a resolution for a particular purpose, such as to conduct an investigation or to issue policy recommendations. For example, in the 116th Congress, the House created the [Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress](#) to study institutional limitations that impede Congress's work and to develop recommendations to make Congress "more effective, efficient, and transparent." Depending on the parameters set in the resolution authorizing the select committee, some may be disbanded automatically upon issuing their final report. Other select committees may be authorized for that Congress' duration. For example, the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress was reauthorized to continue its work in the 117th Congress.

Exclusive and Non-Exclusive Committees

Under current House rules, members may serve on two standing committees and no more than four subcommittees. These limitations can be waived for Republicans or Democrats if their respective parties approve the waiver.³ Under each party's rules, permanent committees are divided into two categories: "exclusive" and "non-exclusive." In general, if a member sits on an exclusive committee, they are not allowed to serve on another committee. However, if they sit on a non-exclusive committee, they are free to serve on other non-exclusive committees.⁴ Exclusive committees generally have broad jurisdiction or play a unique role in the legislative process. For example, the House Rules Committee determines how the legislation

² The House's four select committees are the Select Committee on the Climate Crisis, the Select Committee on Economic Disparity and Fairness in Growth, the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, and the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol.

³ House Rule X, clause 5(b)(2)(A).

⁴ The parties may issue waivers on a case-by-case basis to allow members to serve on multiple exclusive committees. For example, Rep. Norma Torres (D-CA-35) sits on the Rules Committee and the Appropriations Committee.

will come to the full House and which amendments are permissible. In addition to the House Rules Committee, the Committees on Appropriations, Ways and Means, Rules, Energy and Commerce, and Financial Services are considered exclusive committees.⁵

House Democratic Committee Assignment Process

House Republicans and Democrats have different rules governing their committee assignment processes. For House Democrats, members indicate their preferences for a committee assignment to the Steering and Policy Committee.⁶ A committee preference usually relates to a member's interests or experience, or to the issues that are particularly relevant to the member's district.⁷ For example, a member with a large farming community in their district may seek an assignment on the House Agriculture Committee.

The Steering and Policy Committee then nominates members to serve on standing committees.⁸ The whole Democratic Caucus votes to approve or reject the proposed memberships, one committee at a time.⁹ ¹⁰Suppose the Caucus does not approve a nominee or nominees to a standing committee. In that case, the full slate of nominations for that committee is sent back to Steering and Policy to replace the rejected members. If the Caucus approves the nominations, they are put before the full House to vote on via a resolution. For the 117th Congress, the House passed [H.Res. 62](#) to seat Democratic members on their respective committees and [H.Res. 63](#) to seat Republican members. These resolutions traditionally are non-controversial and do not receive opposition, as it is generally understood that it is each respective party's right to determine which of their members receive committee assignments, save extraordinary circumstances.

⁵ While the Democratic Caucus has formal designations of exclusive and non-exclusive committees under their caucus rules, the Republican Conference does not and treats this distinction as informal policy.

⁶ Steering committees are bodies that recommend committee assignments for their party's members in their chamber. These bodies have different names; for example, House Democrats have their Steering and Policy Committee, while House Republicans have their Steering Committee.

⁷ Some standing committee memberships are nominated by the Democratic Leader directly, including the Committee on Rules and the Committee on House Administration.

⁸ Steering and Policy's procedural rules are not public.

⁹ If Steering and Policy does not nominate a certain member for a standing committee, a member can nominate themselves (with support of half of their state's delegation) to Steering and Policy for consideration, though this procedure is rarely used.

¹⁰ Under Democratic Caucus rules for the 117th Congress (Rule 19(D)), Steering and Policy automatically re-nominates sitting members on the Appropriations and Ways and Means Committees each Congress.

House Republican Committee Assignment Process

Like the Democrat's Steering and Policy Committee, the House Republican Conference's Steering Committee nominates members to most standing committees.¹¹ To begin the process, Republican lawmakers receive a Dear Colleague letter from their leadership, generally in early December before the start of a new Congress. This letter asks them to indicate their committee assignment preferences.

After the Steering Committee receives members' input, it submits nominations to the whole Republican Conference for approval. If the Conference rejects one or more of the Steering Committee's nominees, the committee must submit new recommendations. Once the Conference approves the nominees, a resolution is submitted to the House floor for a vote similar to the Democrats' process listed above.

