



Congressional Tenure Analysis and Benchmarks

July 2026

INTRODUCTION

Leadership Now Project's analysis products aim to create a data-driven foundation for change. This analysis of Congressional tenure, benchmarked across parties and other nations, provides a fact base for reform by Democrats and Republicans alike.

The picture this data paints is clear: we have a generational gap in US political leadership.

Congress must evolve - encouraging timely retirements and opportunities for rising leaders - to restore credibility, foster innovation, and improve effectiveness of our governing institutions. The purpose of this work is to encourage leaders to proactively support new talent that better reflects the electorate, not to single out individuals.

We look forward to partnering with leaders ready to take this forward, and want to applaud recent actions, like the retirements of highly-tenured Members of Congress, such as Rep. Nancy Pelosi and Rep. Jerry Nadler, as the type of proactive leadership we need.

For additional information, please visit www.leadershipnowproject.org or contact Dan Mathis, Head of Strategy and Product, at dan.mathis@leadershipnowproject.org

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: A GENERATIONAL GAP IN U.S. POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

- **Aging Leadership vs. the Electorate, Particularly for Democrats**

- U.S. legislative leaders are far older than the voting population, creating a disconnect with today's economy and society.
 - i. *Half of registered voters are under 55; 80% of U.S. Senators are 55+.*
 - ii. *53 House members will be 75+ by 2026.*
 - iii. *CEOs retire at ~62; Congressional Democrats retire at ~70.*
- Democrat leaders are older than their Republican counterparts
 - i. *Democratic committees lack term limits, Republicans adopted a three-term (six year) limit in Gingrich's Contract for America in 1995*
 - ii. *35 House Democrats and 17 House Republicans will be over 75 years old by '26 midterms*
 - iii. *In the House, 3 Democrats have died since the most recent election*

- **Global Comparison**

- In peer democracies, leaders are typically younger and retire earlier due to systemic norms.
 - i. *20%+ of U.S. lawmakers are over 70 vs. <4% in most Western democracies*
 - ii. *Legislative leaders abroad average 50s–early 60s; House Democratic committee chairs average 70+*

- **Public Support for Reform**

- Broad voter support for age limits: *2/3 of voters favor retirement at 75*
- North Dakota set precedent in 2024 with a ballot initiative passing an age cap of 81 (61% approval)

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

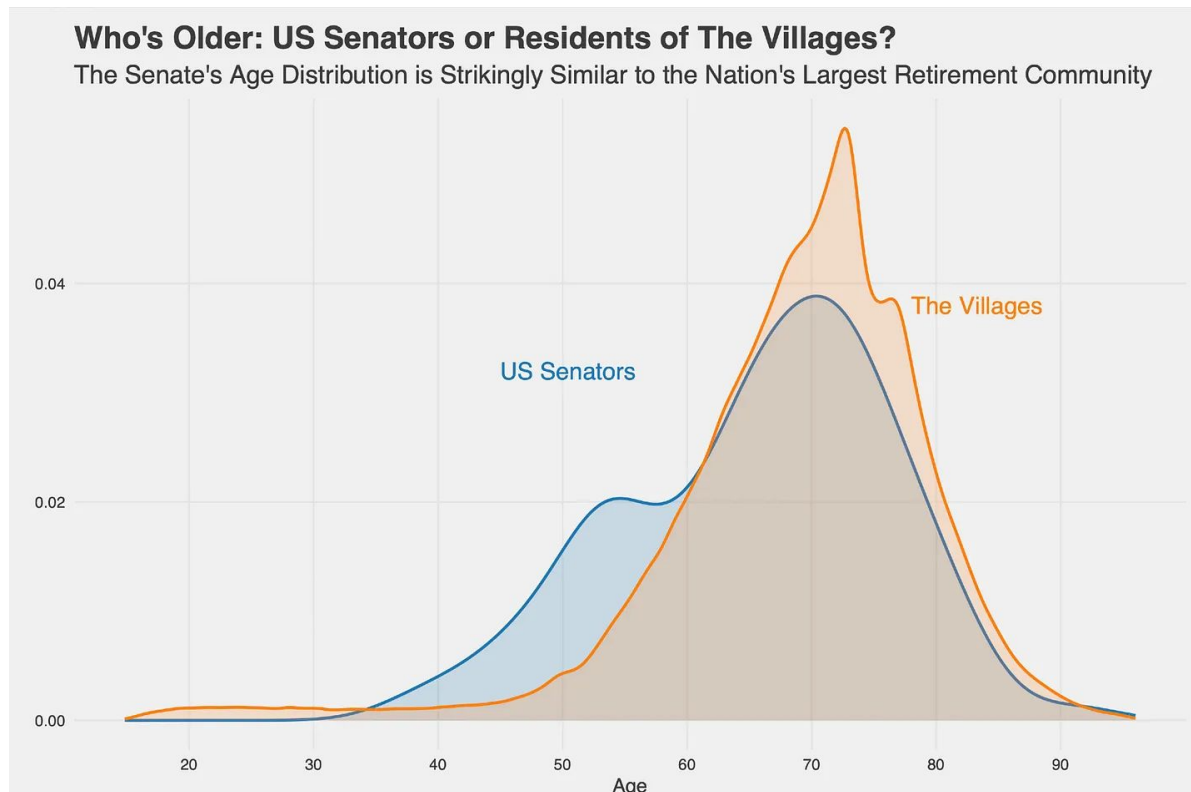
For the 120th Congress's Democratic Caucus Rules, we recommend

