

# The Congress

Unit 5: Congress, Part 1

# Why a Bicameral Legislature?

- Our Congress is bicameral, meaning it has two houses
- The larger house, which is supposedly the “common man’s house,” is the House of Representatives
- The smaller house, which is for “the elite” of America is the Senate
- Precedent: Parliament had two houses as well as many states had bicameral legislatures.
- The Great Compromise
- Separation of Powers-
  - House is will of the people
  - Senate is the will of the states



# House of Representatives

- 435 total members (apportioned by population and given a fixed number in 1929)
- Each state gets at least one member no matter size of pop
  - 2 year term (no limits)- allows for rapid turnover
  - Each state is divided into one or more congressional districts (citizens of those districts are **constituents**)
  - Districts are determined by the **census**, every 10 years
- Each state should have a equal (similar) number of citizens per district (*Wesberry v. Sanders*- )
- Role: Focus on the needs of their districts as well as the nation.

# CONGRESSIONAL SEATS

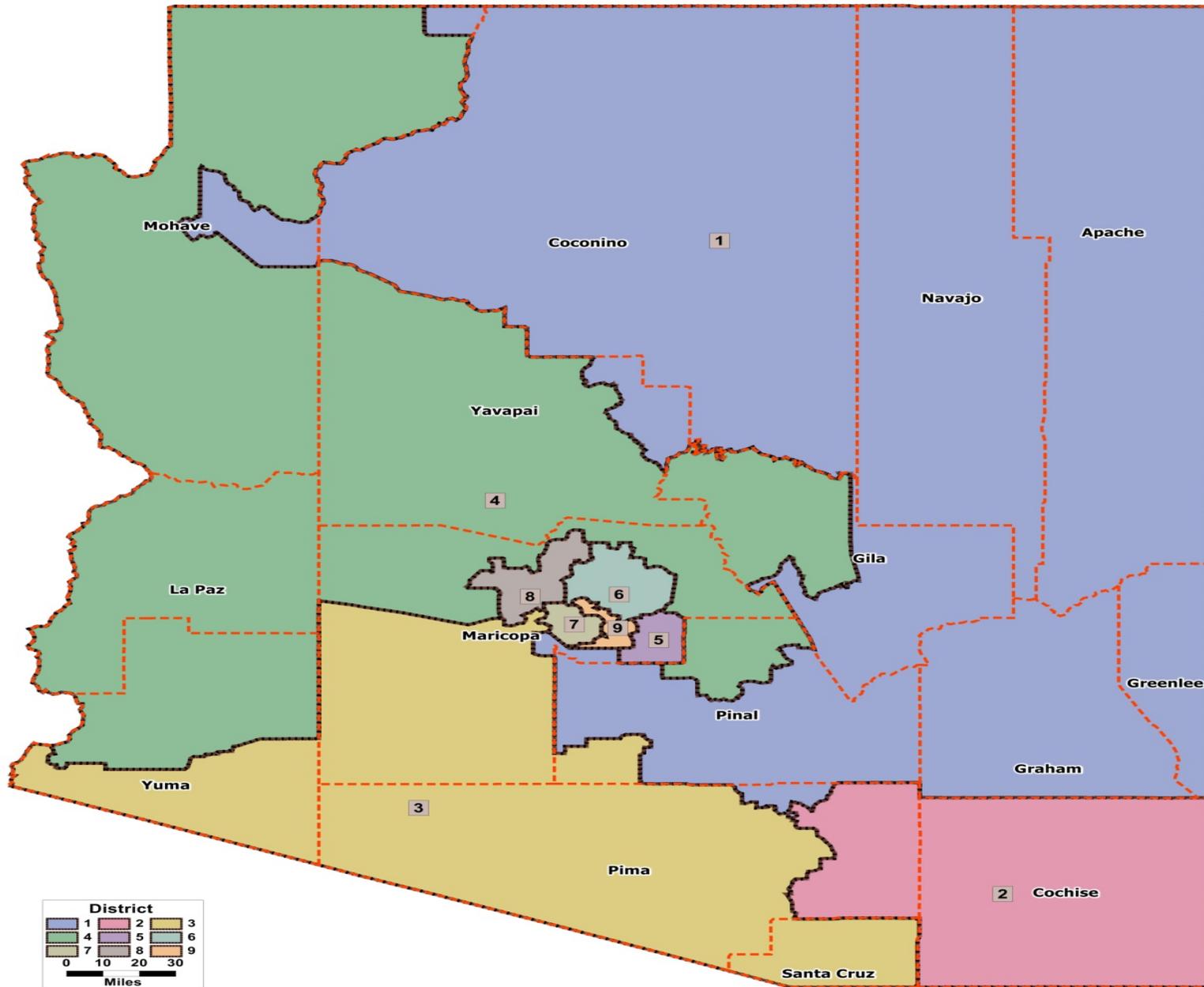
2010  
OFFICIAL RESULTS



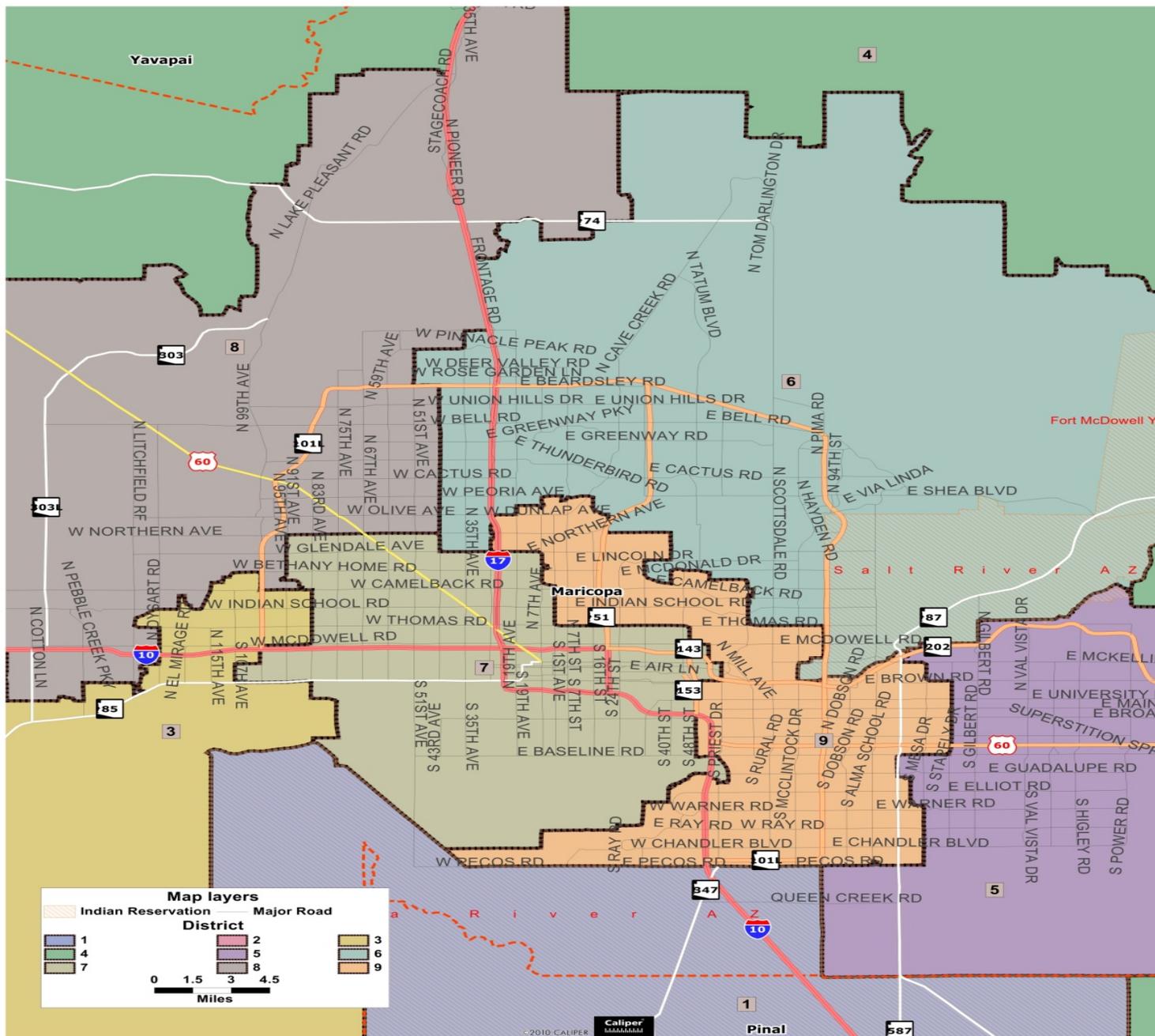
**GAINED**  
**LOST**  
**NO CHANGE**

United States  
**Census**  
**2010**

# Final Congressional Districts - Approved 1/17/12

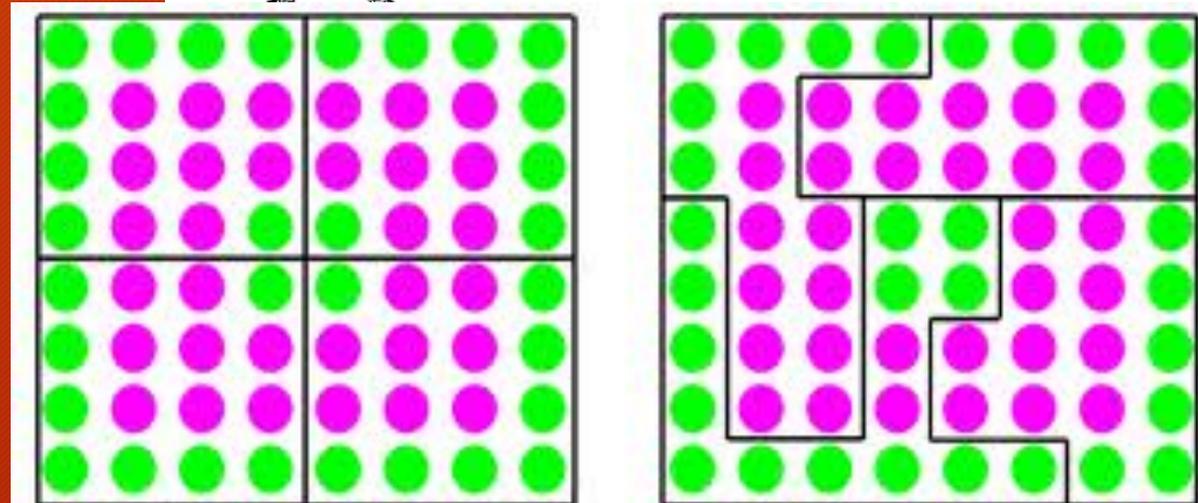


# Final Congressional Districts - Approved 1/17/12 - Maricopa County



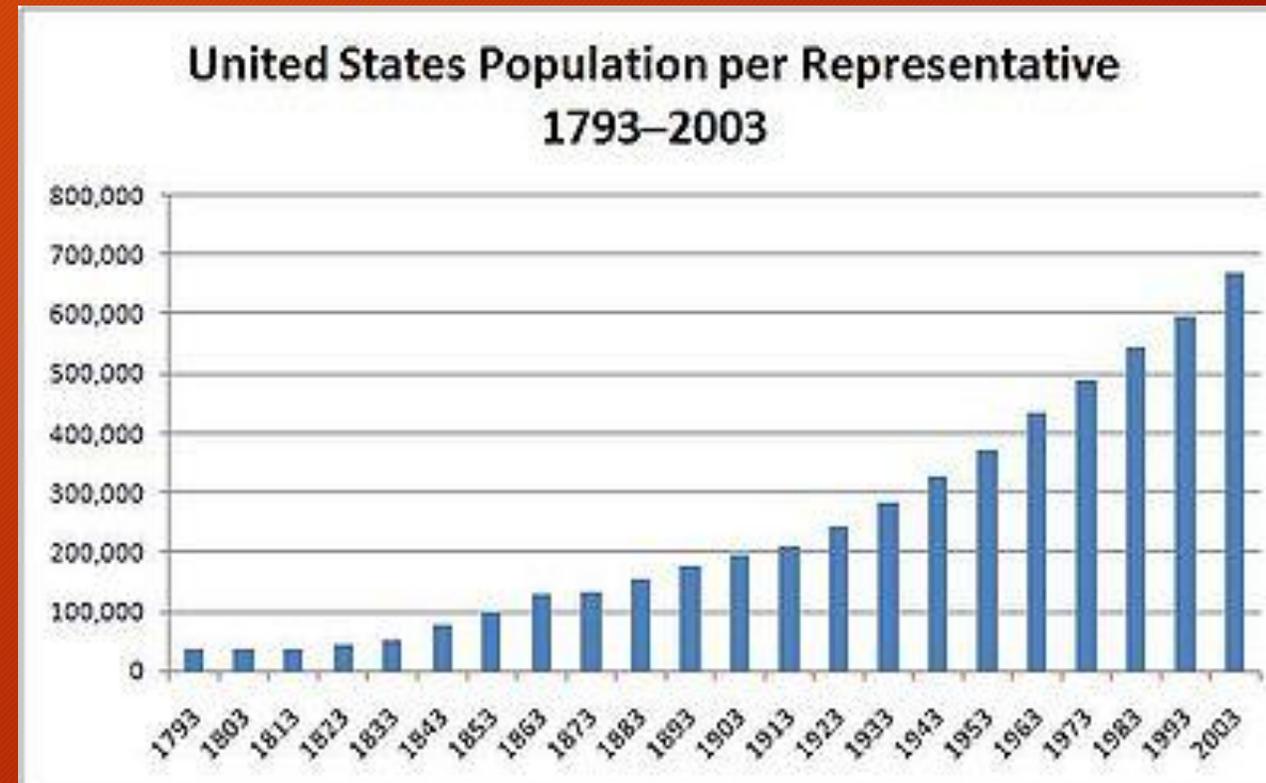
# Gerrymandering

- **Gerrymandering**- shape a district in order to have a majority of specific group within it.
- Named after Elbridge Gerry (Massachusetts) State legislatures decide their federal congressional districts.