Major Ideological Caucuses in the House

A representative's membership to an ideological caucus often indicates the policy priorities or political philosophy they will support in the committees they serve on. When a significant number of members of one ideological caucus serve on a given committee, they often have greater influence on the operations of the committee and the legislation that gets considered.

Below is a list of the major ideological caucuses in the House of Representatives during the 117th Congress.¹² Individual members can be part of multiple ideological caucuses. Conversely, some members choose not to affiliate with any ideological caucuses.

Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC): The CPC consists of 100 Democratic members (45 percent of House Democrats). In its words, the CPC stands “for progressive policies that prioritize working Americans over corporate interests, fight economic and social inequality, and advance civil liberties.”

New Democrat Coalition (NDC): The NDC consists of 99 Democratic members (44 percent of House Democrats) and identifies as “forward-thinking Democrats who are committed to pro-economic growth, pro-innovation, and fiscally responsible policies.”

Blue Dog Coalition (BDC): The BDC consists of 18 Democratic members (8 percent of the House Democrats), and describes itself as “dedicated to pursuing fiscally-responsible policies, ensuring a strong national defense, and transcending party lines to get things done for the American people.”

¹¹ The Republican leader is tasked with submitting nominations for the Committees on Rules, House Administration, and for one assignment to the Committee on the Budget.

¹² The data used for this explainer's analysis can be viewed [here](#).

Problem Solvers Caucus: The Problem Solvers Caucus is a bipartisan group of 52 members (27 Democrats and 25 Republicans, accounting for 12 percent of House Democrats and 12 percent of House Republicans). It describes itself as “committed to finding common ground on many of the key issues facing the nation.”

Republican Governance Group (RGG): The RGG consists of 45 Republican members (21 percent of House Republicans) and “advocates for common-sense legislation on issues including healthcare, energy, infrastructure and workforce development.”

Republican Study Committee (RSC): The RSC consists of 147 Republican members (74 percent of House Republicans) and pushes for a “principled legislative agenda that will limit government, strengthen our national defense, boost America’s economy, preserve traditional values and balance our budget.”

Freedom Caucus: The Freedom Caucus consists of 36 Republican members (18 percent of House Republicans) and advocates “for more conservative spending and policy ideals in the House.”

Top Five and Bottom Five Committees for Each Ideological Caucus

The percentages below indicate the share that an ideological caucus's members represent among all members of that political party on a committee (as of December 1, 2022). For example, among the Democrats on the House Judiciary Committee, 75 percent are members of the CPC.

DEMOCRATS

Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC)

Committees with the Most Democrats in CPC

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Judiciary | 75% |
| 2. Oversight & Reform | 68% |
| 3. House Administration | 67% (tie) |
| Rules | 67% (tie) |
| 5. Natural Resources | 50% |

Committees with Fewest Democrats in CPC

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. Intelligence (Perm. Select) ¹³ | 15% |
| 2. Agriculture | 22% |
| 3. Homeland Security | 26% |
| 4. Jan. 6th (Select) | 29% (tie) |
| Veterans' Affairs | 29% (tie) |

New Democrat Coalition (NDC)

Committees with Most Democrats in NDC

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Intelligence (Perm. Select) | 77% |
| 2. Ethics | 75% |
| 3. Armed Services | 68% |
| 4. Agriculture | 67% (tie) |
| Modernization (Select) | 67% (tie) |

Committees with Fewest Democrats in NDC

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| 1. Natural Resources | 19% |
| 2. Oversight & Reform | 24% |
| 3. Education & Labor | 28% |
| 4. Judiciary | 33% (tie) |
| House Administration | 33% (tie) |

REPUBLICANS

Freedom Caucus

Committees with Most Republicans in Freedom Caucus

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Judiciary | 53% |
| 2. Oversight & Reform | 45% |
| 3. Veterans' Affairs | 36% |
| 4. Natural Resources | 33% (tie) |
| Economic Disparity (Select) | 33% (tie) |

