

How Much Faith Is There on Capitol Hill?

When the 114th Congress is sworn in on Jan. 6, Republicans will control both chambers for the first time since the 109th Congress (2005-2006). Yet, despite the sea change in party control, a new Pew Research Center study finds there is relatively little change in the overall religious makeup of Congress.

More than nine in 10 members of the House and Senate (92 percent) are Christian, and about 57 percent are Protestant, roughly the same as in the 113th Congress (90 percent and 56 percent, respectively). About three in 10 members (31 percent) are Catholic, the same as in the previous Congress.

Protestants and Catholics continue to make up a greater percentage of the members of Congress than of all U.S. adults. Pew Research surveys find that, as of 2013, 49 percent of American adults are Protestant, and 22 percent are Catholic.

As was the case in the 113th Congress, the biggest difference between Congress and the general public is in the share of those who say they are religiously unaffiliated. This group makes up 20 percent of the general public but just 0.2 percent of Congress. The only member of Congress who describes herself as religiously unaffiliated is Rep. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz.

These are some of the findings from an analysis by the Pew Research Center of congressional data compiled primarily by CQ Roll Call. The analysis compares the religious affiliations of members of the new Congress with Pew Research Center survey data on the U.S. public.

Among the study's other findings:

1) Many of the nation's smaller religious groups are

represented in roughly equal proportion to their numbers in the U.S. adult population. Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus combined represent roughly 2% of American adults and 1 percent of Congress. Jews continue to have greater representation in Congress (5 percent) than in the population as a whole (2 percent), but there are five fewer Jewish members in the 114th Congress than there were in the 113th, and 11 fewer than there were in the 112th Congress.

2) The new Congress includes a number of people who have had some form of religious occupation, including at least seven members who are ordained ministers. The number of ordained clergy in Congress has not fluctuated greatly in recent years.

3) Of the 301 Republicans scheduled to be sworn in on Jan. 6, only one—freshman Rep. Lee Zeldin of New York's 1st District—is not a Christian. Zeldin is Jewish.

4) Fully two-thirds of the Republicans in the 114th Congress (202 members, or 67 percent) are Protestant, about a quarter are Catholic (81, or 27 percent) and 5 percent are Mormon (14).

5) Democrats in the new Congress are somewhat more religiously diverse than Republicans, though not as diverse as the population as a whole. Of the 234 Democrats in the 114th Congress, 104 (44 percent) are Protestant, 83 (35 percent) are Catholic, 27 (12 percent) are Jewish, two (1 percent) are Mormon, two are Buddhist, two are Muslim, one is Hindu and one does not identify with a particular religion.