- 1. Adopt term limits for Democratic House committee leadership.** Cap service as chair or ranking member at four terms (eight years).
- 2. Base House committee appointments on merit.** Make demonstrated expertise and capability, not seniority, the primary criterion for committee leadership positions.
- 3. Establish a retirement norm in the House, Senate, and beyond.** Set the expectation that members do not seek reelection after age 75, and that they begin a defined succession-planning process at 70.

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Supporting Analysis

AGE DISTRIBUTION OF DEMOCRATIC SENATORS: MORE REFLECTIVE OF A RETIREMENT COMMUNITY THAN THE GENERAL POPULATION

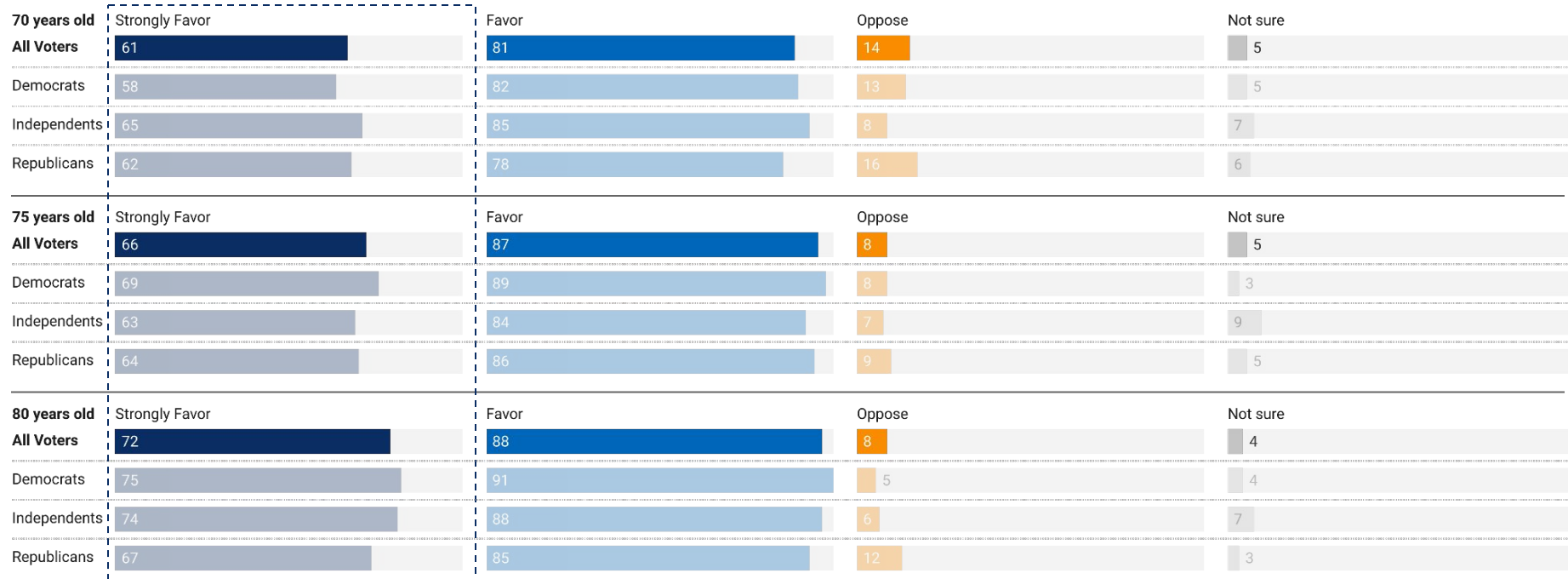


The Villages is the World's Largest Retirement Community in Central Florida

BIPARTISAN SUPPORT FOR REFORMS: A MAJORITY OF VOTERS SUPPORT A 70 YEAR OLD CONGRESSIONAL RETIREMENT AGE

Support for Requiring Members of Congress to Retire When They Reach Certain Age Thresholds, % of Registered Voters

