



We Matter

A Guide for Community Organizations on Redistricting Engagement

July 2021



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The Center for Popular Democracy is a nonprofit organization that promotes equity, opportunity, and a dynamic democracy in partnership with innovative base-building organizations, organizing networks and alliances, and progressive unions across the country. www.populardemocracy.org

The purpose of this guide is to assist the staff and leaders of community organizations—especially those that organize Black, immigrant, and communities of color—in understanding the importance of drawing fair election maps, called the “redistricting” process. This information should be used by organizations to empower community members, who may not understand how to participate in the mapping process, with the information they need to plug into and shape this critical process for their communities.

Acknowledgements

This guide draws heavily from [“Redistricting Fundamentals: A General Redistricting Guide,”](#) which was created in partnership with the following groups: Common Cause, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, and State Voices in collaboration with Arizona Coalition for Change, Asian Americans Advancing Justice, Asian Americans Advancing Justice | Los Angeles, Black Voters Matter Fund, Brennan Center for Justice, Campaign Legal Center, Center for Community Change, Center for Popular Democracy, Fair Immigration Reform Movement, Demos, Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, NALEO Educational Fund, Pennsylvania Voice, and the Southern Coalition for Social Justice.

Making Our Votes Count: Drawing Fair and Transparent Election Maps

Given the dramatic threats to our democracy fueled by the actions of the Trump administration to exclude immigrants from the Census and overturn the 2020 elections, it's more critical than ever to ensure fair elections where each vote counts.

Helping to draw fair and transparent electoral maps is one of the best ways to ensure our voices are heard. "Redistricting" is the process used by governments to redraw political district boundaries and create those maps. During this process, each voter gets grouped into a political district with other voters.

Politicians often redraw maps behind closed doors in order to keep themselves and their party in power. The maps they draw give an unfair advantage to them, or to their party, by making it nearly impossible for other candidates to win.

District boundaries are generally drawn once every 10 years, so this process has long-term effects on community representation. **The upcoming round of redistricting in 2021-2022 presents a critical opportunity to bring communities together to ensure fair political maps are drawn.**

Redistricting has been used in the past to exclude communities from political power. The process has been used to make it harder for communities of color to have a fair shot at electing candidates who represent their interests and fight for their most pressing issues. By fully participating

in and monitoring the upcoming redistricting process, underrepresented communities—including Black, Latinx, Asian, and Indigenous communities—will have the opportunity to elect candidates of their choice and voice their needs and interests. As we organize at the city, state, and federal levels on issues impacting our lives, the redistricting process will help determine whether we have the elected representation that reflects and responds to our needs. By determining each legislator’s constituents, the redistricting process plays a significant role in determining to which communities and interests a legislator feels accountable.

Encouraging our community members to participate in a fair electoral mapping process is a powerful way to demonstrate our fundamental belief in our collective power as well as our ability to protect one another, and our democracy. While most state processes begin later in 2021, communities can start getting organized now. Getting ready can involve building coalitions, collecting community data and stories to inform the official process, and several other steps outlined in the guide below.



States like Texas have a long history of diluting the votes of Latinx and immigrant communities through manipulating electoral maps.

For example, a past redistricting process intentionally moved 100,000 Latinx voters out of one district and into another. This was designed to protect an incumbent (the politician currently in office) who was losing support of Latinx communities which were quickly becoming the majority of voters in the district. According to the Supreme Court “the State took away the Latinos’ opportunity because [Latinx voters] were about to exercise it.” Another federal court concluded that “the Texas Legislature intentionally discriminated in 2011 [against Latinx voters] in numerous and significant ways.”¹

Elections must reflect the will of the people, not the interests and priorities of politicians in power.

Why Drawing Fair Political Maps Matter: The Power of Representation

To ensure our votes count, we need to get engaged in mapping our communities. We also need to ensure the process of drawing electoral maps is transparent and fair to all communities.

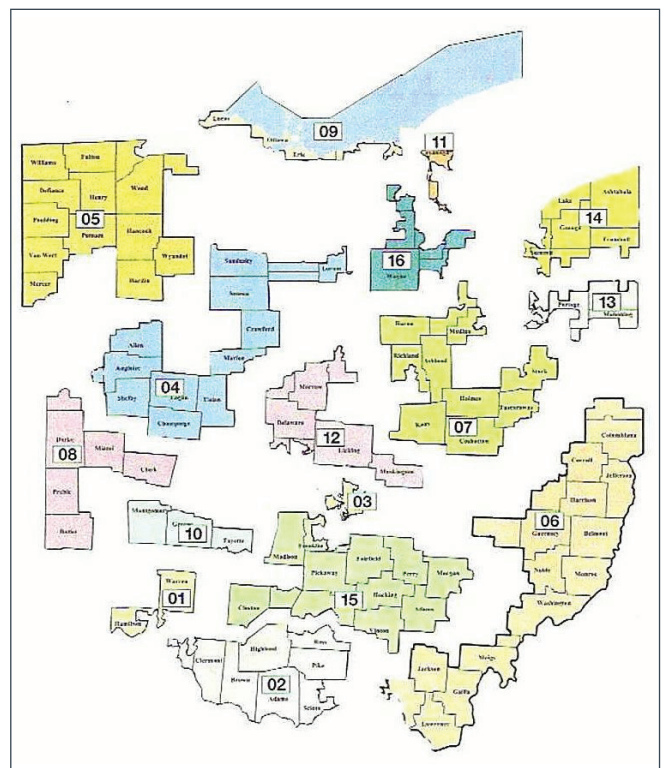


What is redistricting?

