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Membership of Foreign Policy Committees in the U.S. House of Representatives

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Key Foreign Policy Committees/Subcommittees by Ideological Caucus in the 116th Congress

Percentages below reflect the share that an ideological caucus's members represent within members of that political party on each foreign policy committee/subcommittee (as of November 30, 2020). Individual members can be members of multiple ideological caucuses. For example, 18 members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus are also members of the New Democrat Coalition in the 116th Congress. In addition, some Members of Congress choose not to affiliate with any ideological caucuses. See [page 2 for definitions](#).

Committee	Democrats					Republicans			
	All	Blue Dogs	New Dems	CPC	Non-New Dem CPC	All	Tuesday Group	RSC	Freedom Caucus
HASC	31 (100%)	6 (20%)	20 (65%)	10 (32%)	5 (16%)	25 (100%)	2 (8%)	22 (85%)	4 (15%)
HFAC	26 (100%)	3 (12%)	16 (62%)	8 (31%)	7 (27%)	21 (100%)	2 (10%)	11 (52%)	5 (24%)
HPSCI	13 (100%)	0 (0%)	10 (77%)	2 (15%)	1 (8%)	8 (100%)	3 (38%)	4 (50%)	0 (0%)
HAC-D	11 (100%)	2 (18%)	6 (55%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (100%)	0 (0%)	3 (43%)	0 (0%)
SFOPS	6 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (17%)	3 (50%)	3 (50%)	3 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (33%)	0 (0%)
Total¹	87 (100%)	11 (13%)	53 (61%)	23 (26%)	16 (18%)	64 (100%)	7 (11%)	41 (64%)	9 (14%)
Entire House	232 (100%)	26 (11%)	103 (43%)	94 (39%)	76 (32%)	199 (100%)	14 (7%)	146 (74%)	36 (18%)

¹ This is the total number of committee slots across HASC, HFAC, HPSCI, HAC-D, and SFOPS. Members serving on multiple foreign policy committees are counted for each assignment.

Key Foreign Policy Committees in the U.S. House of Representatives²

House Armed Services Committee (HASC): HASC has jurisdiction over key areas that determine U.S. defense policy. Its members write the annual National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which authorizes Pentagon spending. Nuclear weapons programs at the Department of Energy and ongoing military operations also fall under HASC's jurisdiction.

House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC): HFAC has jurisdiction over one of Congress' most significant constitutionally mandated powers, the right to declare war. Additionally, the committee considers sanctions, arms control efforts, humanitarian and security assistance, international law, arms sales, and other global matters.

House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI): HPSCI members oversee the various intelligence agencies as well as investigate national security threats. HPSCI and HFAC were two of the three committees in charge of gathering testimony and evidence during President Trump's impeachment trial.

House Appropriations Committee

- **Defense Subcommittee (HAC-D):** HAC-D sets funding for the Pentagon as well as intelligence activities. Right now, [over half of the federal discretionary budget](#) goes to the Pentagon.
- **State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee (SFOPS):** SFOPS is in charge of funding the State Department, USAID, export and trade functions, international financial institutions, and various international commissions and programs.

Major Ideological Caucuses

Many members of the House join smaller ideological caucuses within the Democratic Caucus or the Republican Conference. While there is ideological diversity within these caucuses, membership in an ideological caucus is a useful marker for a member's ideology relative to members of other ideological caucuses.

Democratic ideological caucuses

- **Blue Dog Coalition (Blue Dogs):** The Blue Dogs describe themselves as "dedicated to pursuing fiscally-responsible policies, ensuring a strong national defense, and transcending party lines to get things done for the American people."
- **New Democrat Coalition (New Dems):** The New Dems identify as "forward-thinking Democrats who are committed to pro-economic growth, pro-innovation, and fiscally responsible policies." New Dems are generally more moderate on foreign policy and national security and tend to vote against efforts to reduce the Pentagon budget.
- **Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC):** The CPC stands "for progressive policies that prioritize working Americans over corporate interests, fight economic and social inequality, and advance civil liberties." CPC members are more likely to support realigning the Pentagon budget towards investing in social services, such as healthcare and education, and away from corporate interests and defense contractors.

