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Membership of Foreign Policy Committees in the U.S. House of Representatives: 117th-118th Congress

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Introduction

One of the most important indicators of priorities in Congress is the ideological composition of members assigned to sit on committees. Congressional committees are where members debate and modify bills, provide oversight and accountability over various government agencies, and much more. The ideological composition of committees is a significant matter when it comes to passing legislation that the full House or Senate will consider. Committee members affiliated with [certain ideological caucuses](#) advocate for issues such as universal childcare, Medicare for all, and less U.S. militarism around the world. In contrast, [other ideological caucuses](#) may not support investment in social needs, but do support continued increases in military spending, which siphons resources from real human needs. This explainer compares the ideological composition of the various foreign policy committees in the U.S. House of Representatives during the 117th Congress to the current 118th Congress.¹

¹ This explainer examines House committees exclusively as Senators generally do not hold membership in ideological caucuses. For more on the ideological composition of all House committees in the 117th Congress, read our [explainer](#). For the ideological composition of foreign policy House committees in the 116th Congress, see our [explainer](#). For the ideological composition of committees in the 116th Congress, read our [explainer](#).

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

House Armed Services Committee (HASC): HASC has jurisdiction over critical areas of U.S. defense policy. For example, its members write the annual National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which authorizes Pentagon spending and sets policies for various defense-related matters.

House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC): HFAC has jurisdiction over one of Congress' most significant constitutionally mandated powers, the power to declare war. Additionally, the committee considers sanctions, 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, such as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the National Security Agency (NSA). HPSCI also investigates and monitors national security issues and threats.

House Appropriations Committee

- **Defense Subcommittee (HAC-D):** HAC-D sets funding for the Pentagon as well as defense-related programs at other agencies.
- **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 other members.

Democratic Ideological Caucuses

- **Blue Dog Coalition (Blue Dogs):** The Blue Dogs comprises 8 Democratic members (4 percent of the House Democrats). It describes itself as "dedicated to pursuing fiscally-responsible policies, ensuring a strong national defense, and transcending party lines to get things done for the American people."

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.

- **Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC):** The CPC comprises 101 Democratic members (47 percent of House Democrats). In its words, the CPC stands “for progressive policies that prioritize working Americans over corporate interests, fight economic and social inequality, and advance civil liberties.”
- **New Democrat Coalition (NDC):** The NDC comprises 98 Democratic members (46 percent of House Democrats) and identifies as “forward-thinking Democrats who are committed to pro-economic growth, pro-innovation, and fiscally responsible policies.”

Republican Ideological Caucuses

- **Freedom Caucus:** The Freedom Caucus comprises 45 Republican members (20 percent of House Republicans) and advocates “for more conservative spending and policy ideals in the House.”
- **Republican Governance Group (RGG):** The RGG comprises 42 Republican members (19 percent of House Republicans) and “advocates for common-sense legislation on issues including healthcare, energy, infrastructure and workforce development.”
- **Republican Study Committee (RSC):** The RSC comprises 156 Republican members (70 percent of House Republicans) and 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.”

Key Foreign Policy Committees and Subcommittees by Ideological Caucus in the 117th and 118th Congress

The percentages below reflect the share of ideological caucus members — in their respective political parties — on each committee/subcommittee.³ Individual members can be members of multiple ideological caucuses. For example, 20 members of CPC were also members of NDC in the 117th Congress. In addition, some Members of Congress choose not to affiliate with any ideological caucuses.

Table 1: Ideological Caucus Composition of Foreign Policy Committees and Subcommittees in the U.S. House of Representatives during the 117th Congress.

Committee	Democrats					Republicans			
	All	Blue Dogs	New Dems	CPC	Non-New Dem CPC ⁴	All	RGG	RSC	Freedom Caucus

³ The CPCC calculated these percentages by dividing the number of members belonging to ideological caucuses on key committees by the total Democratic or Republican members of the committee.

