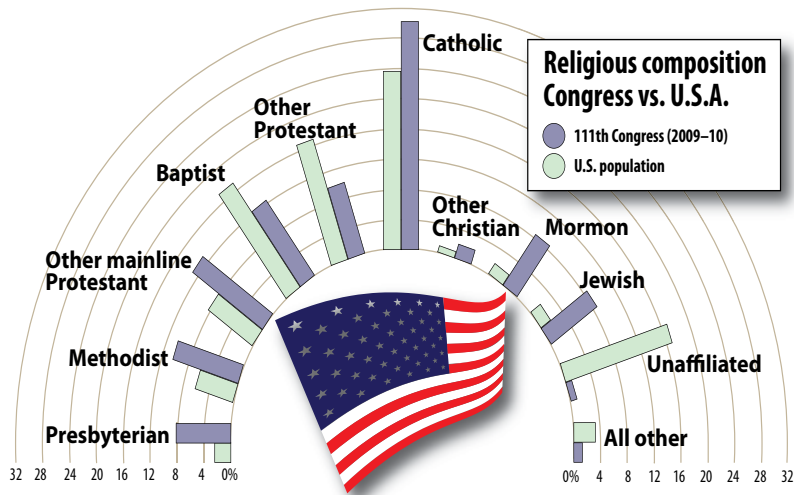


GO FIGURE

JACK MARCUM



GRAPHICS BY JEFFREY LAWRENCE

What the research shows

Fewer Americans declare a religious preference than did so a few decades ago, but in Congress the rate remains more than 99 percent. Either people elected to national office are more religious than others, or religion is viewed as politically advantageous. The fact that 39 members of Congress describe themselves only as “Protestant” or “Christian” suggests that, for some, political pragmatism plays a role.

Despite the disproportionately large number of mainline Protestants (including Presbyterians) in Congress (34 percent), their share has shrunk appreciably since the early 1960s, when they made up

55 percent of Congress, including 14 percent who were Presbyterians. The slack has been taken up primarily by Catholics (+61 percent, to 161), Jews (+275 percent, to 45), and Mormons (+100 percent, to 14).

Curiously, the rise in political clout among evangelical Protestants has not translated into similar percentages of representatives and senators. In particular, Pentecostals make up 4.4 percent of the population and nondenominational Protestants 4.5 percent, but only 0.4 percent and 0.9 percent, respectively, of Congress.

Almost no members of Congress identify with faiths outside Christianity and Judaism. There are two Muslims and two Buddhists, but no Baha’is, Hindus, Sikhs, Taoists or Zoroastrians. As the religious diversity of the country continues to grow, it will be interesting to see whether members of such groups make their way into Congress—and whether the number of unaffiliated senators and representatives comes more in line with their one-in-six share of the population. □

Religious representation in Congress

Here are some highlights on the religious composition of the 111th Congress (elected in November 2008), courtesy of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life:

- **Congress is more Protestant (55 percent) than the U.S. population** (51 percent), more Catholic (30 vs. 24 percent), more Jewish (8 vs. 2 percent), and more Mormon (3 vs. 2 percent).
- **One in six Americans (17 percent) lists no religious preference**, compared to only five members of Congress (1 percent).
- **There are 43 Presbyterians* in Congress**, or 8 percent of the total; by comparison, Presbyterians are only 3 percent of the U.S. population. Only two Protestant groups have more representation in Congress: Baptists (66) and Methodists (57).
- **There are 31 Presbyterians in the House** (7 percent), 12 in the Senate (12 percent).
- **More Presbyterians in Congress are Republicans** (24) than Democrats (19).

*All but one belong to the PC(USA).

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