Strongly Favor Favor Oppose Not sure

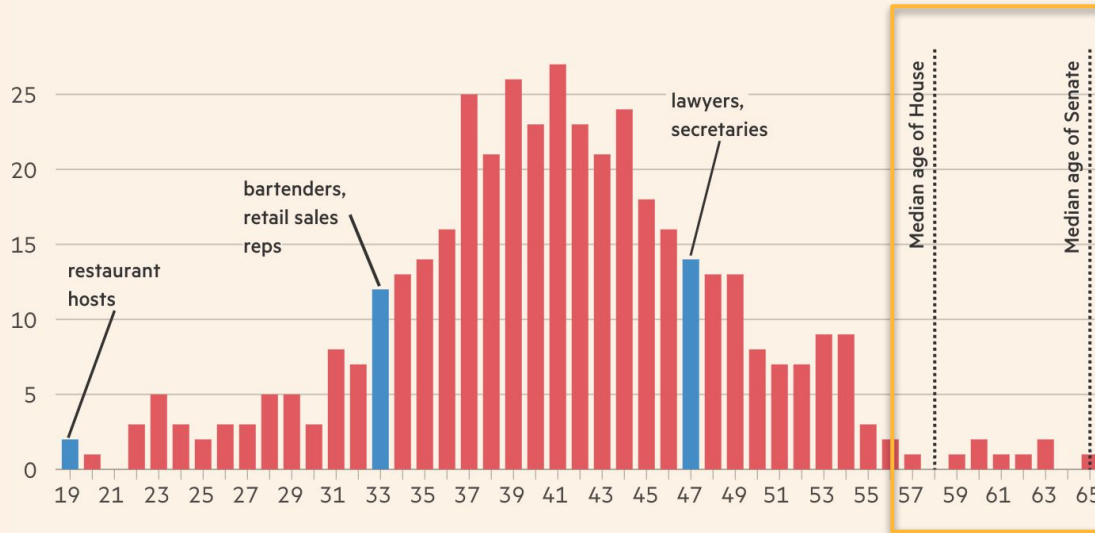


U.S. LAWMAKERS ARE SIGNIFICANTLY OLDER THAN MOST PROFESSIONS: SENATORS HAVE THE HIGHEST MEDIAN AGE OF ANY PROFESSION

US JOB CATEGORIES BY MEDIAN AGE

Compared to other jobs, lawmakers are exceptionally old

Number of job categories by median age of workers, with select examples for highlighted ages



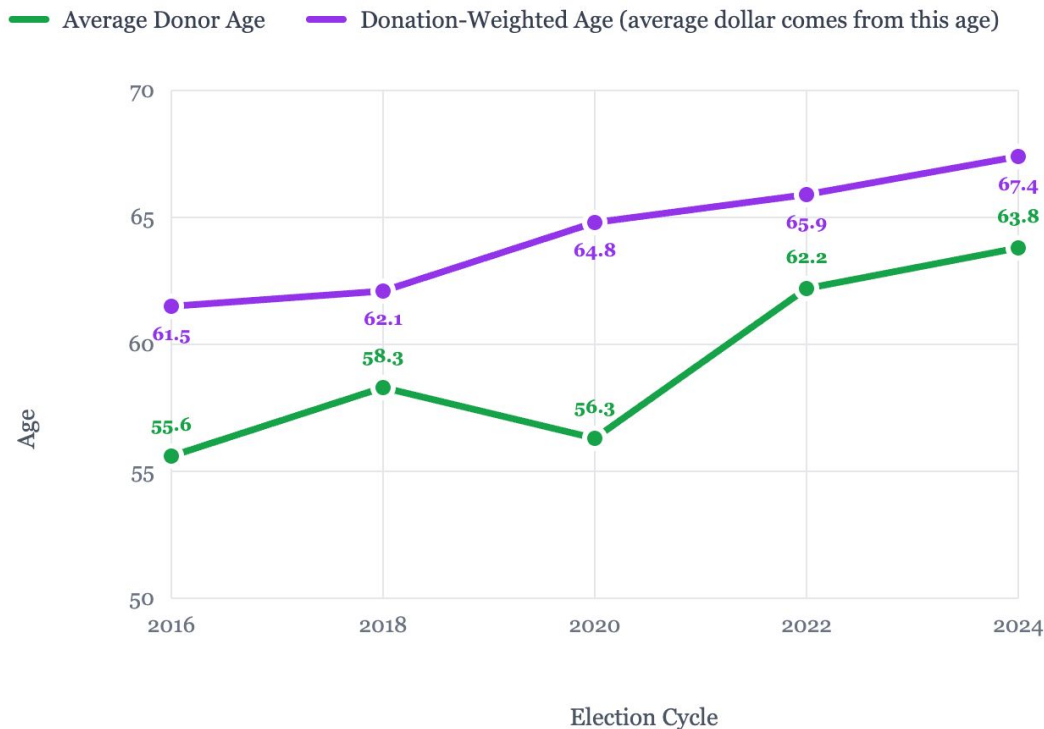
Source: [JPUMS-CPS, University of Minnesota](#), [FiveThirtyEight](#) • Note: Job data is for July 2023
FT graphic: Eva Xiao