Answer: Redistricting is the process used by our government to redraw political districts/maps. Redistricting applies to all levels of government where district elections are held, including the US House of Representatives, state legislatures, city councils, school boards, county boards, judicial districts, water districts, and more.

For instance, Ohio's congressional districts are shown on the map below. These districts were drawn in 2010 based on Census data and these lines are now being redrawn in 2021.

Ohio's Congressional Districts



Source: Statewide News Bureau <https://www.statenews.org/post/ohios-redistricting-reforms-avoid-gerrymandering-take-shape-2021>



When does redistricting happen?

Answer: Every 10 years, usually one year after the US Census. The last census took place in 2020, so the redistricting process is kicking off in 2021. Census data that is collected every ten years is used to draw new electoral maps to account for the ways that populations have changed and moved across the states and districts over the last decade.

States and local areas each have their own timelines for redrawing voting districts, based on when they get their census data and when the next set of elections are scheduled. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the US Census Bureau pushed back its data release deadline by several months to September 30, 2021.² This change could have a significant effect on the timeline and process used to draw new electoral maps this and next year.



Why does the redistricting process need to happen?

Answer: Redistricting is based on the idea of “one person, one vote,” which makes sure that each of our voices can be represented fairly, by creating equal districts that have roughly the same number of people.



Who is allowed to participate in the redistricting process?

Answer: Everyone! Advocacy and community groups can (and should) use their community knowledge to develop and advocate for their own ideal voting district maps. Whether testifying at public hearings or providing feedback on maps produced by government officials, community groups can impact the process in meaningful and important ways.

Voters should choose their politicians, politicians shouldn't choose their voters.

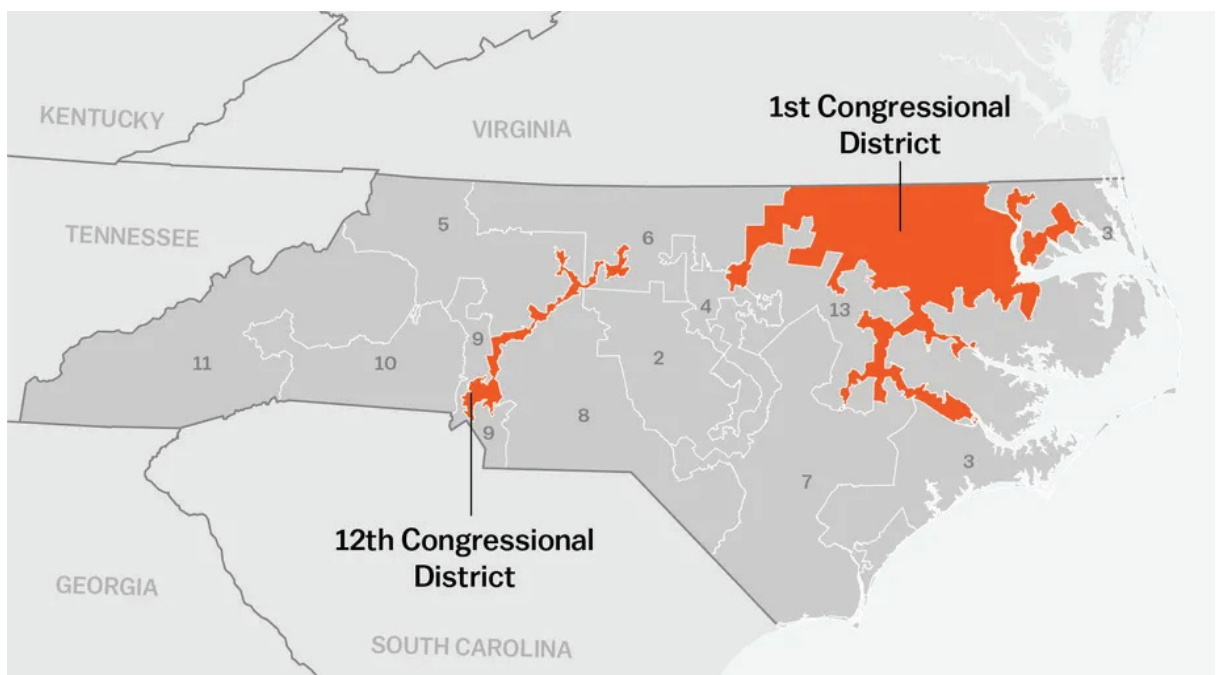


What happens if community groups don't push for fair electoral maps?

Answer: Without community participation, politicians will draw unfair political maps that take away the voting power of communities of color.

For example, after North Carolina redrew its maps to add more Black voters into Congressional Districts 1 and 12, the Supreme Court ruled that North Carolina violated the Equal Protections Clause of the 14th Amendment, which requires that everyone be treated equally by law, including when exercising the legal right to vote. This map was drawn by politicians to intentionally dilute the voting power of Black residents in these neighborhoods, who were split into a thin strip of land in the 12th Congressional District and jammed into a large body of land in the 1st Congressional District.³

Unfair Political Maps in North Carolina



Source: Vox, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/5/22/15676250/supreme-court-racial-gerrymandering-north-carolina>

Mapping our Future: Redistricting Process 101

Each state has its own rules on redistricting. In general, every state has someone who redraws the lines and decides what representation looks like.

1) Maps drawn by politicians: In most states, officials in the state or local government are responsible for developing maps. Most state legislatures are responsible for drawing congressional districts and state legislative districts. Local governments are responsible for drawing maps of their own districts.