² While the committees here have much of the jurisdiction over foreign policy issues in the House, additional committees have some jurisdiction over foreign policy matters in addition to domestic issues. For example, the Energy and Water Development Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee funds nuclear programs at the Department of Energy. Additionally, the Budget Committee sets top-line spending levels for both defense and nondefense spending.

Republican ideological caucuses

- **Tuesday Group:** The Tuesday Group is described as a center-right coalition.
- **Republican Study Committee (RSC):** The RSC pushes for a “principled legislative agenda that will limit government, strengthen our national defense, boost America’s economy, preserve traditional values and balance our budget.
- **Freedom Caucus:** The Freedom Caucus advocates “for more conservative spending and policy ideals in the House.”

Leadership of Key Committees in the 116th and 117th Congresses

Committee	116th Congress		117th Congress	
	Chair (Democratic)	Ranking Member (Republican)	Chair (Democratic)	Ranking Member (Republican)
HASC	Adam Smith (New Dem, CPC)	Mac Thornberry (RSC)	Adam Smith (New Dem, CPC)	Mike Rogers (RSC)
HFAC	Eliot Engel (New Dem)	Michael McCaul (RSC)	Gregory Meeks (New Dem)	Michael McCaul (RSC)
HPSCI ³	Adam Schiff (New Dem)	Devin Nunes	TBD	TBD
HAC-D	Pete Visclosky	Ken Calvert	TBD ⁴	TBD
SFOPS	Nita Lowey	Hal Rogers	TBD ⁵	TBD

Data Analysis

Blue Dogs have more influence on the Pentagon than the State Department or the intelligence agencies.

- Overall, Blue Dogs’ share of foreign policy committee slots is roughly proportional to their share in the Democratic Caucus.
 - Blue Dog slots on HFAC are roughly proportional to their share in the Democratic Caucus.
- Blue Dogs have double the slots on HASC and HAC-D than they would have if slots were proportionate.
- There are no Blue Dogs on HPSCI or SFOPS, and no Blue Dogs lead foreign policy committees.

³ The Chair and Ranking Member for HPSCI are appointed by the Speaker and Minority Leader, respectively. Those appointments have not been formalized yet for the 117th Congress.

⁴ Subcommittee assignments for the House Appropriations Committee have not been finalized yet. Chairman Pete Visclosky is retiring, and Rep. Betty McCollum (no ideological caucus) is the most senior returning Democrat on HAC-D.

⁵ Subcommittee assignments for the House Appropriations Committee have not been finalized yet. Chairwoman Nita Lowey is retiring, and Rep. Barbara Lee (CPC) is the most senior returning Democrat on SFOPS.

The New Democrat Coalition held a disproportionately high share (61%) of Democratic seats on foreign policy committees.

- New Dems have the majority of Democratic seats on all foreign policy committees and subcommittees, except SFOPS.
 - HASC, HFAC, and HPSCI are among the top five committees where New Dems were most highly represented.⁶
- New Dems have 40% more foreign policy committee slots than they would if seats were proportionate to their share of the Democratic Caucus.
 - More than three-fourths of HPSCI members are New Dems, even though New Dems are only 43% of House Democrats.
- The leaders of HASC, HFAC, and HPSCI are all New Dems in the 116th Congress, which could continue in the 117th Congress.

CPC members are underrepresented in foreign policy committees, holding only 26% of seats.

- The CPC has *only two-thirds of the committee slots* it would have if slots were proportional to its share of the Democratic Caucus.
 - Excluding CPC members who are also in the New Democrat Coalition, CPC members only have 56% of the committee slots that they would have if seats were proportionate.
- There are no CPC members on HAC-D, which appropriates over half of the U.S. discretionary budget.
- There are only two CPC members on HPSCI, and one is a member of both the CPC and New Dems.
- The only committee/subcommittee with overrepresentation of the CPC is SFOPS, where the CPC makes up half of the subcommittee. A CPC member is also likely to lead SFOPS in the 117th Congress.
- HASC Chairman Adam Smith, a member of both the CPC and New Dems, is the only CPC member leading a foreign policy committee.

The Tuesday Group is highly represented in foreign policy committees, despite its small size.