Committees with Fewest Republicans in Freedom Caucus

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| 1. Ethics | 0% (tie) |
| House Administration | 0% (tie) |
| Rules | 0% (tie) |
| Intelligence (Perm. Select) | 0% (tie) |
| Modernization (Select) | 0% (tie) |
| Jan. 6th (Select) | 0% (tie) |

Republican Study Committee (RSC)

Committees with Most Republicans in RSC

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------|
| 1. Rules | 100% |
| 2. Budget | 94% |
| 3. Ways and Means | 88% |
| 4. Climate Crisis (Select) | 86% |
| 5. Economic Disparity (Select) | 83% |

Committees with Fewest Republicans in RSC

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Jan. 6th (Select) | 0% |
| 2. Ethics | 25% |
| 3. Homeland Security | 56% |
| 4. Appropriations | 58% (tie) |
| Transportation & Infrastruct. | 58% (tie) |

¹³ House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence

DEMOCRATS

Blue Dog Coalition (BDC)

Committees with Most Democrats in BDC

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Jan. 6th (Select) | 29% |
| 2. Agriculture | 22% |
| 3. Homeland Security | 16% |
| 4. Foreign Affairs | 15% |
| 5. Small Business | 13% (tie) |
| Armed Services | 13% (tie) |
| Economic Disparity (Select) | 13% (tie) |

Committees with Fewest Democrats in BDC

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| 1. Veterans' Affairs | 0% (tie) |
| Ethics | 0% (tie) |
| House Administration | 0% (tie) |
| Rules | 0% (tie) |
| Intelligence (Perm. Select) | 0% (tie) |
| Climate Crisis (Select) | 0% (tie) |
| Modernization (Select) | 0% (tie) |

Problem Solvers Caucus (Democrats)

Committees with Most Democrats in Problem Solvers Caucus

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------|
| 1. Small Business | 33% |
| 2. Ethics | 25% |
| 3. Veterans' Affairs | 24% |
| 4. Armed Services | 23% (tie) |
| Foreign Affairs | 23% (tie) |

Committees with Fewest Democrats in Problem Solvers Caucus

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| 1. House Administration | 0% (tie) |
| Judiciary | 0% (tie) |
| Oversight and Reform | 0% (tie) |
| Rules | 0% (tie) |
| Intelligence (Perm. Select) | 0% (tie) |
| Climate Crisis (Select) | 0% (tie) |
| Economic Disparity (Select) | 0% (tie) |

REPUBLICANS

Republican Governance Group (RGG)

Committees with Most Republicans in RGG

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. House Administration | 67% |
| 2. Ethics | 50% (tie) |
| Modernization (Select) | 50% (tie) |
| Jan. 6th (Select) | 50% (tie) |
| 5. Transportation & Infrastruct | 45% |

Committees with Fewest Republicans in RGG

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------|
| 1. Financial Services | 4% |
| 2. Oversight & Reform | 5% (tie) |
| Judiciary | 5% (tie) |
| 4. Ways and Means | 6% |
| 5. Climate Crisis (Select) | 14% |

Problem Solvers Caucus (Republicans)

Committees with Most Republicans in Problem Solvers Caucus

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. House Administration | 33% (tie) |
| Small Business | 33% (tie) |
| 3. Foreign Affairs | 29% |
| 4. Ethics | 25% |
| 5. Intelligence (Perm. Select) | 20% |

Committees with Fewest Republicans in Problems Solvers Caucus

- | | |
|----------------------|----------|
| 1. Education & Labor | 0% (tie) |
| Judiciary | 0% (tie) |
| Oversight & Reform | 0% (tie) |
| Rules | 0% (tie) |
| Veterans' Affairs | 0% (tie) |
| Jan. 6th (Select) | 0% (tie) |

Conclusion

The data above shows how some ideological caucuses are overrepresented or under-represented on certain House committees. As the 118th Congress approaches, stakeholders inside and outside Congress may pressure party leaders to address these imbalances. Alternatively, stakeholders may determine that the committee compositions during the 117th Congress should be maintained, given the ideological caucuses' top policy priorities.

Whether these proportions shift or stay relatively stable, they have major implications for the nature of a committees' work—including the bills they produce—during the 118th Congress. These various possibilities will undoubtedly be top-of-mind for members, advocates, the media, and other Hill-watchers as the 117th Congress concludes.