2) Maps drawn by commissions: Increasingly, states and local areas are using some form of commission to carry out mapping responsibilities. Commissions are smaller groups of people that are often not elected officials but may be appointed by elected officials.

Each state also has its own criteria for what a “representative” map looks like. The criteria might require them to factor in communities of interest, to not favor a political party, or to ensure the map is logical and doesn’t carve out and exclude certain neighborhoods, but these criteria can vary a great deal across states.⁴

Each state’s process has different levels of community input, transparency, and engagement. Some states have mechanisms for public input which can be mandatory or optional, while others may not.

It is important to become familiar with and pay attention to your state’s unique mapping process. The process also varies in each state and local area. Knowing the process your area uses, and who you need to influence, is an important part of designing an effective advocacy strategy. Much of electoral mapping is still done using a legislative process, but more and more, commissions are being used.

- This resource from the National Conference of State Legislatures allows you to see who is in charge of redistricting in your state, the criteria used for maps, and the rules around public input and engagement: <https://www.ncsl.org/research/redistricting/redistricting-systems-a-50-state-overview.aspx>
- For more information on “Free and Equal” Election Clauses in State Constitutions see: <https://www.ncsl.org/research/redistricting/free-equal-election-clauses-in-state-constitutions.aspx>

What is a Community of Interest?

A community of interest is a neighborhood, community, or group of people who have common policy concerns and would benefit from being maintained in a single district. Another way of understanding a community of interest is that it is simply a way for a community to tell its own story about what neighbors share in common, and what makes it unique when compared to surrounding communities. They are defined by the local community members.

Why is a Community of Interest important?

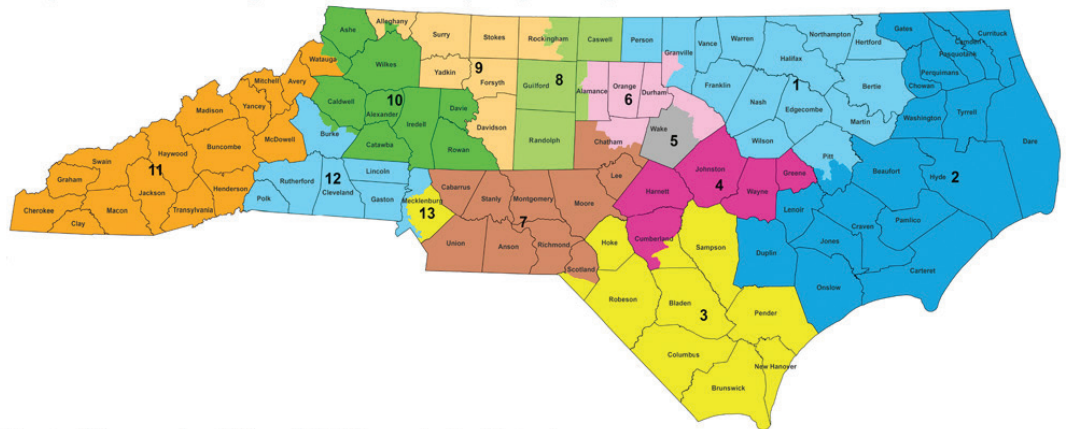
Keeping communities of interest together is an important principle in redistricting. It can be especially helpful to communities that have been traditionally left out of the political process. Community members can define their communities by telling their own stories and describing their concerns to policy makers in their own words. Without this, those who may not have a community's best interest in mind will define the communities for them.

A unity map is a proposed map drawn by a coalition of multiple community groups that demonstrates how their multiple communities of interest can be simultaneously respected.

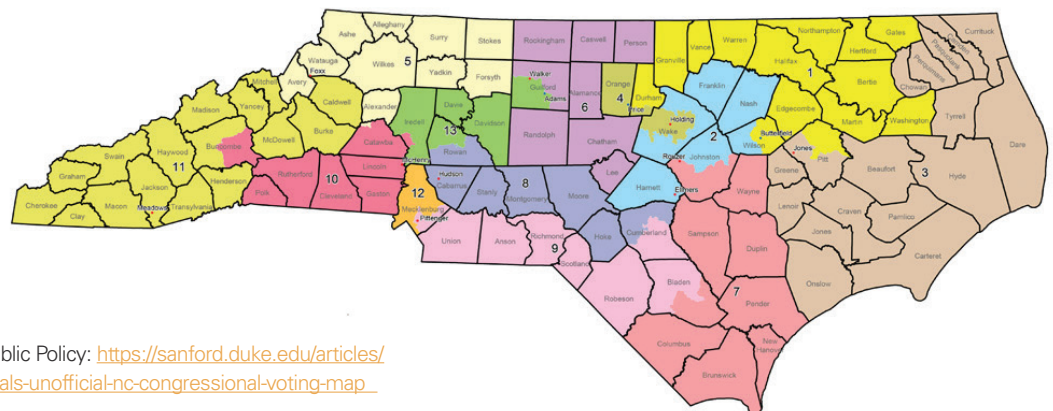
Maps drawn by independent, non-partisan groups often vary significantly from those drawn by state legislatures.

NC Congressional Maps: How They Compare

Independent Redistricting Simulation (drawn by nonpartisan panel)



Enacted Congressional Plan - 2016 (drawn by legislature)



Source: Duke Sanford School of Public Policy: <https://sanford.duke.edu/articles/nonpartisan-redistricting-panel-reveals-unofficial-nc-congressional-voting-map>

We Draw the Lines: Key Stages of the Electoral Mapping Process

When considering your community's involvement in drawing political maps (aka redistricting), it is important to understand how the process unfolds. While the rules and timelines vary for each state and local area, there are some common stages in which the public can participate.