FINANCIAL TIMES

The average **retirement** age of a CEO is 62; the average age a Congressional Democrat retires is ~70 years old

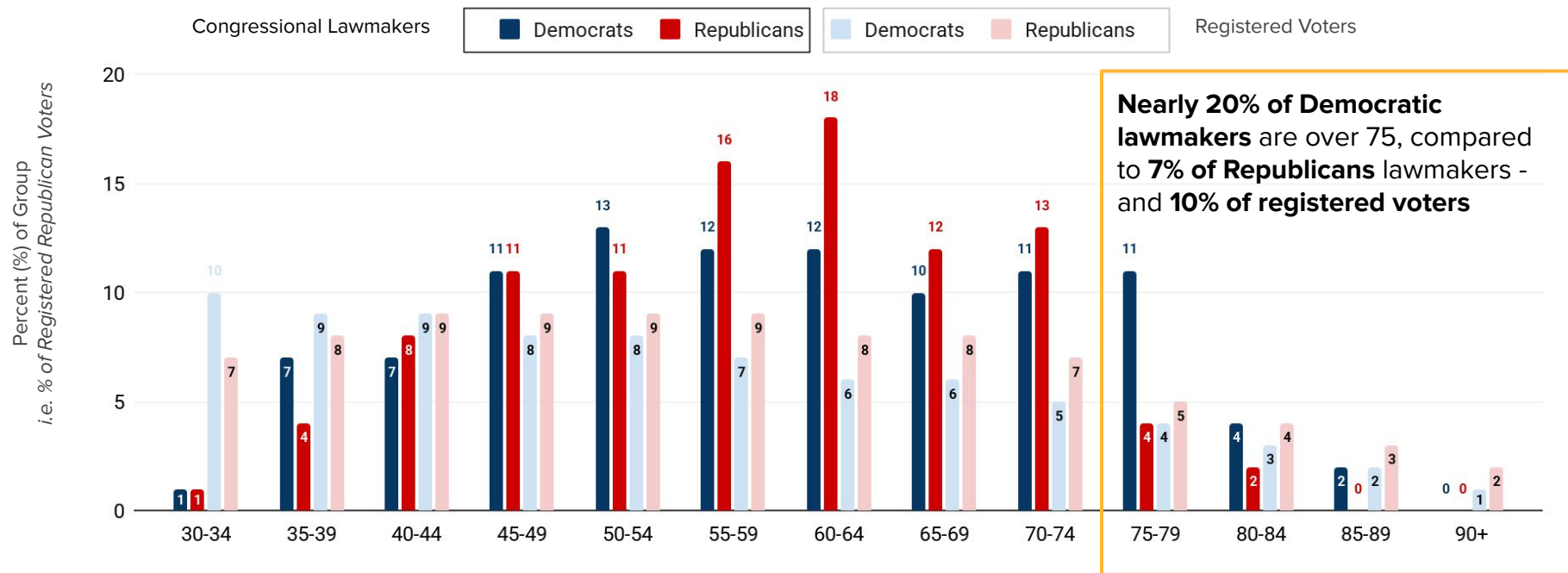
POLITICIANS AND DONORS: AGING ALIKE

Average donor age vs. donation-weighted age showing where the money comes from, 2016-2024



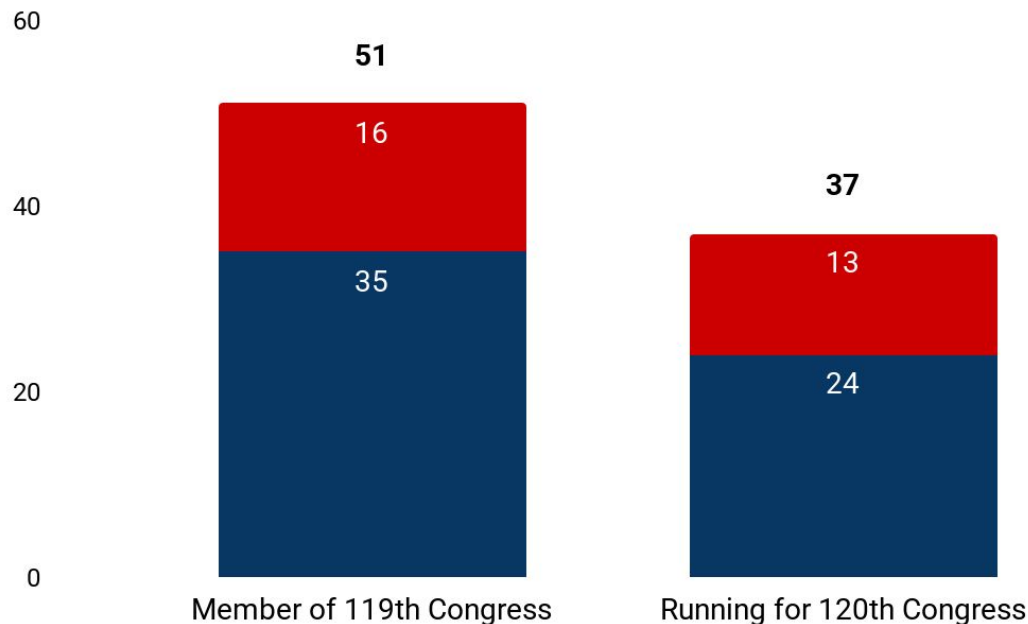
CONGRESSIONAL AGE: FEDERAL LAWMAKERS DO NOT REFLECT THE AGE DISTRIBUTION OF VOTERS