⁴ This column refers to CPC members who were not NDC members

<i>HASC</i>	31 (100%)	4 (13%)	21 (68%)	12 (39%)	6 (19%)	28 (100%)	5 (18%)	22 (79%)	5 (18%)
<i>HFAC</i>	26 (100%)	4 (15%)	17 (65%)	9 (35%)	7 (27%)	24 (100%)	8 (33%)	16 (67%)	4 (17%)
<i>HPSCI</i>	13 (100%)	1 (8%)	10 (77%)	2 (15%)	1 (8%)	10 (100%)	4 (40%)	7 (70%)	0 (0%)
<i>HAC-D</i>	9 (100%)	1 (11%)	5 (56%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (100%)	2 (29%)	3 (43%)	0 (0%)
<i>SFOPS</i>	7 (100%)	0 (0%)	2 (29%)	4 (57%)	4 (57%)	4 (100%)	1 (25%)	2 (50%)	0 (0%)
Total⁵	86 (100%)	10 (12%)	55 (64%)	27 (31%)	18 (21%)	73 (100%)	20 (27%)	50 (68%)	9 (12%)

Table 2: Ideological Caucus Composition of Foreign Policy Committees and Subcommittees in the U.S. House of Representatives during the 118th Congress.⁶

Committee	Democrats					Republicans			
	All	Blue Dogs	New Dems	CPC	Non-New Dem CPC	All	RGG	RSC	Freedom Caucus
<i>HASC</i>	27 (100%)	1 (4%)	19 (70%)	12 (44%)	6 (22%)	31 (100%)	7 (23%)	23 (74%)	4 (13%)
<i>HFAC</i>	16 (100%)	0 (0%)	12 (75%)	4 (25%)	3 (19%)	27 (100%)	6 (22%)	17 (63%)	5 (19%)
<i>HPSCI</i>	11 (100%)	1 (9%)	10 (91%)	2 (18%)	1 (9%)	14 (100%)	4 (29%)	10 (71%)	0 (0%)
<i>HAC-D</i>	7 (100%)	1 (14%)	4 (57%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	10 (100%)	3 (30%)	4 (40%)	0 (0%)
<i>SFOPS</i>	4 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	3 (75%)	7 (100%)	1 (14%)	5 (71%)	0 (0%)
Total⁷	65 (100%)	3 (5%)	46 (71%)	21 (32%)	13 (20%)	89 (100%)	21 (24%)	59 (66%)	9 (10%)

⁵ 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.

⁶ Control of the House switched from Democrats in the 117th Congress to Republicans in the 118th Congress. Usually the majority party has more seats on committees than the minority.

⁷ 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.

Data Analysis of the 117th Congress

The Blue Dog Coalition

- Blue Dogs held more seats on HASC and HFAC than other foreign policy committees, which meant they had more input on the NDAA and foreign policy matters than on intelligence agencies or appropriations.
- Blue Dogs had the same number of seats on HASC and HFAC relative to those two committees.
- Blue Dogs had the same number of seats on HPSCI and HAC-D relative to those two committees.
- There were no Blue Dogs on SFOPS, meaning their general support for a [strong military and national security](#) were not represented by a Blue Dog member on the spending committee that focuses on diplomacy and humanitarian aid.

The New Democratic Coalition

- The New Dems held a disproportionately high share (64%) of Democratic seats on foreign policy committees compared to the other major Democratic ideological caucuses.
- New Dems had the majority of Democratic seats on foreign policy committees/subcommittees, except SFOPS.
- [HASC and HPSCI](#) are among the top five committees in the House where New Dems were most represented.⁸
- The high share of New Dems could mean they exerted more influence over foreign policy matters than CPC or Blue Dog members did in committee.

Congressional Progressive Caucus

- There were no CPC members on HAC-D, which appropriates more than half of the U.S. discretionary budget.
- The only committee/subcommittee with overrepresentation of the CPC is SFOPS, where the CPC makes up half of the subcommittee while making up 45% of all House Democrats. The chair of SFOPS was Congresswoman Barbara Lee, a CPC member and chair emeritus.
- HASC Chairman Adam Smith, a CPC and New Dem member, was the only CPC member leading a foreign policy committee.

The Republican Governance Group

⁸ [Committees with the most NDC members](#) were: 1. HPSCI (77%) 2. Ethics (75%) 3. HASC (68%) 4. Agriculture (67%) - tie 5. Modernization - Select (67%) - tie. Percentages of NDC members are relative to the number of Democrats on these committees.