Census Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It all begins after the release of the 2020 census data, which is the key data used for all redistricting. The US Census Bureau is typically mandated to deliver census results to the states by April 1, 2021. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the data release deadline has been delayed. Now data will be released state-by-state, with all states receiving their data by September 30, 2021.⁵• While groups are waiting for this census data to be released in fall 2021, they can begin collecting stories from community members on the issues facing their communities, along with contact information, in order to start preparing for electoral mapping.
Public Hearings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The redistricting body, whether a legislature or some form of commission, will likely announce its process and public hearing dates. This may be done without much advance notice, or may not be made widely known. Staying attentive to the decision makers is important.• The hearings are an opportunity for community members to tell their stories and present a case for keeping their communities united. There may be hearings before any draft maps are displayed.
Draft Maps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Depending on the state-specific rules, draft maps may be released with an opportunity for public comment before any votes are taken to adopt a final map. Having access to the map as well as the underlying data will be important for analyzing the map.• Some of the factors to consider are whether the maps have incorporated community suggestions, respected neighborhood areas, and adhered to the Voting Rights Act, among other criteria.
Map Approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If there is a legislative redistricting process, communities can start directly advocating and educating the decision makers.• After maps are approved, they can be assessed for potential legal challenges. If the maps are unsatisfactory, and a case can be made that they violate the Voting Rights Act, they can be challenged in the courts.
Elections with New Maps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The new maps will be used in elections for the next ten years.• The long-lasting effects of redistricting is one of the most important reasons for communities to be involved in this process.



Case Study: The Ohio Organizing Collaborative uses grassroots organizing and community engagement to ensure fair maps for Ohio



As a result of successful grassroots organizing in 2015 and 2018, Ohio overhauled how its state legislative and congressional maps are drawn. While these vital reforms offer an opportunity to ensure fair district maps, community groups must remain vigilant to prevent gerrymandering and partisan political maneuvering. The Ohio Organizing Collaborative (OOC), a Center for Popular Democracy affiliate, is a core coalition partner in this redistricting fight. OOC is working closely with dozens of groups including the NAACP State Conference of Ohio, the A. Philip Randolph Institute of Ohio, Common Cause of Ohio, and America Votes among many partners, to ensure a fair redistricting process and to achieve a fair map outcome at the congressional and legislative levels.

OOC will use a range of strategies to support grassroots engagement including: educating and training grassroots leaders on key redistricting issues and how to get involved; activating and mobilizing a base of diverse constituencies in key districts to hold map drawers accountable; and ensuring robust public participation at every stage of Ohio's formal redistricting process—including community members attending public hearings and submitting testimony—to ensure inclusive and responsive maps are drawn. These grassroots efforts are designed to leverage the voices of community groups to influence decision makers and the final map adopted. OOC's efforts will focus on elevating the leadership and participation of Black community members who are traditionally excluded from redistricting processes and most impacted by gerrymandering.

In addition to these outreach strategies, the Ohio Citizens' Redistricting Commission, will be created to run parallel to, and hold accountable, the state's formal Ohio Redistricting Commission which is

convened by the state Governor. The 15 volunteer member, non-partisan Citizens' Redistricting Commission will solicit public input to model a thorough and robust citizen engagement process; create "unity maps" based on community input and feedback; and develop and demonstrate citizen-driven principles on redistricting. The Ohio Citizens' Redistricting Commission is working closely with academic partners on a participatory mapping project. The MGGG Redistricting Lab at Tufts University and the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at The Ohio State University are collecting and synthesizing Community of Interest (COI) input into a report to be delivered to the Commission. Grassroots groups, with a focus on communities of color, will tap into community expertise to help inform the state's redistricting process. These groups will use Districtr, a free community web tool that enables community members to generate maps which capture their local insights.

The Ohio Organizing Collaborative took on this redistricting fight for several reasons. First, the state's elected officials do not adequately reflect the interests of communities of color and are rigging the rules to keep it that way. Second, if groups want to win on criminal justice, economic justice, and other key issues, Ohio needs fair and transparent political maps in 2021. Finally, this represents a real opportunity to build more political power, in a short period of time that will impact the state's trajectory over the next 10 years. OOC is clear that communities must apply incredible public pressure to ensure a fair, transparent, and accessible redistricting process in Ohio. By creating a citizens commission, training grassroots leaders, and ensuring robust public participation, OOC and its coalition partners are poised to positively impact the redistricting process in their state.

What's at Stake: How developing fair electoral maps impacts our communities

Ultimately, how district lines are drawn influences who runs for public office and who is elected. Elected representatives make decisions that are important to our lives, from ensuring safe schools to adopting immigration policies. Who lives in a district can influence whether elected officials feel obligated to respond to a community's needs.

In the 2016 election, gerrymandering in states like Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania resulted in at least an additional 16 Republican seats in the US House of Representatives.⁶ Had these states used non-partisan mapping criteria, the dramatic policy changes that impact our democracy would not have occurred.



