

Texas Legislature

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The Texas Legislature

The Texas legislature is bicameral; it has two bodies. The **Senate** is the upper chamber, and the **House of Representatives** is the lower chamber.

Each member of the legislature is elected from a district. Each district must have approximately equal representation. *Reynolds v Sims* decided that each person's vote must have the same power.

Census data is used to redraw district lines to keep the districts even. As of 2010, each Senate district in Texas represented ~800,000 people, with House Districts representing ~160,000 people.

Geographic Districts

Gerrymandering is redrawing districts to tip a vote in one direction or another for political gain. Districts might be packed with a small majority of one party to force the vote. This leads to weirdly shaped districts. Gerrymandering may or not be legal based on intent.

There are 4 tactics to gerrymandering:

1. Parties will draw districts to protect or gain political power. This is legal.
2. Parties draw districts to reduce minority votes, and Anglos have a slight majority. This is illegal.
3. Creating a majority-minority district (the majority of the district are minorities). This is iffy, it may be legal.
4. The pairing technique. To represent a district, you must live in the district. With the pairing technique, two districts that are “safe seats” for one party can be combined into one district. This reduces the number of representatives that are shoe-ins. If you know a group of people are all going to vote the same way, might as well put them all in one district to limit their power. This is legal.

Gerrymandering happens at both the state and federal level, and both parties gerrymander.

Qualifications for Representation

Texas House of Representatives

- Citizen of the US
- 21 years old
- Residency:
 - District: 1 year
 - State: 2 years
- Registered Voter
- 2 year term, unlimited terms
- Part time job, salary of \$7,200 / year
- Leader: Speaker of the House

Texas Senate

- Citizen of the US
- 26 years old
- Residency:
 - District: 1 year
 - State: 5 years
- Registered Voter
- 4 year staggered terms, unlimited terms
- Part time, \$7,200 / year
- Leader: Lt. Governor

Informal Qualifications for Representation

- Race and gender could be argued
- WASP (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant)
- Occupation (Attorney, Doctor, Businessmen, etc. usually rich people)
- Party, sometimes

Presiding Officers of the Texas Legislature

Lt. Governor (Senate)

- Elected in statewide, partisan elections
- Not a Senator
- Serves a 4 year term
- Decides what legislation the Senate votes on
- Gets to assign Senate members to committees

Speaker of the House

- Elected by the majority of House members
- Is a representative
- 2 year term

Legislative Committees

Committees are classified based on function, membership, and longevity. Some committees can be occupied by both senators and House representatives. Some committees are permanent, and some are temporary.

Examples of types of committees:

- Standing (and subcommittee)

Standing committees have the authority to write or change legislation. They are exclusive to one chamber, and they are permanent.

- Conference

Conference committees compromise on legislation. They are temporary, and inclusive between house and senate.

- Joint

- Special

- Ad Hoc

Legislative Staff

There are 31 senators, and 150 representatives. Legislators are provided minimal funds for hiring staff members. Each senator is given \$27,500 total to hire staff (usually 4-14), and representatives are given \$13,250 to hire staff (usually 2-4).

Senators and Representatives are known as **citizen legislators**. The Texas legislature meets for 140 days every other year. Being a legislator is a part time job. Most of their income comes from their other jobs.

Senators serve a 4 year staggered term, and Representatives serve 2 year terms. Legislators experience a rapid turnover. They usually leave early or stay for a long time.

Factors leading to diminishing legislative effectiveness:

- Low salaries
- Short sessions
- Heavy workloads
- Inadequate staff and clerical assistance

Compensation

Legislators do receive compensation. They get \$7,200 per year, and a per diem of \$221 per day. They also get a travel allowance after the legislative session ends.

The Limited Session

The Texas legislature meets starting on the 2nd Tuesday in January in odd numbered years for 140 days. Texas is the only state out of the top 10 most populous to meet biennially.

If need be, The governor can call a special session that lasts no longer than 30 days. These are unpopular with the public and legislators.