

Apportionment 101

What You Need to Know and Why It's Important

Determines Congressional Representation

Every 10 years, population counts from the decennial census determine how many seats each state gets in the U.S. House of Representatives. After the first census in 1790, each member of the U.S. House represented about 34,000 people. Today, each member represents more than 700,000 people.

This process, called apportionment, is one of the most important uses of census results because it impacts your voice in Congress. The 2020 Census population counts used for apportionment include the number of people who live in each state, plus overseas military and federal civilian employees and their families living with them who can be allocated back to their home state.

It's in the U.S. Constitution

Article 1, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution requires that a census of the population be taken every 10 years to apportion seats in Congress.

How it Works

Since 1940, the "Method of Equal Proportions" has been used to distribute the 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. One seat is given to every state, per the Constitution. Then, a formula is used to distribute the remaining 385 seats. The formula calculates

values based on each state's total population and the number of potential seats each state could receive. Those values are ranked to determine how many additional seats each state receives.

The populations of the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Island Areas are excluded from the calculation because they do not have any voting seats in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Determines Number of Electoral Votes

The number of electoral votes a state gets is based on its representation in Congress. States receive an electoral vote for each of its two senators, plus one for each of its seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. Its number of seats is based on the census.

Impacts Legislative Boundaries

After the census, shifts in population and congressional representation among the states usually require the redrawing of district boundaries within states. The Census Bureau provides states with the local area population counts that they need to redraw or "redistrict" their congressional and other legislative boundaries in the later redistricting data product.

Apportionment Press Kit

www.census.gov/newsroom/press-kits/2021/2020-census-apportionment-counts.html

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