

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Date of Elections: 4 November 1980

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the members of the House of Representatives and one-third (34) of the members of the Senate on the normal expiry of their term of office.

Characteristics of Parliament

The bicameral Parliament of the United States of America, the Congress, consists of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

The Senate is composed of 100 members elected for 6 years on the basis of two for each of the country's 50 States, a third of whom are chosen every two years in such manner that, in each State, both Senators are not normally standing for election at the same time.

The House of Representatives is composed of members elected for 2 years in the 50 States in such manner that each Representative represents roughly the same number of citizens, provided that each State has at least one Representative. Within the constitutional limitation that "the number of Representatives shall not exceed one for every thirty thousand" inhabitants, the Congress itself has the power to determine the size of the House of Representatives. Under the law currently in force, the membership from the 50 States is fixed at 435. In addition to these Representatives, there are Delegates from the District of Columbia, Guam, the Virgin Islands and American Samoa*, who are elected for 2 years, and a Resident Commissioner from Puerto Rico, elected for 4 years; these five officers may take part in the debate of the House, but have no right to vote except in committees.

Electoral System

The Constitution of the United States lays down that all citizens who, "in each State, shall have the qualifications requisite for electors of the most numerous branch of the State legislature", are entitled to vote in elections for Congress; it prescribes, furthermore, that the right of citizens to vote shall not be denied or abridged on account of race, colour or sex, or by reason of failure to pay any poll tax or other tax.

Within these limitations, the determination of who may vote falls under the jurisdiction of each State, with the proviso that no violation be made of the factors of discrimination proscribed by the Constitution. In all States, electors are required to be United States citizens and not less than 18 years of age. In elections other than presidential, the United States Supreme Court has held that a maximum period of 30 days' residence in a State is what will be constitutionally permissible. Most States have conformed their durational residence requirements to meet this Supreme Court standard.

With the passage of the Voting Rights Act Amendments of 1970, the States ceased to

* See section *Parliamentary Developments*, pp. 28-29.

have the right to impose literacy tests or similar devices as a condition for voting; the 1975 Amendments to the Voting Rights Act made permanent the ban on such tests or devices.

The insane and persons convicted of a crime which carries the penalty of disfranchisement are disqualified from voting in many States. Other grounds for disqualification found in some States include conviction for an election-connected offence, duelling, bad moral character and imprisonment. Tests of moral character, however, fall under the prohibitions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, as amended.

Electors must have their names appear on the registers as eligible voters in virtually all the States. In these cases, persons must take the initiative in order to become registered to vote. Once on the register, voters generally need take no initiative other than to continue to vote regularly, provided that they do not change their names or addresses. The registers—which are mostly drawn up at the county level—are revised almost continuously, and particularly before State-wide elections. The Overseas Voting Rights Act of 1975 requires States to adopt uniform absentee registration and voting procedures covering overseas citizens in federal elections.

Although voting is not compulsory, employers in many States are required to allow their employees to take time off to vote without loss of pay. Most States permit absentee voting, especially for members of the armed forces and their dependants and Government employees.

No person may be a Representative who has not attained the age of 25 years and been for seven years a citizen of the United States and an inhabitant of his State; for the Senate, the requirement is 30 years of age and nine years' citizenship and an inhabitant of his State. No Senator or Representative may hold any civil office under the authority of the United States during his term in Congress.

A person may run for Congress either as an independent or as a member of a political party; most candidates are, in practice, presented on the ballot paper under a party designation. Voters may "write in" the name of a candidate who does not appear on the printed ballot.

Nomination as a result of nominating, or primary, elections of parties is the practice in most States. It is regulated by State law. Usually, a person may become a candidate in the primary election by obtaining a petition subscribed by a designated number of voters of his political party. Voters then choose their party's candidate at the primary election. The number of voters whose support is necessary to qualify as a candidate in either a party's primary or in a general election, and the necessity or amount of an accompanying filing fee, vary according to State law.

The Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971, as amended in 1974, 1976 and 1980, provides for the civil enforcement of the federal campaign financing laws; these laws provide for various overall contribution limitations for individuals and political committees. The United States Supreme Court has held expenditure limitations to be unconstitutional since they place substantial direct restrictions on political expression that is prohibited by the First Amendment; expenditure limitations, however, are valid in situations where candidates agree to adhere to them in order to receive public financing.

Each State is entitled to at least one Representative and all beyond this minimum number are apportioned among the States according to population, so that no congressional district

is exactly the same geographical size. Districts must, however, be substantially the same size in terms of population. Representatives all come from single-member districts.

Each of the 50 States is entitled to two Senators, both of whom represent the State as a whole regardless of its population. Each elector therefore votes for two senatorial candidates.

Members of Congress are all directly elected, generally on the basis of simple plurality of vote. The two exceptions are the State of Georgia and the District of Columbia, both of which provide for a run-off election in the event that no candidate obtains an absolute majority of the votes cast in the general election.

If a seat becomes vacant in the House of Representatives between general elections, a special election is held. If a seat becomes vacant in the Senate, the Governor of the State concerned may, through a temporary appointment, fill it until a special election is held in conformity with the laws of that State.

General Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

The landslide victory of the Republican Party in the 1980 presidential race was clearly reflected in the simultaneous congressional elections, as the Republicans won control of the Senate for the first time since the 1952 poll and considerably reduced the Democratic Party's majority in the House of Representatives. For the first time since the 1916 elections the two Houses were controlled by different parties.

Principal campaign issues debated by incumbent President Jimmy Carter and Republican candidate Ronald Reagan included management of the country's economy and, in foreign affairs, the detention by Iran of US hostages and the 1979 draft treaty with the USSR on strategic arms limitation, whose congressional ratification had been postponed because of the military intervention in Afghanistan by the USSR in December 1979. Mr. Reagan's conservative political platform, which included drastic proposals to trim the nation's budget and a promise to adopt a firm line in international affairs, proved more appealing to the electorate, which turned out in low numbers on polling day.

Statistics

1. *Distribution of Seats in the House of Representatives*

Political Group	Number of Seats
Democratic Party.	242 (-34)
Republican Party.	192 (+ 33)
Others.1 (+1)
	435

2. *Distribution of Seats in the Senate*

Political Group	Number of Seats won in 1980 Elections	Total Number of Seats
Republican Party	22	53 (+12)
Democratic Party	12	46 (-12)
Others.	—	1(=)
	34	100

3. *Distribution of Members of Congress according to Professional Category*

	Senate	House of Representatives
Lawyers	57	186
Businessmen	23	117
Educators	5	42
Farmers, ranchers	5	20
Journalists	2	16
Astronauts	2	—
Public officials	—	29
Congressional aides	—	8
Doctors, dentists	—	3
Clergymen	—	3
Others	6	11
	100	435

4. *Distribution of Members of Congress according to Sex*

	Senate	House of Representatives
Men.	98	416
Women	2	19
	100	435

5. *Average Age of Members of Congress*

Senate.	52.5 years
House of Representatives.	48.4 years
Overall average:	49.2 years