

Pew Research: Congress Looks a Lot Like It Did in 1961

In 1961, John F. Kennedy had just been sworn in as the 35th president of the United States, the Cold War was becoming increasingly warm, the civil rights movement was launched, and the Space Race between the U.S. and Soviet Union was about to aim for the moon and beyond.

Many things have changed in the nearly six decades that have followed, but one aspect of America really hasn't. According to a new report from Pew Research, the percentage of members of the 115th Congress is nearly the same as it was at the start of the 87th.

The report's narrative states:

The share of U.S. adults who describe themselves as Christians has been declining for decades, but the U.S. Congress is about as Christian today as it was in the early 1960s, according to a new analysis by Pew Research Center. Indeed, among members of the new, 115th Congress, 91 percent describe themselves as Christians. This is nearly the same percentage as in the 87th Congress (1961 to 1962, the earliest years for which comparable data are available), when 95 percent of members were Christian.

Among the 293 Republicans elected to serve in the new, 115th Congress, all but two identify as Christians; there are two Jewish Republicans—Lee Zeldin of New York and David Kustoff of Tennessee—who both serve in the House. Democrats in Congress also are overwhelmingly Christian (80 percent), but there is more religious diversity on this side of the aisle. The 242 Democrats in Congress include 28 Jews, three Buddhists, three Hindus, two Muslims and one Unitarian Universalist—as well as the only member of Congress to

describe herself as religiously unaffiliated, Rep. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz. In addition, all 10 members of Congress who decline to state their religious affiliation are Democrats.

Here's the actual breakdown of religious affiliations of all 536 members of Congress:

- Christian—485
 - Mainline Protestant Christian—150
 - Evangelical Protestant Christian—149
 - Roman Catholic—168
 - Orthodox Christian—5
 - Mormon—13
- Jewish—30
- Buddhist—3
- Hindu—3
- Muslim—2
- Unitarian-Universalist—1
- No Religious Affiliation—1
- Refused to Answer—10

While there is a difference in terms of the Christianity and religious diversity of the two major parties, both are overwhelmingly dominated by professing Christians. Nearly all Republicans (99.3 percent) claim to be Christian, while more than three-fourths of Democrats (80.2 percent) make the same profession of faith.

Pew's analysis of the report seems to lament the lack of representation of "religious nones"—atheists and agnostics—in Congress:

The analysis finds that some religious groups, including Protestants, Catholics and Jews, have greater representation in Congress than in the general population. Jews, for example, make up 2 percent of the U.S. adult population but account for 6 percent of Congress. Other groups—including Buddhists, Mormons, Muslims and Orthodox Christians—are

represented in Congress in roughly equal proportion to their share of the U.S. public

The group that is most notably under-represented is the religiously unaffiliated. This group—also known as religious “nones”—now accounts for 23 percent of the general public but just 0.2 percent of Congress. As noted above, Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona is the only member who describes herself as religiously unaffiliated.

Particularly with everything that is going on in the world today, it’s not difficult to see that God certainly has His hand on what is happening on Capitol Hill. But the dominance of professing Christians in Congress certainly begs a question for the church itself to ponder:

With so many Christians in the House and Senate, why doesn’t our government and our culture reflect a more biblical society?