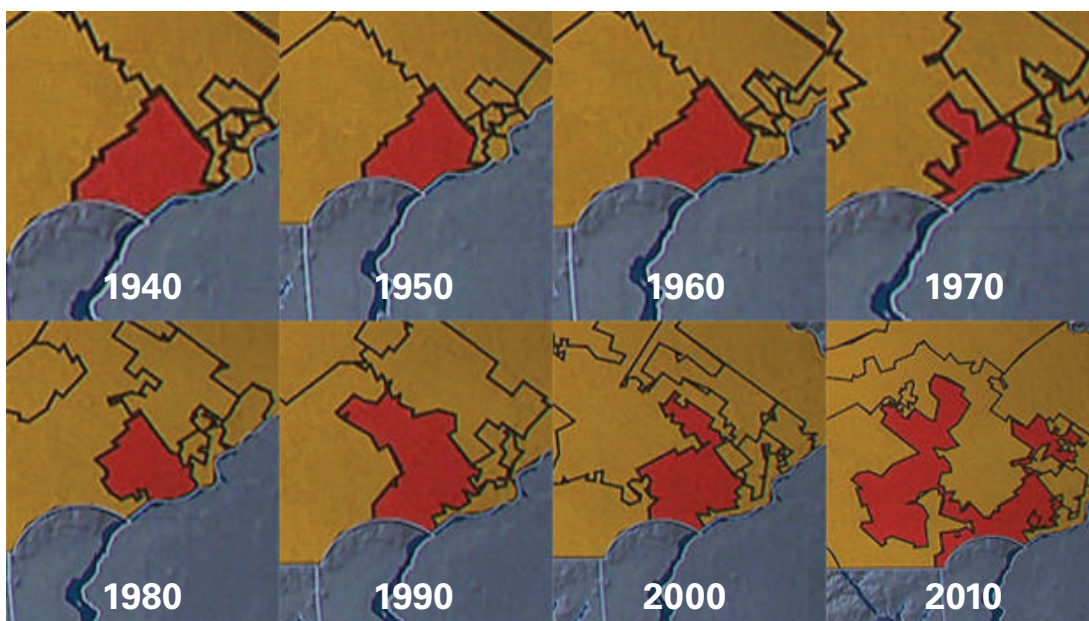
Historically and today, people in power use the mapping process to suppress community voices:

Politicians manipulate election maps in a process called “gerrymandering.”

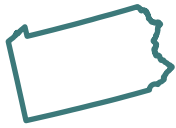
- **Gerrymandering** is when one political party draws a political map to benefit one party or community. This can be motivated by partisan interests or racism, and often is motivated by both.
- In most states, the people in charge of drawing the voting maps are the same people who stand to benefit from influencing those maps. Politicians use gerrymandering tactics to create voting district maps that make it easier for them to win elections.⁷
- In recent years, the Supreme Court has frequently declined to take up cases on the legality of gerrymandering. The result: partisan politicians have often been emboldened to continue the practice.⁸
- It’s important to note that drawing majority-minority districts, in order to comply with the Voting Rights Act, is not gerrymandering.

“One of the most gerrymandered districts in the country:” Pennsylvania’s 7th Congressional District: from the 1940’s to today.⁹

Each decade, the state of Pennsylvania has redrawn the 7th Congressional District to make it increasingly splintered. The new lines being used today spread out less wealthy urban communities among suburban and rural areas in Pennsylvania. By diluting the voice of communities in less wealthy urban areas, community members in these neighborhoods are denied the opportunity to elect a representative who centers their interests.



Source: CBS News: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/drawing-the-lines-on-gerrymandering/>



Case Study: Advocating for Fair, Equitable, and Community-Driven Redistricting in Pennsylvania



The Pennsylvania Voice partnership—which includes CPD affiliates CASA, Make the Road Pennsylvania, and One Pennsylvania, among several other state partners—is currently fighting to change the way district lines are drawn so that the process is more inclusive, community-driven, and grounded in racial equity.

Pennsylvania has a long history of gerrymandering that state legislators and members of Congress have used to disadvantage other parties and protect their incumbents. In the last decade, courts have ruled twice that state legislative and congressional boundaries have been unfairly drawn.¹⁰ Legislators in the state have engaged in racial gerrymandering that dilutes the power and systematically disenfranchises communities of color, resulting in an overwhelmingly white and male legislature. This legislature does not reflect the demographics of the state, in which communities of color are the fastest growing segment of the population.¹¹

To address these longstanding racial inequities and build long-term power in communities of color, the coalition is working to engage community members as participants in determining how voting maps are drawn and to ensure that voting maps give voice particularly to those who have been previously excluded from the process.

Since 2018, after community maps were thrown out by the Supreme Court and needed to be redrawn, the coalition has:

- Engaged in legislative advocacy to fight for the creation of an independent commission to oversee congressional redistricting. This would have significantly increased transparency and provided opportunities for community voices within the commission. While the legislation did not pass, these advocacy efforts have led to shifting public expectations for a more transparent process.
- Analyzed current voting maps along racial equity lines and proposed a new set of more equitable voting maps.
- Built on the momentum of Census outreach efforts to make the connections between the Census and redistricting, including through educational sessions with community members.
- Turned out community members to public hearings in order to voice how the current process results in districts and representatives disconnected from their communities' concerns and drove public comments during comment periods.
- Developed community members and volunteers as leaders in the campaign.

These strategies will help the partnership build a robust base and broad allies as they engage in the redistricting process. In 2021, the coalition will lead a community mapping process, through which it expects to build agreement around “unity maps” in several priority counties. These maps will be grounded in racial equity and will reflect the needs and values of community members.

