

Analyzing Congressional Representation

Overview

Description

In this assignment, students will compare the demographics of their congressional district to the race or ethnicity and gender of the person who represents the district in the United States House of Representatives. Students will also compare the overall composition of the House to the demographic characteristics of the United States. Finally, students will assess how important or unimportant it is that the gender, race, and ethnicity of elected officials match the gender, race, and ethnic makeup of their districts and the nation as a whole.

Final Product: Students will prepare a written report to Congress discussing their findings.

Subject

US Government

Task Level

Grade 12

Objectives

Students will:

- Take part in class discussions on demographics and congressional representation.
- Perform independent research using library and Internet resources.
- Interpret and compare data from a variety of sources in reference to different levels of analysis of representative democracy (local congressional district level and national level).
- Draw conclusions from the data about representation at a local congressional district level and national level.
- Present the results of their findings in the form of a written report to Congress.

Preparation

- Read the Instructor Task Information and the Student Notes.
- Prepare student copies of the Student Notes pages.

- Explore the websites mentioned in the Investigating phase of the assignment so that you can guide students in their research if necessary.
- Identify some key legislative issues that might be of particular interest to women and racial and ethnic minorities. These might include affirmative action, pay equity, immigration reform, etc.
- If *The Almanac of American Politics* is not in your school library, try to obtain a copy through the public library or interlibrary loan. It will be a great source of information for students. As a last resort, you can access ordering information at <http://www.nationaljournal.com/aboutalmanac>.
- Read a selection of articles from *The U.S. House of Representatives: Reform or Rebuild?* edited by Joseph F. Zimmerman and Wilma Rule (Praeger Publishers, 2000) to expand your understanding of the issues related to representation in the House of Representatives.

Prior Knowledge

- Students should understand the separation of powers inherent in the constitutional system of the United States and the nature of republican or representative government.
- Students understand the concepts of race, gender, and ethnicity.
- Students need to know how to access library and Internet resources.
- Students need to be able to organize and analyze the results of their research.
- Students need to be able to write a report synthesizing their findings.

Key Concepts and Terms

- Congressional district
- Demographics
- Proportional representation
- Representative (adj.)
- Republican form of government
- Separation of powers
- US House of Representatives
- US Senate

Time Frame

This assignment will require one class period to introduce the assignment to students, discuss the topic, and plan the process. Additionally, spend one to two class periods on previewing the required sources and discussing the effective selection and use of research. Outside of class, allow students one week to do their

research. Allocate 30 minutes to model the creation of congressional reports, and give students one week outside of class to write their reports. Consider devoting one class period to peer review before students submit their final drafts.

Instructional Plan

Getting Started

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Take part in class discussions on demographics and congressional representation.

Procedure

1. Begin by discussing the significance of demographics in politics and policymaking. Define the term, and ask students: What is the value of studying demographics? Discuss with students how political values and perspectives may differ based on demographic identity. Elicit from students that studying demographics helps us see the makeup of a population and how it changes over time.
2. Introduce the assignment by asking: How representative is the House of Representatives? Discuss what is meant by *representative* and why this is important in the House of Representatives.
3. Tell students that in this assignment they will investigate this question along two levels of analysis—regional and national. Make sure that students understand what is required of them in the assignment.

Investigating

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Perform independent research using library and Internet resources.
- Interpret and compare data from a variety of sources in reference to different levels of analysis of representative democracy (local congressional district level and national level).

Procedure

1. Show the students the websites and sources they will be using. Discuss the purpose and effectiveness of each. As a class, discuss when and how students might use each of these sources.
2. Using library resources such as *The Almanac of American Politics* and Internet sites such as the United States House of Representatives at www.house.gov and the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) at <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>, students will compile demographic information about their congressional district. This information

should include the percentages of men, women, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans who live in their congressional district.

3. Students should then look at the gender and race or ethnicity of their congressional representative. Encourage students to contact the office of their congressional representative for information. The staff in these offices is generally pleased to help students in their research.
4. In the second part of this assignment, students use the same data sources to look at the gender, race, and ethnicity of all members of the House of Representatives, comparing these figures to the same statistics for the entire United States. Repeat this examination with members of the Senate. Discuss with students the divide between representation in these two legislative bodies and why such a divide exists.
5. Have students select one of the following issues: pay equity, affirmative action, or immigration reform (you can also select other issues relevant to the community). Using the information on the *Student Data Sheet* handout, ask students to predict how the community would stand on the chosen issue. Then, have students research the local representative's stand on these issues to determine if the position of the representative reflects the hypothesized community stance.

Drawing Conclusions

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Draw conclusions from the data about representation at a local congressional district level, state level, and national level.
- Present the results of their findings in the form of a written report to Congress.