- While the Tuesday Group has only 14 members, it has seven slots on foreign policy committees.
 - None of those slots are on HAC-D or SFOPS.
- The Tuesday Group has three of eight Republican seats on HPSCI.

The Republican Study Committee is underrepresented on foreign policy committees, except on HASC.

- While the RSC makes up nearly three-fourths of the Republican Conference, it only has about half of the slots on HFAC and HPSCI.
- The RSC has only one of three Republican slots on SFOPS and only three of seven Republican slots on HAC-D.
- The RSC makes up 85% of Republicans on HASC.
- Both HASC and HFAC are led by RSC members.

The Freedom Caucus is overrepresented on HFAC and underrepresented elsewhere.

- Almost a quarter of HFAC Republicans are in the Freedom Caucus, but only 18% of House Republicans are in the caucus.
- Freedom Caucus members have a roughly proportionate share of slots on HASC.
- There are no Freedom Caucus members on HPSCI, HAC-D, or SFOPS.

⁶ See CPCC's [Ideological Composition of House Committees \(116th Congress\)](#)

Policy implications

Committees influence and shape policies under their jurisdiction so their ideological representation has significant implications. Foreign policy committees and subcommittees guide U.S. foreign policy priorities and appropriate U.S. taxpayer dollars to military and diplomatic functions. Progressive priorities -- such as reining in military spending, protecting civil liberties, and empowering vulnerable communities -- are at a structural disadvantage due to the underrepresentation of progressive members in relevant committees. For example:

- CPC members have struggled to advance legislation limiting the transfer of military equipment to state and local law enforcement (H.R. 1714 and H.R. 7143) as a part of the NDAA.
- Both CPC and Freedom Caucus members have called for reform of mass surveillance programs. However, neither caucus is well-represented on HPSCI, which has jurisdiction over these programs, or HAC-D, which controls funding for intelligence agencies.
- While there is some agreement between CPC and Freedom Caucus members on cutting Pentagon waste, neither caucus is represented on HAC-D, which controls military spending.

For too long, U.S. foreign policy has been overly militarized, increasing the prospect of war and violence abroad as well as at home through militarization of the police. Lack of ideological balance in key foreign policy committees narrows the agenda and room for debate while cementing the influence of the foreign policy establishment and bolstering corporate interests that benefit from a militarized status quo. The result is more Pentagon spending and more military-led programs. The needs of working families, women, BIPOC communities, LGBTQIA people, and other marginalized communities often go neglected.

Changing the ideological balance

The start of each Congress is the critical period to adjust the ideological balance on foreign policy committees. The Democratic Steering and Policy Committee and the Republican Steering Committee will soon recommend committee assignments for new and returning members. For members of underrepresented caucuses to gain seats on these committees, they need to actively pursue those committee assignments and gain the support of party leadership and their respective steering committees. While returning members generally have first claim on committees they served in the previous Congress, there is natural churn in every Congress.⁷

- **HASC:** Five Democrats and seven Republicans are not returning in the 117th Congress.
- **HFAC:** Chairman Eliot Engel lost his primary in 2020 and will not be returning. An additional three Democrats have waivers to serve on the committee and are not guaranteed to keep their spots. Three Republicans are also leaving the committee.
- **HPSCI:** Members are term-limited to four Congresses (eight years) on the committee. However, appointments are made by the Speaker and Minority Leader so they tend to closely follow the policy views of leadership.⁸
- **HAC-D:** Chairman Pete Visclosky is retiring, meaning there will be a change in subcommittee leadership.
- **SFOPS:** Chairwoman Nita Lowey is retiring, meaning there will be a change in subcommittee leadership.

CPC thanks Just Foreign Policy, the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, and Win Without War for their comments and insights.

⁷ For more, see [CPC's Potential Vacancies in the 117th Congress](#)

⁸ Unlike the other foreign policy committees, leaders and members of HPSCI are recommended by the Speaker and Minority Leader rather than by their parties' steering committees. A range of progressive and conservative organizations have called for modifications in HPSCI's structure. See, for example, [Strengthening Congressional Oversight of the Intelligence Community](#) from Demand Progress, R Street Institute, Electronic Frontier Foundation, and FreedomWorks.