Prison Gerrymandering

“Prison gerrymandering” is the practice of counting incarcerated people as residents of the legislative districts in which they are incarcerated, and not as residents of the communities they call home. Due to a census policy known as the “usual residence rule”—a practice of counting people as residents of where they typically eat and sleep—incarcerated people are counted as residents of the jails and prisons in which they are held.¹²

Prison gerrymandering not only inaccurately counts where people actually reside, but it diminishes the political power of majority Black and Brown communities. While the majority of incarcerated people are Black and Brown and from urban communities, most prisons are located in rural, mostly-white communities. This results in a direct transfer of political power from Black and Brown urban communities to mostly rural, whiter communities. Because people are often incarcerated hundreds if not thousands of miles from the places they call home, they often lack any attachment to the local community where they are incarcerated or its elected officials. And because they cannot vote, they have no mechanisms for holding local elected officials accountable or influencing local politics.¹³

The presence of even a single prison in a rural community can significantly alter its population count.¹⁴ For example, 60% of Illinois’ incarcerated population is from Cook County (Chicago), but 99% of the incarcerated population is counted outside the county.¹⁵ In one rural district in Texas, incarcerated people comprise nearly 12% of the district’s official “population” count.¹⁶

Seven states (Colorado, Mississippi, New Jersey, Virginia, Maryland, Michigan, and New York) have encouraged or required local governments to exclude prison populations during redistricting, as have local governments in many other states. Some of the methods for avoiding prison gerrymandering include: “ignoring the prison population, cutting a hole in their maps around the prison, overpopulating the district with the prison by the exact amount of the prison population, or splitting the prison population between all districts equally.”¹⁷ These practices ensure that localities with prisons located within their borders are not granted disproportionate political power compared to those that do not.

Politicians use two main strategies to create unfair maps that strip voters of power.

1) One common approach is called “packing.”

“Packing” is when politicians cram a large number of Black or Latinx voters into a small district or set of districts within a state. In practice, this dilutes the power of those voters.¹⁸

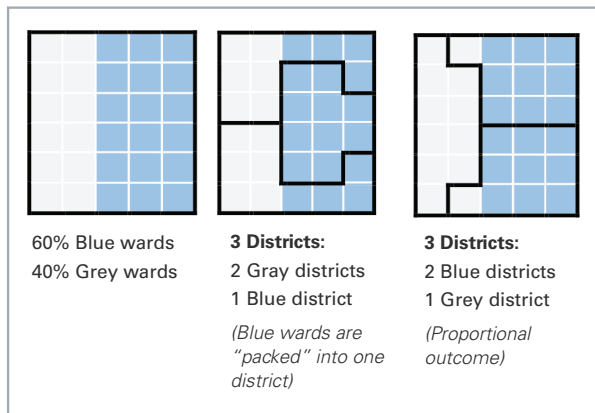
For example, after North Carolina’s last round of redistricting, the 114th Congressional District packed a large number of Black voters into the district boundaries. The Supreme Court went on to say that NC had used “race as the predominant factor in drawing district lines” without good justification.¹⁹

2) Another common approach is called

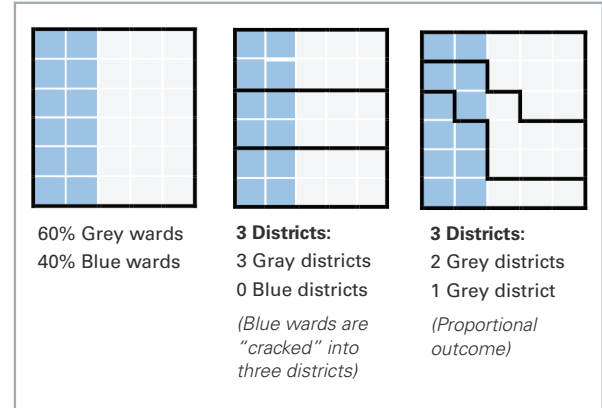
“cracking,” which is when politicians thinly spread out Black, Latinx, and other communities of color across many districts. In practice, this also dilutes the power of those voters.²⁰

For example, a redistricting process once took one square mile of an LA neighborhood and split it into four city council districts and five different state assembly districts. It became very difficult for the people living in that square mile to hold their various elected officials accountable and get their needs met.²¹

Packing



Cracking



Source: https://my.lvw.org/sites/default/files/leagues/wysiwyg/%5Bcurrent-user%3Aog-user-node%3A1%3Atitle%5D/redistrictingbasics-english_jan2021.pdf

Packing and cracking are both unfair tactics that result in minority voters having less of a chance of electing their candidates of choice.

The maps that result from gerrymandering often look like what they are: an attempt to carve and dissect certain neighborhoods or cities out of a political district. While this is a longstanding practice, new forms of technology, software, and voter data is making it easier for politicians to manipulate voting maps with more precision.²²

As people of color are growing in numbers around the country, especially in the South, racist and partisan gerrymandering is increasingly used by politicians who are trying to maintain the status quo.²³ **The biggest factor in predicting if a state will draw fair maps is who is in charge of drawing them, and whether one party has sole control over the process.**²⁴

Using Redistricting to Eliminate Challengers

In a 2000 primary, then-State Senator Barack Obama ran for an Illinois congressional seat. Though he ultimately lost, he won 30% of the vote—a strong enough showing to present a threat in a potential rematch.²⁵

During Illinois' subsequent redistricting process, state legislators “deferred to incumbent members of Congress, including the incumbent whom Obama challenged.”²⁶ In redrawing district lines, legislators carved out the block around Obama’s home, which would have required him to sell his house and move in order to live in the same district in which he previously ran.²⁷



Inaccurate counts of enslaved people and Black, Indigenous and communities of color: a racist legacy