US CONGRESSIONAL LAWMAKER AND REGISTERED VOTER SHARE BY PARTY & AGE GROUP, %
Congress's makeup skews much older than the voting population



THE '26 MIDTERM PICTURE: 51 HOUSE MEMBERS WILL REACH 75 IN THEIR CURRENT TERM — AND 37 ARE RUNNING AGAIN

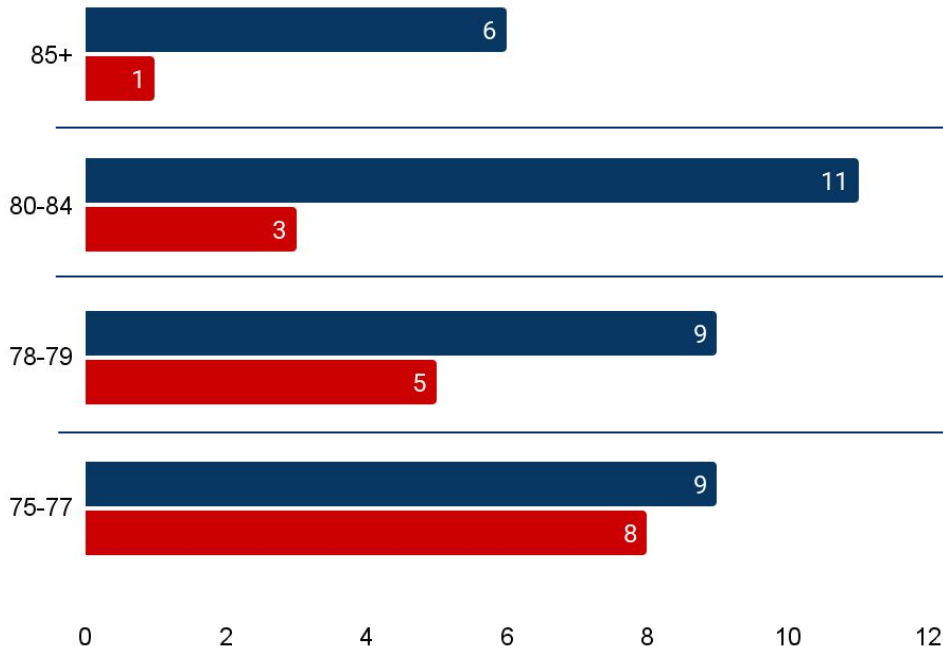
US House Members 75 y.o. or older by Party and Midterm Status
(75 or older at time of '26 general election)



~2x as many House Democrats over 75 as Republicans

OVER 75 AT TIME OF REELECTION: 35 HOUSE DEMOCRATS AND 17 HOUSE REPUBLICANS WILL BE OVER 75 YEARS OLD BY '26 MIDTERMS

Count of Members in Age Bands by Party (At time of '26 general election)



Including.....

DEMOCRATS

Maxine Waters (CA-43), Nancy Pelosi (CA-11), James Clyburn (SC-6)

Rosa L. DeLauro (CT-3), Frederica S. Wilson (FL-24), Emanuel Cleaver (MO-5)

Sanford D. Bishop, Jr. (GA-2), Al Green (TX-9), Bobby Scott (VA-3), John Larson (CT-1)

Steve Cohen (TN-9), Richard E. Neal (MA-1), Dina Titus (NV-1), Joyce Beatty (OH-3)

REPUBLICANS

Harold Rogers (KY-5)

John R. Carter (TX-31), Virginia Foxx (NC-5), James R. Baird (IN-4)

Jack Bergman (MI-1), Joe Wilson (SC-2), Mike Kelly (PA-16), Brian Babin (TX-36)

