



Reapportionment & Redistricting

Understanding their Impact in Louisiana

BACKGROUND

- Congress is the branch of our U.S. government responsible for making laws for the country.
- Congress is divided into two parts--the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives. The U.S. Senate has 100 members. Each state gets two seats in the Senate.
- The U.S. House of Representatives has 435 members. Each state gets at least one seat in the House, in addition to more seats based on the population of the state. Louisiana will now have six U.S. representatives instead of seven.
- The Louisiana Legislature makes laws for the state of Louisiana. It consists of 39 Senators and 105 representatives.
- Reapportionment is the process of deciding how many seats a state will have in the U.S. House of Representatives when its population changes. Redistricting is the process of deciding how areas will be divided into sections or districts based on the number of seats a state has.
- The Legislature will redistrict state House and Senate seats based on where people now live. Some communities have grown and will gain representation while other areas have shrunk and will lose seats.

1. Why should you care about this?

How districts are drawn affects which types of candidates can win elections. Once elected, officials make many decisions that affect the lives of citizens. You should understand how your district is drawn and whether you will have a fair chance to elect the candidate of your choice. Redistricting will be challenging in Louisiana this time because:

- Louisiana is losing one seat in the U.S. House of Representatives because its population did not grow as fast as other states.
- Louisiana House and Senate districts will be redrawn to account for population shifts. Some regions stand to gain seats, while other areas, like New Orleans, will lose seats.
- You will be affected depending on the population of your area. Some areas of the state now have fewer residents due to several factors, including Hurricane Katrina. Other areas have more population.
- There is less time to get the maps drawn and approved. Usually, states have more than a year to plan, draw maps, listen to the public and agree on final plans. The Louisiana Legislature has an election this fall and will have to move quickly to get the maps drawn and approved.

2. How does reapportionment happen?

The U.S. Constitution requires the federal government to count how many people live in each state every 10 years. Since the number of people living in each state changes, the U.S. House seats must occasionally be redivided. If the number of people living in a state goes up, the state may get more seats in the U.S. House. States that grow more slowly or lose population may lose a seat. Each member of Congress gets one vote on each bill that is considered, so states with more seats get more votes. This includes votes on issues that have a big impact on citizens, such as health care and education.



The **Census** is taken every 10 years by the federal government to count the number of people living in the country. The most recent Census, in 2010, is being used for reapportionment and redistricting.

3. How does redistricting work?

Redistricting is the process of drawing maps that divide each jurisdiction into sections (districts) of voters. Different maps are drawn for different types of seats such as those in the U.S. House of Representatives, the state Legislature, judges' seats, city councils, school boards and others. The number of people living in each district must be as close to the same as possible.

In most states, the legislators draw the maps for their seats. In other states, small groups of volunteers (independent commissions) are asked to draw the maps. Local authorities usually draw maps for city council, school board and other seats.

In 2011, the Louisiana Legislature will meet (March 20-April 13) to draw new districts for Louisiana's state Legislature in addition to the Supreme Court, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Public Service Commission.

4. Who approves the maps?

The members of a state's legislature must agree on the maps they draw before the maps become official. In most states, the approved maps are used unless someone files a protest in court that the maps are unfair.

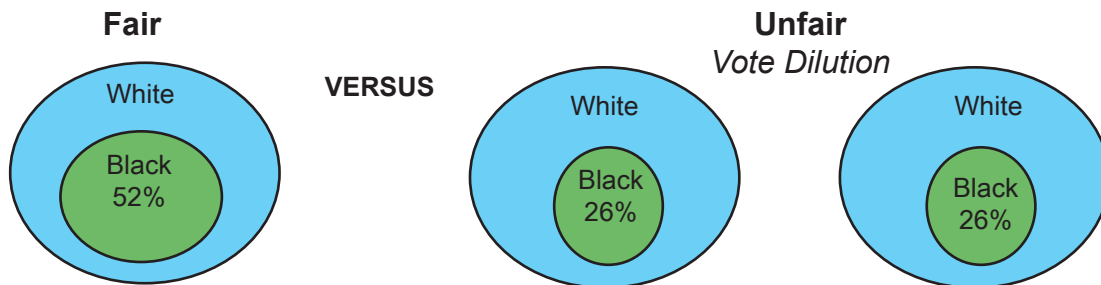
In some states, like Louisiana, the U.S. Department of Justice must approve final maps for all jurisdictions before they can be used. This approval is required because some states have a history of drawing unfair maps. Maps are considered unfair when they interfere with a **minority** citizen's ability to elect a candidate of his choice.



A **minority** is a group of people that is different from other groups in some important way AND that has often been discriminated against because of that difference. People may be considered part of a minority group based on their race, gender, religion or political beliefs.

5. When is a redistricting map considered unfair?

A map may be considered unfair if it splits up a minority group and lumps its members in with majority groups so the minority group cannot elect a candidate of its choice. This is called *vote dilution*.



A map may also be considered unfair if it decreases the number of minority districts in a state for no valid reason. This is called *retrogression*.

6. How can you be involved in redistricting?

You can attend public meetings and comment on the work the Louisiana Legislature is doing. Also, you can watch the Legislature's work on the Internet, follow the news so you know when the maps are being presented and see how the maps might affect you and your community. You may write letters to your state representative or to the U.S. Department of Justice to express your opinion about how maps are being drawn.



Information about Louisiana's redistricting process is available online at www.legis.state.la.us or by calling (225) 342-6945. For more research on redistricting, please visit www.la-par.org