- The RGG and the Freedom Caucus had the same number of seats and representation on HASC, meaning the more conservative Freedom Caucus and the more mainstream RGG had equal votes on the NDAA at the committee level.
- Most of the RGG's representation was on HFAC, meaning the more moderate Republican ideological caucus likely had more input on diplomacy, aid, sanctions, and declaring war.

The Republican Study Committee

- The RSC held a disproportionately high share (68%) of Republican seats on foreign policy committees compared to the other major Republican ideological caucuses.
- The RSC held a majority of seats on all foreign policy committees except HAC-D. On SFOPS, it held half of all Republican seats.
- The RSC makes up 79% of Republicans on HASC, meaning it had significant input on the NDAA.

The Freedom Caucus

- The Freedom Caucus only had seats on HASC and HFAC and held no seats on HPSCI, HAC-D, and SFOPS. This means they had more influence on the NDAA, decisions to go to war, sanctions, and humanitarian aid.

Data Analysis of the 118th Congress

The Blue Dog Coalition

- Blue Dogs hold only three seats on the foreign policy committees, losing seven seats when compared to the 117th Congress.
- Among the foreign policy committees, Blue Dogs have more seats on defense/national security-related committees (HASC, HPSCI, and HAC-D) and zero representation on committees that consider humanitarian support (HFAC and SFOPS).

The New Democratic Coalition

- New Dems continue to hold the highest share of seats (71%) among Democrats on the foreign policy committees.
- Despite losing the majority, the percentage of New Dems on the foreign policy committees increased from 64% in the 117th Congress to 71% in the 118th Congress.

Congressional Progressive Caucus

- CPC members continue to have zero representation on HAC-D, which appropriates over half the discretionary budget, meaning likely support to reign in excessive Pentagon spending and waste, fraud, and abuse at the agency is not present on the committee that oversees its funding.
- The foreign policy committee with the most CPC members is HASC; however, CPC membership on HASC is less than half of all the Democrats on that committee.
- More than half of the Democratic seats on SFOPS are held by CPC members.

The Republican Governance Group

- About one-fourth of the Republican Conference is represented on the foreign policy committees, meaning [mainstream](#) Republican views on the NDAA, security assistance, and arms sales are underrepresented.

The Republican Study Committee

- The RSC continues to hold a disproportionately high share (66%) of Republican seats on foreign policy committees compared to the other major Republican ideological caucuses.
- On every foreign policy committee (except HAC-D), the RSC holds over half the Republican seats.
- Because the RSC has over half the seats on HASC, HFAC, HPSCI, and SFOPS, it has considerable input on the NDAA, congressional war powers, sanctions, oversight of the intelligence agencies, and funding for humanitarian assistance.

The Freedom Caucus

- The Freedom Caucus has the least number of seats on the foreign policy committees. It has zero representation on HPSCI, HAC-D, and SFOPS, meaning its conservative spending views are likely not represented on two critical foreign policy appropriations subcommittees.

Policy implications

Committees influence and shape policies under their jurisdiction, so their ideological representation has significant implications. More specifically, foreign policy committees and subcommittees guide U.S. foreign policy priorities and appropriate U.S. taxpayer dollars to military and diplomatic functions. Ideological values can be underrepresented in committee activities, such as oversight of federal agencies and deciding which bills the full chamber votes on, due to underrepresentation of relevant ideological caucus members on committees. For example:

- CPC and Freedom Caucus members have called for [reforms to mass surveillance programs](#). However, both CPC and the Freedom caucus are not well represented on HPSCI, which has jurisdiction over these programs.

- While there is some [agreement](#) between CPC and Freedom Caucus members on cutting Pentagon waste, neither caucus was represented on HAC-D, which controls military spending in the House.

Conclusion

For too long, excessive Pentagon spending and funding for deadly weapons programs have centered U.S. foreign policy on militarism. This reckless spending increases the prospect of war and violence abroad, which also surfaces here at home through the increased [militarization of the police](#). Moreover, the lack of ideological balance in key foreign policy committees narrows the room for debate while cementing the status-quo U.S. foreign policy, which generally holds the idea that the U.S.' role in the world should be military-led. This thinking takes focus away from prioritizing diplomacy, peacebuilding, and human rights.