The very convention for counting the US population for purposes of determining a state's electoral vote count and House representation were racist in origin. Under the US constitution, an enslaved person was originally counted as three-fifths of a person.²⁸ This decision was favorable to enslavers, who gained political power and representation from having enslaved people counted as a part of their population, even though enslaved people could not vote or benefit from the rights of citizenship. The result was to entrench the political interests of enslavers by giving them outsized representation.²⁹

It wasn't until 1870 that the Constitution was amended to give Black people the legal right to vote. However, Black communities faced countless barriers to exercising their right, ranging from poll taxes, "literacy" tests, intimidation, and violence at the hands of white people. These illegal and immoral tactics meant that by 1940, only 3% of Black voting age people living in the South were registered to vote.³⁰

The passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was designed to prevent racial discrimination at the ballot box—the "culmination of more than a century of battles for [B]lack voting rights."³¹ The Voting Rights Act, and the advocates who tirelessly fought for it, had immediate impacts. For instance, in 1964 only 7% of Mississippi's eligible Black voters were registered to vote. By the end of 1966, nearly 60% were registered.³²

Unfortunately, racist southern politicians acted quickly. If they could no longer limit the *ability* for Black voters to cast ballots, they would try to *limit the power of the votes that Black people cast*. One key way they did this was by manipulating voting maps. Before long, these illegal tactics were challenged at the Supreme Court which ruled the Voting Rights Act must give Black voters the right "to elect the candidate of their choice" in fairly designed electoral districts.³³

In 2013, in *Shelby County v. Holder*, 570 U.S. 529 (2013) the Supreme Court struck down a key provision in the Voting Rights Act (Section V), gutting the requirement that certain states and counties with a history of racially discriminatory voting practices get approval of any changes to their election laws with the Department of Justice before putting them in place. This ruling opened the floodgates by allowing states to enact laws that restrict registration and voting, effectively disenfranchising countless voters. Moreover, the gutting of Section V makes it easier for states to use racial gerrymandering—in other words, to split up voters of color during the redistricting process to diminish their political power.³⁴

What Happens When We Lose Representation

The process of gerrymandering doesn't just skew election results and make elections less competitive, it also hurts communities of color who have no say in their local elections.³⁵ Census undercounts, combined with partisan and racist gerrymandering, strips communities of color, urban and rural low-income households, and immigrants of their political power. Unfair voting maps are causing millions of voters to have little to no power at the ballot box.³⁶

In 2020, the longstanding problem of undercounting Black, Brown, immigrant and low-income communities and children in the US Census was compounded by active efforts to undermine the Census, and particularly the participation of immigrant communities. In some places these efforts will lock in one-party control, disempower communities of color and the New American Majority, and protect incumbents from the will of the people. Community groups must get engaged in the redistricting process to help ensure that our votes count and our voices are heard.

According to the Center for American Progress “unfairly drawn congressional districts shifted, on average, a whopping 59 seats in the US House of Representatives during the 2012, 2014, and 2016 elections. That means that every other November, 59 politicians that would not have been elected based on statewide voter support for their party won anyway because the lines were drawn in their favor—often by their allies in the Republican or Democratic Parties.”³⁷

Winning Fair Election Maps Means Winning on All our Issues

Influencing the electoral mapping process, and ensuring that fair election maps are drawn, will help build political power for our communities. It will ensure that federal, state, and local legislatures and elected officials reflect our increasing numbers through representation and by prioritizing our issues. Our organizations and memberships have a range of urgent priorities:



Promoting Immigrant Rights



Ensuring Police Accountability



Winning Access to Healthcare



Protecting Workers Rights



Advancing Climate Justice



Ensuring Quality Education

To win on these issues we must ensure the political maps drawn are transparent and fully reflect our communities.



Case Study: Make the Road New York's Redistricting Project is training and educating Black, Brown, and immigrant members on the redistricting process to ensure fair representation in New York state.



While immigrant and Latinx communities are some of the fastest-growing groups in parts of the state, they are facing consistent challenges to full representation as elected officials have consistently manipulated the redistricting process. Make the Road New York (MRNY) is taking on this fight to ensure that Latinx, immigrant, and Black communities, as well as transgender, gender non-conforming, intersex, and queer (TGNCIQ) communities, are equipped to advocate for fair redistricting in which their voices are heard.

The first phase in 2021 will involve reforming New York State's current redistricting process, which was crafted to give one political party permanent veto power. MRNY will ramp up the fight to improve the state's process by pushing for legislation in 2021 and a ballot measure in fall 2021. This will involve partnering with a broad base of allied community groups, legal advocacy organizations, and good government groups to ensure the passage of the amendment of the redistricting process. While pushing for these important rule changes via a ballot initiative, MRNY will also build the infrastructure with their coalition

partners and members for the community mapping process. This will include engaging member leaders with 1-to-1 outreach through MRNY's organizing committees, political education, and other forms of online and offline engagement. MRNY will also work with allies on public letters, petitions, and direct engagement with lawmakers to ensure a fair map.

This work builds off MRNY's extensive 2020 Census outreach and engagement to ensure a full Census count, and litigation to preserve the integrity of the count. MRNY's lawsuit with allies helped keep the citizenship question off the census, and most recently, they won a favorable ruling in a different lawsuit finding Trump's attempt to subtract undocumented people from the final count was unlawful. MRNY plans to re-engage the very large base from their census and voter engagement work, educating them about the redistricting process and moving them to action. MRNY also plans to integrate redistricting work with a Civic Engagement Program that has registered tens of thousands of New Yorkers in the past decade. MRNY's Redistricting Project is partnering with the New York Civic Engagement Table and its 70+ partner groups across the state.