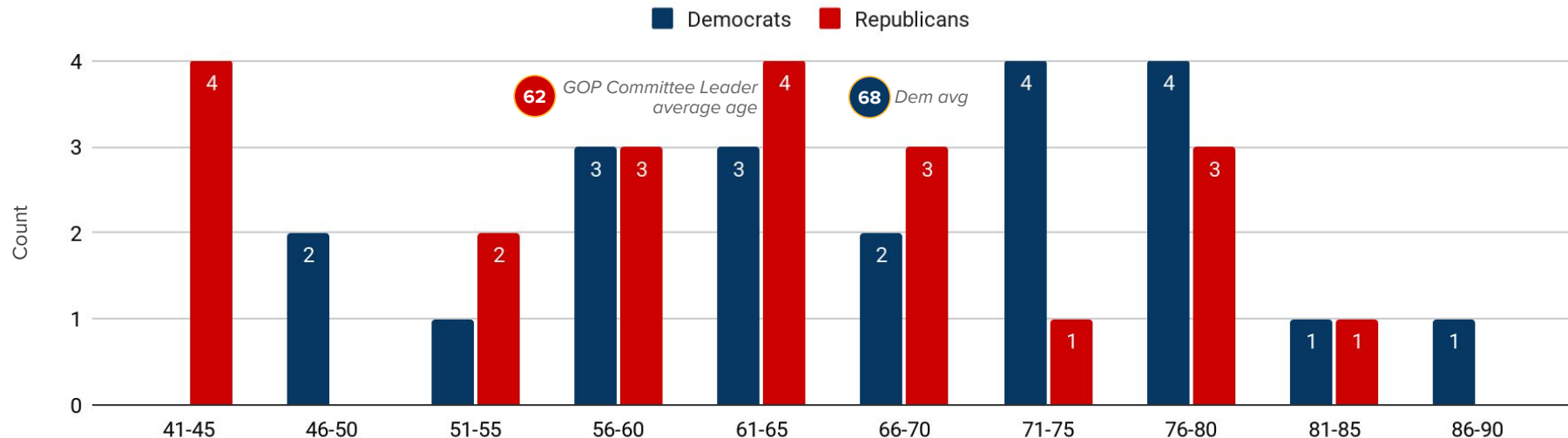
Daniel Webster (FL-11), Tom Cole (OK-4), Roger Williams (TX-25), Michael Simpson (ID-2)

Full details included in the Annex

CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP BREAKDOWN: DEMOCRATIC COMMITTEE LEADERS ARE ON AVERAGE, NEARLY 70 YEARS OLD

119th HOUSE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE LEADERSHIP BY PARTY & AGE GROUPS

Democratic leaders are older than Republican counterparts



House Committee Leaders Over 70 years old:

Republicans: 5

Democrats: 10

TENURE ASYMMETRY: DEMOCRATS WAIT 44% LONGER TO LEAD COMMITTEES, THEN HOLD THE POSITION MORE THAN TWICE AS LONG

Dems	Metric	GOP
7 yrs	Avg. Tenure as Party Cmte. Lead	3
10 members	6+ Years as Lead	7
8 members	8+ Years as Lead	0