Procedure

1. Have students organize their research notes in preparation for responding to the focus questions below.
2. Have students revisit the question: How representative is the U.S. House of Representatives? Have them answer this question, based on the following criteria:
 - a. Is the congressional member in your district the same gender as the majority of people in the district? Is the congressional member in your district the same race or ethnicity as the majority of people in the district?
 - b. Does the overall composition of the House of Representatives mirror the demographic composition of the United States?

- c. What do you believe may explain any incongruities or discrepancies between the demographic composition of the United States and the composition of the House of Representatives?
 - d. Use data gathered about community demographically linked opinions on key issues and the local representative's stance on those issues. Does the representative actually represent what you deduce to be the constituents' views? Is there a relationship between gender, race, or ethnicity and voting records? Make an argument about whether or not it is important that a representative have the same demographic characteristics as the majority of the people s/he represents. Make an argument about whether or not it is important that the overall composition of the House of Representatives mirror the demographic composition of the United States as a whole.
3. Produce a sample draft of a congressional report as a class.
 4. Have students write a rough draft of their report to Congress, with each of the questions above meriting a separate paragraph or paragraphs in which students draw conclusions. Students may also wish to include data in the form of tables. Remind students to include in-text citations and a Works Cited page.
 5. Direct students to have a peer review their report.
 6. Instruct students to incorporate the feedback about their rough draft into a final draft and submit this draft as their final product.

Scaffolding/Instructional Support

The goal of scaffolding is to provide support to encourage student success, independence, and self-management. Instructors can use these suggestions, in part or all together, to meet diverse student needs. The more skilled the student, however, the less scaffolding that he or she will need. Some examples of scaffolding that could apply to this assignment include:

- Provide additional opportunities for students to practice reading and using primary and secondary sources.
- Instead of having the entire class focus their research on their local representative, you may assign a number of students another Texas representative to research. In this way, not everyone in the class will be working on the same topic, at least at the local level.
- As an alternative to all students focusing on the same issue, students can be broken into groups with each group researching a separate issue.
- Before students contact their representative directly, provide them with practice in developing their telephone skills. For example, how to introduce oneself over the phone, explain what one is seeking, thank the person who helped, and so on.
- Consider developing task cards for students who need structure while doing their research. Students could use a new task card for each new source.
- Consider requiring outlines of the reports as part of the prewriting stage, for students who have a greater need to structure their thoughts.
- As a possible extension upon completion of this activity, have students discuss the implications of representation across the two chambers of Congress. Discuss possible reasons why there is less representativeness in the Senate as compared to the House of Representatives.
- Another extension activity is to discuss the Census, the ethnic and racial categories, and the related political issues (such as who defines the categories, who is counted, and what are the implications of the results).

Solutions

The information below is intended to help you assess students' final work products. It may not represent all possible strategies and ideas. The accompanying scoring guide provides specific examples of ways a student might demonstrate content understanding and mastery of cross-disciplinary skills.

Necessary Elements

Reports should be directed to policymakers, deal with the issue of demographics at the regional and national levels, and include final conclusions about the focus question on representation.

Students should gather and use relevant data to support their analysis of the extent to which the House of Representatives represents the American population. Any data sources used should be cited accurately internally and in a Works Cited page. Reports should include few or no grammar and spelling errors.

Key Connections

Students should effectively identify and address known or anticipated counterarguments to their analysis.

Common Misconceptions

Students may fall into relying on stereotypes and using unsupported personal opinions. All assertions should be supported by evidence.

TCCRS Cross-Disciplinary Standards Addressed

Performance Expectation	Getting Started	Investigating	Drawing Conclusions
<i>I. Key Cognitive Skills</i>			
B.2. Construct well-reasoned arguments to explain phenomena, validate conjectures, or support positions.			✓
B.3. Gather evidence to support arguments, findings, or lines of reasoning.		✓	
C.3. Collect evidence and data systematically and directly relate to solving a problem.		✓	
D.1. Self-monitor learning needs and seek assistance when needed.	✓	✓	✓
D.2. Use study habits necessary to manage academic pursuits and requirements.	✓	✓	✓
D.3. Strive for accuracy and precision.	✓	✓	✓
D.4. Persevere to complete and master tasks.	✓	✓	✓
E.1. Work independently.		✓	✓
E.2. Work collaboratively.	✓		✓
<i>II. Foundational Skills</i>			
B.1. Write clearly and coherently using standard writing conventions.			✓
B.3. Compose and revise drafts.			✓
C.5. Synthesize and organize information effectively.			✓
C.6. Design and present an effective product.			✓
C.7. Integrate source material.			✓
D.1. Identify patterns or departures from patterns among data.			✓
D.3. Present analyzed data and communicate findings in a variety of formats.			✓
E.1. Use technology to gather information.		✓	

