

Congress's religious profile unaltered

by [Daniel Burke](#) in the [February 8, 2011](#) issue

An influx of Republicans has colored the House of Representatives red, but the midterm elections did little to alter the religious composition of Capitol Hill.

Like the U.S. public, Protestants make up more than half (57 percent) of the 112th Congress, and Catholics constitute roughly a quarter (29 percent), according to a study by the nonpartisan Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

The number of Protestants in Congress has slowly dropped from 394 in the early 1960s to 304 in 2011, declining by several percentage points each decade. This year's congressional class added 12 Protestants, however.

Nearly seven in ten Republicans in Congress are Protestant, and there remains a greater percentage of Methodists (10 percent), Episcopalians/Anglicans (8 percent) and Presbyterians (8 percent) in Congress than in the American public. Baptists, by contrast, are underrepresented, according to Pew's study: they make up nearly 17 percent of the population, but less than 13 percent of Congress.

No religious group appears to be as underrepresented on Capitol Hill as atheists, however. About one-sixth of the U.S. population (16 percent) identifies as religiously unaffiliated, according to Pew. While six members of the new Congress don't specify a religious affiliation, none say they are unaffiliated.

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