



▶ Objectives

1. Explain why the Constitution provides for a bicameral Congress.
2. Explain the difference between a term and a session of Congress.
3. Describe a situation in which the President may convene or end a session of Congress.

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▶ Key Terms

- **bicameral**: a legislature made up of two houses
- **term**: the two-year period during which the U.S. Congress meets, starting on noon of the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of January of each odd-numbered year
- **session**: for the U.S. Congress, the period of time during which Congress assembles and conducts business; there are two sessions in each term
- **convene**: to begin

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▶ Key Terms, cont.

- **adjourn**: to suspend operations until the start of the next Congressional session
- **recess**: to temporarily suspend business, such as a session of Congress
- **prorogue**: to end or discontinue; the President has the power to prorogue a session of Congress
- **special session**: a Congressional meeting called to deal with some emergency situation

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## ▶ Introduction

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- Why does the Constitution establish a bicameral legislature?
  - Historically, it is modeled on the two houses of the British Parliament and colonial legislatures.
  - Practically, two houses were adopted as part of the Great Compromise, which solved the dispute between large and small states at the Constitutional Convention over how they would be represented in the national legislature.
  - Theoretically, having two house of Congress means that one house can check the powers of the other.

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## ▶ The National Legislature

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- Congress turns the will of the people into public policy by passing laws.
  - Pictured here are Senators Arlen Specter (R., Penn.) and Patrick Leahy (D., Vt.)



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## ▶ The National Legislature, cont.

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- The Framers on the whole believed that Congress would be the most powerful branch of the federal government.
- The Constitution spends more space detailing the powers and structure of Congress than any other branch of government.
- Yet in U.S. history, Congress has perhaps been less admired by the American people than the presidency.

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## ▶ Congress and Federalism

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- Federalism involves the **division of power** between the central government and the state governments.
- The different roles taken by the members of Congress are examples of federalism in the national government.
  - Each state sends representatives to Congress who act in the interests of the citizens of that state.
  - At the same time, these congressional representatives must work together on behalf of all Americans to address issues of national importance.

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**Representation**

- Each state is **equally** represented in the Senate and represented by **population** in the House.
- Some critics argue that this structure gives too much power to the smallest states.

Representation in Congress

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**The Capital**

The Capital

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**Congressional Terms**

- Beginning in 1789, Congress has met for two-year terms.
  - Originally congressional terms began and ended in March. This start date was changed to January 3<sup>rd</sup> of every odd-numbered year by the 20<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

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**Congressional Sessions**

- Checkpoint: How many sessions make up each congressional term?
  - Congress meets and conducts business twice in each term, holding one session each year.
  - The second session of a term often begins somewhat later than January 3<sup>rd</sup>.

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## ▶ Adjourning Congress



- During a session, Congress can choose to adjourn, or suspend its operations, until the next session.
  - Though Congress meets for most of the year, each house typically has a few recesses, or breaks, in a session.
  - Neither house can officially end a session without the approval of the other house.
  - The President can end a session of Congress, but only if both houses cannot agree on a date to adjourn. This power has never been used.

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## ▶ Special Sessions



- The President can call one or both houses of Congress into a special session to deal with an emergency situation.
  - Only 27 joint special sessions have been called. The Senate has been called out alone 46 times, while the House has never been called out alone.
  - Special sessions are rarely called today since Congress meets for most of the year.
  - The President may threaten to call a special session if Congress has not acted on a measure important to the presidency.

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## ▶ Review



- Now that you have learned why the Constitution establishes a bicameral legislature, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question.
  - Whose views should members of Congress represent when voting?

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