TCCRS Social Studies Standards Addressed

Performance Expectation	Getting Started	Investigating	Drawing Conclusions
<i>I. Interrelated Disciplines and Skills</i>			
C.1. Evaluate different governmental systems and functions.	✓	✓	✓
F.1. Use a variety of research and analytical tools to explore questions or issues thoroughly and fairly.		✓	✓
<i>II. Diverse Human Perspectives and Experiences</i>			
B.1. Explain and evaluate the concepts of race, ethnicity, and nationalism.	✓	✓	✓
<i>IV. Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation of Information</i>			
A.2. Situate an informational source in its appropriate contexts (contemporary, historical, cultural).		✓	
A.3. Evaluate sources from multiple perspectives.		✓	✓
A.4. Understand the differences between a primary and secondary source and use each appropriately to conduct research and construct arguments.		✓	✓
A.6. Read research data critically.		✓	
B.1. Use established research methodologies.		✓	
B.3. Gather, organize, and display the results of data and research.		✓	✓
B.4. Identify and collect sources.		✓	
D.1. Construct a thesis that is supported by evidence.			✓
<i>V. Effective Communication</i>			
A.2. Use conventions of standard written English.			✓
B.1. Attribute ideas and information to source materials and authors.			✓

TEKS Standards Addressed

Analyzing Congressional Representation - Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): Social Studies, Government

113.43.c.15. Citizenship. The student understands how different points of view influence the development of public policies and decision-making processes on local, state, national, and international levels. The student is expected to:

- 113.43.c.15.A. identify and give examples of different points of view that influence the development of public policies and decision-making processes on local, state, national, and international levels; and
- 113.43.c.15.B. explain how citizenship practices, public policies, and decision making may be influenced by cultural beliefs, including nationalism and patriotism.

113.43.c.16. Culture. The student understands how the components of culture affect the way people live and shape the characteristics of regions. The student is expected to:

- 113.43.c.16. B. describe elements of culture, including language, religion, beliefs and customs, institutions, and technologies; and
- 113.43.c.16.C. explain ways various groups of people perceive the characteristics of their own and other cultures, places, and regions differently

113.44.c.7. Government. The student understands the American beliefs and principles reflected in the U.S. Constitution and why these are significant. The student is expected to:

- 113.44.c.7.A. explain the importance of a written constitution.
- 113.44.c.7.B. evaluate how the federal government serves the purposes set forth in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution.
- 113.44.c.7.D. evaluate constitutional provisions for limiting the role of government, including republicanism, checks and balances, federalism, separation of powers, popular sovereignty, and individual rights.
- 113.44.c.7.F. identify how the American beliefs and principles reflected in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution contribute to both a national identity and federal identity and are embodied in the United States today.

113.44.c.8. Government. The student understands the structure and functions of the government created by the U.S. Constitution. The student is expected to:

- 113.44.c.8.E. explain how certain provisions of the U.S. Constitution provide for checks and balances among the three branches of government.
- 113.44.c.8.G. explain the major responsibilities of the federal government for domestic and foreign policy such as national defense.
- 113.44.c.8.H. compare the structures, functions, and processes of national, state, and local governments in the U.S. federal system.

113.44.c.9. Government. The student understands the concept of federalism. The student is expected to:

- 113.44.c.9.A. explain why the Founding Fathers created a distinctly new form of federalism and adopted a federal system of government instead of a unitary system.
- 113.44.c.9.B. categorize government powers as national, state, or shared.
- 113.44.c.9.C. analyze historical and contemporary conflicts over the respective roles of national and state governments.
- 113.44.c.9.D. understand the limits on the national and state governments in the U.S. federal system of government.

Analyzing Congressional Representation - Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): Social Studies, Government
<p>113.44.c.10. Government. The student understands the processes for filling public offices in the U.S. system of government. The student is expected to:</p> <p>113.44.c.10.A. compare different methods of filling public offices, including elected and appointed offices at the local, state, and national levels.</p>
<p>113.44.c.11. Government. The student understands the role of political parties in the U.S. system of government. The student is expected to:</p> <p>113.44.c.11.A. analyze the functions of political parties and their role in the electoral process at local, state, and national levels.</p> <p>113.44.c.11.B. explain the two-party system and evaluate the role of third parties in the United States.</p>
<p>113.44.c.13. Citizenship. The student understands rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. The student is expected to:</p> <p>113.44.c.13.A. understand the roles of limited government and the rule of law in the protection of individual rights;</p> <p>113.44.c.13.B. identify and define the unalienable right;</p> <p>113.44.c.13.C. identify the freedoms and rights guaranteed by each amendment in the Bill of Rights; and</p> <p>113.44.c.13.E. explain the importance of due process rights to the protection of individual rights and in limiting the powers of government.</p>
<p>113.44.c.14. Citizenship. The student understands the difference between personal and civic responsibilities. The student is expected to:</p> <p>113.44.c.14.A. explain the difference between personal and civic responsibilities; and</p> <p>113.44.c.14.B. evaluate whether and/or when the obligation of citizenship requires that personal desires and interests be subordinated to the public good.</p>
<p>113.44.c.20. Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:</p> <p>113.44.c.20.B. create a product on a contemporary government issue or topic using critical methods of inquiry.</p> <p>113.44.c.20.D. analyze and evaluate the validity of information, arguments, and counterarguments from primary and secondary sources for bias, propaganda, point of view, and frame of reference.</p> <p>113.44.c.20.E. evaluate government data using charts, tables, graphs, and maps</p> <p>113.44.c.20.F. use appropriate mathematical skills to interpret social studies information such as maps and graphs.</p>
<p>113.44.c.21. Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:</p> <p>113.44.c.21.A. use social studies terminology correctly.</p> <p>113.44.c.21.B. use standard grammar, spelling, sentence structure, and punctuation.</p> <p>113.44.c.21.C. transfer information from one medium to another, including written to visual and statistical to written or visual, using computer software as appropriate.</p> <p>113.44.c.21.D. create written, oral, and visual presentations of social studies information.</p>