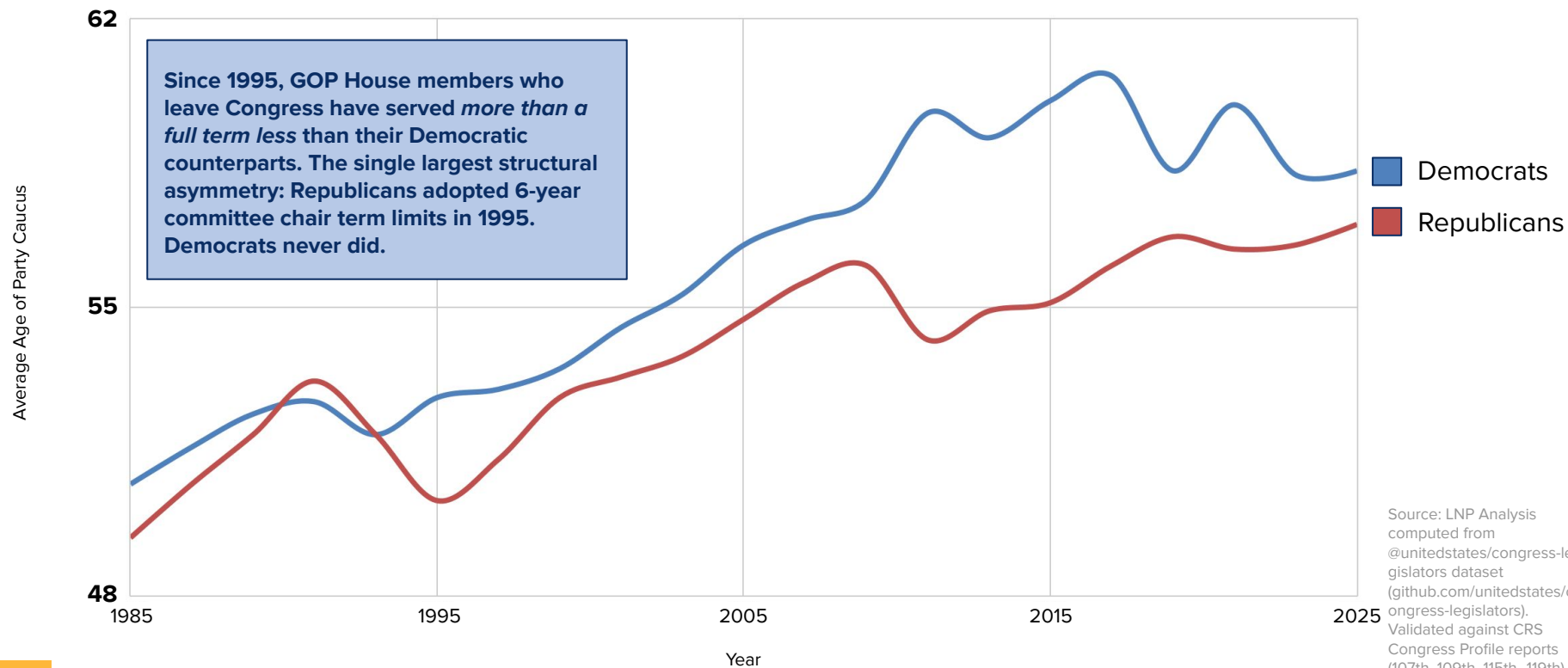
On average, Democrats wait

44%

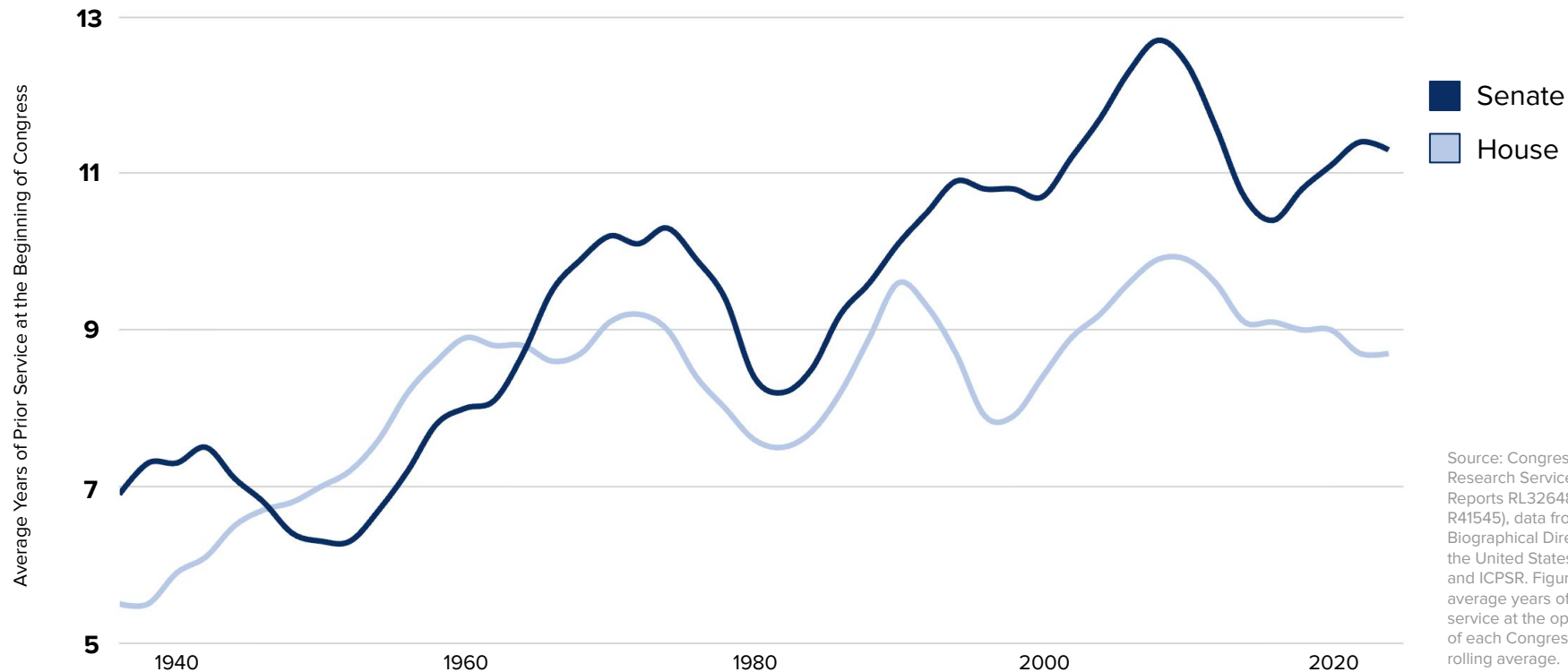
longer than Republicans to ascend to committee leadership