- The party which controls the state legislature will design districts to best benefit their party.
- Gerrymandering is an abuse of power.



# Congressional Districts

- There are **435** seats in the US House of Representatives (#capped by federal law). Each US house member today represents approximately 650,000 constituents.



# Senate

- 100 members (2 per state)
- Role: Make decisions which are best for the entire state and nation.
- 6 year term (no limit)
- Originally chosen by state legislature- 17<sup>th</sup> amendment
- Staggered election cycle
  - ~33 senators every 2 years
  - - “When the Founding Fathers agreed to give six-year terms to Senators, they also decided to stagger the elections, so that a third of the Senate was up for election every two years. With this staggered turnover, the Founding Fathers wanted to ensure stability in the Senate, and encourage Senators to deliberate measures over time, rather than risk a rapid turnover of the entire chamber every six years.”

# Requirements for the House

- 25 years old
- U.S. citizen for at least 7 years
- Must live in the state you are elected in



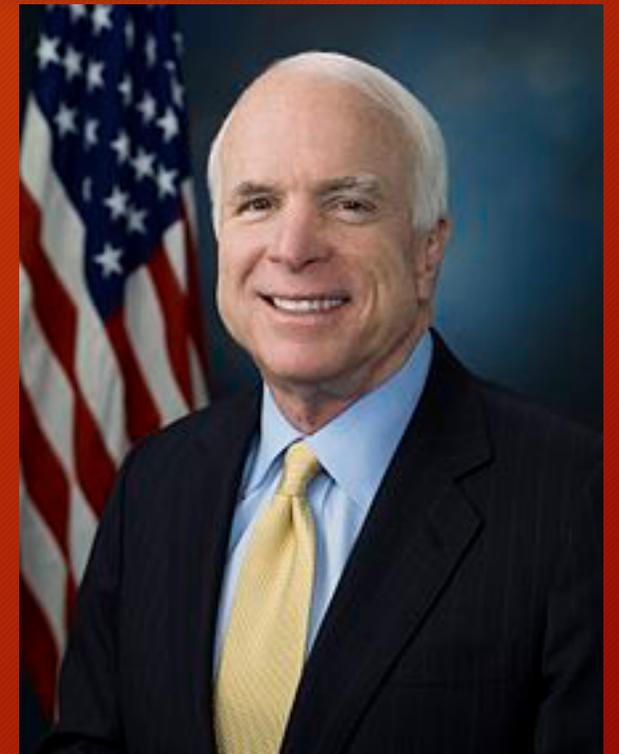
Rep. Kyrsten Sinema  
(AZ 9<sup>th</sup>) Dem

# Requirements for the Senate

- 30 Years Old
- U.S. Citizen for 9 Years
- Must live in the state you are elected in



**Sen. Jeff Flake (R-AZ)**



**Sen. John McCain (R-AZ)**

# Congressional Demographics

- What is the demographic composition of Congress? What groups are most underrepresented and why?
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/01/05/the-new-congress-is-80-percent-white-80-percent-male-and-92-percent-christian/>