Analyzing Congressional Representation

Introduction

Representation is one of the great strengths of our democracy. In this assignment, you will focus on demographics, determining how representative of your congressional district your congressional representative is, and how the membership of the House of Representatives compares to the population of the United States. You will be asked to present your findings and develop possible explanations for these findings in a written report to Congress.

Directions

Getting Started

1. Discuss the importance of demographics in politics and policymaking.
2. Consider the question: How representative is the House of Representatives? Discuss what is meant by *representation* and why this is important in the House of Representatives.
3. Make sure that you understand what is required of you in this assignment. You will investigate the question of representation along two levels of analysis—regional and national.

Investigating

1. Preview the sources you will be using, and discuss effective research selection and usage with your class.
2. Using library resources such as *The Almanac of American Politics*, and Internet sites such as the United States House of Representatives at <http://www.house.gov> and the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) at <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>, compile demographic information about your congressional district. This information should include the percentages of men, women, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans who live in your congressional district. Fill in the data on the *Student Data Sheet* handout.
3. Identify the gender and race or ethnicity of your congressional representative, and fill in the *Student Data Sheet* handout with your findings.
4. Next, use the same data sources to look at the gender, race, and ethnic backgrounds of all members of the House of Representatives,

comparing these figures to the same statistics for the entire United States. Fill in the Student Data sheet with your findings.

5. Select one of the following issues: pay equity, affirmative action, or immigration.
6. Based on the demographic characteristics of your district, make an argument about what position the representative should take on this issue.
7. Determine the position of your representative on this issue (by looking at the representative's website or calling the representative's office to determine his or her policy position).
8. Does your hypothesized community opinion match the representative's position? If they match, why do you think that is? If not, why not?

Drawing Conclusions

1. Use the notes you made in the *Student Data Sheet* handout to respond to the focus questions below.
2. Revisit the question: How representative is the U.S. House of Representatives? Answer this question in your report, based on the following criteria:
 - a. Is the congressional member in your district the same gender as the majority of people in the district? Is the congressional member in your district the same race or ethnicity as the majority of people in the district?
 - b. Does the overall composition of the House of Representatives mirror the demographic composition of the United States?
 - c. What do you believe may explain any incongruities or discrepancies between the demographic composition of the United States and of the House of Representatives?
 - d. Use data gathered about community demographically linked opinions on key issues and the local representative's stance on those issues. Does the representative actually represent what you deduce to be the constituents' views? Is there a relationship between gender, race, or ethnicity and voting records? Make an argument about whether or not it is important that a representative have the same demographic characteristics as the majority of the people s/he represents. Make an argument about whether or not it is important that the overall composition of the House of

Representatives mirror the demographic composition of the United States as a whole.

3. Participate in the group construction of a congressional report.
4. Write a rough draft of your report to Congress with each of the questions above meriting a separate paragraph or paragraphs in which you draw conclusions. You may also wish to include data in the form of tables. Remember to include internal citations and a Works Cited page.
5. Have a peer review your report.
6. Incorporate the feedback about your rough draft into a final draft, and submit this draft as your final product.

Student Data Sheet

Complete the chart below with the data you gather during your research. Categories are based on U.S. Census Bureau categories:

<http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/race/racefactcb.html>

	M/F	Race						Ethnicity	
		A	AI/AN	B/AA	NH/PI	SOR	W	H/L	Not H/L
Your Representative									
Your District (percentages)									
House of Representatives (percentages)									
Nation (percentages)									

Key:

A = Asian

AI/AN = American Indian or Alaskan Native

B/AA = Black or African American

H/L = Hispanic or Latino

M/F = Male or Female

NH/PI = Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Not H/L = Not Hispanic or Latino

SOR = Some Other Race

W = White