(16 vs 11 years in Congress)

THE 1995 DIVERGENCE: HOUSE DEMOCRATS' AVERAGE AGE HAS OUT-PACED THE GOP'S SINCE REPUBLICANS ADOPTED CHAIR TERM LIMITS



LENGTHENING TENURES: AVERAGE PRIOR SERVICE IN BOTH CHAMBERS HAS RISEN SHARPLY SINCE THE 1930s



Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS Reports RL32648 and R41545), data from Biographical Directory of the United States Congress and ICPSR. Figures reflect average years of prior service at the opening day of each Congress, 3-year rolling average.

COMMITTEE LEADERSHIP: DEMOCRATIC LEADERS ARE OLDER THAN THEIR REPUBLICAN COUNTERPARTS

House Committee on....	Chair Name (R)	Chair Age	Ranking Member Name (D)	Ranking Member Age	RM vs. Chair	
Homeland Security	Andrew Garbarino	41	Bennie Thompson	78	37	Democrat is Older
Ways and Means	Jason Smith	45	Richard E. Neal	77	32	
Foreign Affairs	Brian J. Mast	45	Gregory W. Meeks	72	27	
House Administration	Bryan Steil	45	Joseph D. Morelle	69	24	
Financial Services	J. French Hill	69	Maxine Waters	87	18	
Ethics	Michael Guest	56	Mark DeSaulnier	74	18	
Energy and Commerce	Brett Guthrie	62	Frank Pallone, Jr.	74	12	
Appropriations	Tom Cole	77	Rosa L. DeLauro	83	6	
Natural Resources	Bruce Westerman	58	Jared Huffman	62	4	
Education and Workforce	Tim Walberg	75	Robert C. "Bobby" Scott	79	4	
The Judiciary	Jim Jordan	62	Jamie Raskin	63	1	Republican is Older
Science, Space, and Technology	Brian Babin	78	Zoe Lofgren	78	0	
Veterans' Affairs	Mike Bost	65	Mark Takano	65	0	
Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence	Eric A. "Rick" Crawford	60	James A. Himes	59	-1	
Transportation and Infrastructure	Sam Graves	62	Rick Larsen	60	-2	
Small Business	Roger Williams	76	Nydia M. Velázquez	73	-3	
Oversight and Government Reform	James Comer	53	Robert Garcia	48	-5	
The Budget	Jodey C. Arrington	54	Brendan F. Boyle	49	-5	
Armed Services	Mike Rogers	67	Adam Smith	60	-7	
Agriculture	Glenn Thompson	66	Angie Craig	54	-12	
Rules	Virginia Foxx	82	James P. McGovern	66	-16	



GLOBAL BENCHMARKS: LEADERS ARE YOUNGER AND RETIRE EARLIER DESPITE THE ABSENCE OF A MANDATORY RETIREMENT AGE

Country	Federal Legislator Age Distribution		House or Similar Chamber Leadership	
	61-70 years old	71+ years old	Avg Leadership Tenure*	Avg. Leadership Age**
Canada		19% 4%	1–2 legislative terms (4–8 yrs)	50s–early 60s
Germany		17% 2%	1–2 legislative terms (4–8 yrs)	50s–early 60s
France		16% 3%	4–7 yrs (party/coalition based)	50s–early 60s
Norway		13% 1%	1–2 terms, regular party turnover	~50–60s
Sweden		11% 1%	1–2 terms	~50–60s
Spain		8% 1%	Rotation after general election	~50s
Australia		8% 1%	1–2 legislative terms (4–8 yrs)	~50–60s
USA		25% 20%	GOP House 3 Term Limit; 3-4 Terms Avg for Dems; Up to 6-8	~55 (GOP) –70s (Dems)

DEMAND FROM VOTERS: 2024 NORTH DAKOTA BALLOT MEASURES ON AGE LIMIT PASSES BY 61%

Ballot Initiative Case Study: North Dakota

The New York Times

North Dakotans Approve Age Limit for Members of Congress

B B C

North Dakota sets age limit for Congress candidates

12 June 2024

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- Measure 1 passed in June 2024 by ballot initiative, with 61% voting in favor
- Makes it illegal to run for US Congress if the Representative or Senator turn 81 before the end of his or her term.
- Expected litigation, but none has come so far, on basis of Supreme Court 1995 term limits decision that states cannot set qualifications for Congress beyond what is already in the U.S. Constitution

Thank You

Contact: dan.mathis@leadershipnowproject.org