Organizing Best Practices: How can community organizations help ensure our representation matters

Communities must find ways to influence the redistricting process in 2021, or see ourselves unfairly shut out of power for another decade. Luckily, there are some organizing best practices that communities can employ to win fair representation in the 2021 redistricting cycle:

Start early	Once the redistricting mapping process starts, it moves fast. To influence the process, groups need a comprehensive understanding of the timeline, where they can have influence and a strategy, long before the formal process kicks off. That means starting in 2021. It is particularly important to put out sample maps as early as possible and before the politicians release theirs out, to set the terms of the debate.
Draw your own map	Community groups have reported that drawing their own set of district maps was an especially powerful activity. It allows communities to clearly define and articulate their own communities, rather than having them defined by someone else.
Use technology to democratize the process	Technology can either help or hurt community participation in the redistricting process. Groups should work to make the mapmaking tools available and accessible to community members. Bring a laptop with data and software to show people current maps and demonstrate how to draw districts on their own.
Make redistricting part of a comprehensive organizing strategy	Redistricting should not be a standalone project, but a continuation of a long-term strategy to build power and community voice. Ideally this means targeted engagement of communities, by or in collaboration with existing base-building groups who work in those communities. It also includes using organizing tools as part of the redistricting process, such as strategic communications to define the public narrative.
Don't stop organizing, even when maps are "final"	Community groups need to start early and be prepared to continue organizing community power to influence the redistricting after the formal process has ended. It is very common for maps to be litigated after the formal redistricting process ends. Groups should plan for the potential of litigation and have a strategy for influencing the litigation, or other battles, after the lines are formally drawn.

Where We Go From Here

We need to pull back the curtain on the process of drawing election maps. By manipulating voting maps, politicians keep their jobs while our communities struggle. The district boundaries are in place for the next ten years, and their policy impacts can last well beyond that. By taking an active role in the redistricting process, our organizations can have a strong voice and elect officials who will make meaningful change. The CPD network and affiliates can help ensure a fair redistricting process that puts the voices of community members at the center of our democratic process.

The 2021–2022 redistricting cycle is critical to our mission of building community power and increasing the voices of communities of color, low- and moderate-income communities, immigrant communities, women, and young people in our democracy. For CPD, our state affiliates, and other community organizations on the ground to be successful in building and exercising power, we must fight to ensure fair representation, fight back against gerrymandering efforts, and organize proactively for district lines that are responsive and reflective of the communities we represent.



Glossary

Census: The counting and survey of every person in a population. In the US, a census is taken every ten years. The census is required by the Constitution for reapportionment and is used in the redistricting process.

US Census Bureau: The federal agency responsible for producing data about the American People.

Census Day: A date used by the Census Bureau as a reference. Questions on the census form should be answered from the point of view of that date, which is April 1st.

Census Form or Questionnaire: A survey that collects socioeconomic information about residents.

Commissions: Commissions, which carry out mapping responsibilities, are smaller groups of people that are often not elected officials.

Community of Interest: A group of people with a common set of concerns that may be affected by legislation. Examples of communities of interest include ethnic, racial, and economic groups. Some states require that the preservation of communities of interest be taken into account when drawing electoral districts in an effort to enable these communities to elect representatives whose platforms or policy proposals align with their interests.

Cracking: A splitting of a racial minority community into two or more districts so that the minority community is not a significant portion of any district. For example, cracking occurs when a minority population is big enough that it can make up 50% of one district but, instead, is divided into two or more districts so that the minority community makes up a small percentage in each district.

Gerrymandering: Drawing of district lines to give one group an unfair advantage over another group. Gerrymandering is not the same as redistricting, but gerrymandering can occur during redistricting. Drawing majority-minority districts to comply with the Voting Rights Act is not gerrymandering.

Majority-Minority Districts: A district where one racial minority equals 50% or more of the citizen voting-age population. In combination with a few other factors, a majority-minority district may be required by the Voting Rights Act.

New American Majority: Refers to the shifting demographics of the US that reflects a majority of people of color, young people, and unmarried women.

Packing: A tactic where politicians cram a large number of a states' Black or Latinx voters into a small district or set of districts to decrease the power of their vote.

Prison gerrymandering: The practice of counting incarcerated people as residents of the legislative districts in which they are incarcerated, and not as residents of the communities that they call home. Prison gerrymandering leads to inaccurate counts while diminishing the political power of majority Black and Brown communities.

Racial gerrymandering: The practice of manipulating legislative district maps during the redistricting process, often to dilute the political power of voters of color.

Reapportionment: The redistribution of seats in the US House of Representatives based on changes in a state's population. This occurs so that a state's representation in Congress is proportional to its population. Reapportionment is not redistricting, although some states use the terms interchangeably.

Redistricting: The process of redrawing congressional and other legislative district lines following the US Census to accommodate population shifts and keep districts as equal as possible in population.

Usual Residence Rule: A census policy in which people are counted as residents of where they typically eat and sleep. This impacts incarcerated people who are counted as residents of the legislative districts in which they are incarcerated, and not as residents of the communities that they call home (see "prison gerrymandering").

Unity Map: A proposed map drawn by a coalition of multiple community groups that demonstrates their multiple communities of interest can be simultaneously respected.

Voting Rights Act: Federal legislation that was passed in 1965 to ensure state and local governments do not pass laws or policies that deny American citizens the equal right to vote based on race.

Endnotes

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