

## Expanded religious diversity in Congress a welcome sight

Maureen Fiedler | Jan. 8, 2013 NCR Today

Americans are not very fond of Congress these days. And it's understandable. Gridlock and political blabber often reign supreme.

But one part of congressional identity that is fluid is the slowly growing religious diversity in the new 113th Congress. In addition to two Muslims elected in previous cycles (Keith Ellison of Minnesota and Andre Carson of Indiana), the House of Representatives now has its first Hindu, Rep. Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii, and the Senate has its first Buddhist, Sen. Mazie Hirono, also of Hawaii. In fact, Gabbard took her oath on the Bhagavad Gita, the holy book of Hinduism, without all the controversy that erupted when Keith Ellison took his oath on the Quran a few years ago.

Catholics had noticeable gains in 2012, picking up seven seats for a total of 163. They, along with Protestants generally, Jews and Mormons make up a greater percentage of Congress than of the U.S. population as a whole. Underrepresented religious groups include Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses, among others.

Most interesting in the new data are the unaffiliated, sometimes dubbed the "nones." In the general population, just under 20 percent of Americans now claim no religious affiliation. In the new Congress, only one member (Democrat Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona) called herself "unaffiliated," but 10 new members refused to name a religious affiliation. In the previous Congress, Pete Stark of California (who was defeated this year) was the only atheist. And Members of Congress generally would rather be caught dead than thought of as irreligious or non-religious. That may be changing.

What does all this mean in terms of a better-functioning Congress? Probably nothing. There is no evidence that Hindus or Buddhists or even the unaffiliated are any better at breaking gridlock than are Protestants, Catholics and Jews. But it does show a new openness to religious diversity among voters and in Congress itself. And welcoming diversity is a healthy American trend.

[Read more](#) [1] about the religious composition of the new Congress.

---

**Source URL (retrieved on 07/26/2017 - 19:52):** <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/expanded-religious-diversity-congress-welcome-sight>

### Links:

[1] <http://www.pewforum.org/Government/Faith-on-the-Hill--The-Religious-Composition-of-the-113th-Congress.aspx>