



REDRAWING THE LINES:

The Impact of Redistricting on African-American Political Power

Redistricting represents one of the most important undertakings of our democracy. Without fair redistricting plans in place, the impact of the African-American vote may not be fully realized on Election Day.

Redistricting provides an opportunity to assess how the lines are redrawn for our local school board, city council, state legislative and congressional districts. It is important that African American and minority communities participate in the redistricting process to ensure that the maps adopted reflect the true diversity of our communities.

HOW IS THE CENSUS CONNECTED TO REDISTRICTING?

The census count happens at the beginning of each decade. Recently released Census data reveals changing demographics throughout the country and shows that we have become a much more diverse nation. The distribution of federal funds and the distribution of political power at all levels of government are all based on new census counts. During redistricting, this data is used to redraw district lines so that each district is equal in population size.

WHAT IS THE REDISTRICTING PROCESS?

Redistricting refers to the process by which census data is used to redraw the lines and boundaries of electoral districts within a state. This process affects everything from local school boards, city councils, county commissions and state legislatures to the United States House of Representatives.

WHY IS THE REDISTRICTING PROCESS IMPORTANT?

Redistricting impacts the weight of your vote. How and where districts are drawn in your state will often determine if your community can elect representatives of its choice.

WHO MAY PARTICIPATE IN THE REDISTRICTING PROCESS?

Anyone may participate! Interested parties—including non-profit organizations, community leaders, and political parties—may use maps and population counts of their states, counties and cities to indicate where they believe district boundaries should be drawn. All redistricting proposals should be closely analyzed to ensure that they do not violate the Voting Rights Act of 1965 or the U.S. Constitution.

HOW CAN COMMUNITY MEMBERS PARTICIPATE IN THE REDISTRICTING PROCESS?

Community members can testify at public hearings about proposed maps and provide feedback on the maps proposed by the official redistricting body and others.

HOW DOES SECTION 2 OF THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT AFFECT REDISTRICTING?

During the last several decades, the Voting Rights Act has helped to protect minority voting rights.

Special attention must be paid to the Voting Rights Act whenever redistricting occurs. Section 2 requires that officials draw plans that do not unfairly dilute minority voting strength. Vote dilution most commonly occurs when those who draw redistricting plans compress minority communities into a small number of districts (packing) or spread them thinly into a large number of districts (cracking, fracturing, or splitting).



SECTION 5 OF THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT AND REDISTRICTING

Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act applies only to certain parts of the country. Section 5 requires that officials in these covered areas obtain federal review of any redistricting plan or other voting change from the Department of Justice (DOJ) or the District Court of the District of Columbia before it can be implemented. Section 5 has helped block discriminatory redistricting plans and has helped to eliminate barriers to political participation faced by minority voters.

The following states are covered by Section 5: Only certain counties or towns in the following states are covered by Section 5:

Alabama	California
Alaska	Florida
Arizona	Michigan
Georgia	New Hampshire
Louisiana	New York
Mississippi	North Carolina
South Carolina	South Dakota
Texas	
Virginia	

HOW CAN INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES PARTICIPATE IN THE SECTION 5 PRECLEARANCE PROCESS?

DOJ invites interested individuals and community groups to participate in the Section 5 review process. Your goal in participating in the Section 5 review process should be to assist DOJ in making a decision that will best protect your community's voting rights. This may include writing a Comment Letter encouraging DOJ to object to a proposed plan that is discriminatory. Your Comment Letter to DOJ should include your perspective regarding the facts and process leading up to the creation and adoption of the proposed redistricting plan or other voting change. You can submit your comments by mail or by email at: voting.section@usdoj.gov. You can also call DOJ with your comments at 1-800-253-3931.

WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT REDISTRICTING IN MY COMMUNITY?

LDF, MALDEF and the Asian American Justice Center have recently released an important guide that provides extensive detail about the redistricting process and its impact on minority communities: "The Impact of Redistricting in Your Community: A Guide to Redistricting." The guide outlines the legal and policy framework that will govern this round of redistricting and describes advocacy strategies that can be employed by those seeking to participate in the process. Most importantly, the guide describes the central role that the Voting Rights Act plays in safeguarding minority voting rights during redistricting efforts. Finally, the guide also includes a directory that offers specific information and points of contact regarding the redistricting process in many states. To request a copy of the guide, please contact vote@naacpldf.org or visit <http://naacpldf.org/files/publications/Impact%20of%20Redistricting%20in%20YOUR%20Community%202010.pdf>.

In addition, you can also find a three-minute public education video that can be used to support your local public education and advocacy efforts by visiting LDF's redistricting website at: www.redrawingthelines.org. The video explains how redistricting impacts everyday lives.

HOW CAN I SEEK LEGAL SUPPORT OR ADVOCACY FOR MY COMMUNITY DURING REDISTRICTING?

LDF will be available throughout the process to ensure that this round of decennial redistricting produces maps that fairly reflect African-American voting strength. For legal advocacy or other redistricting-related support in your community, please contact LDF at vote@naacpldf.org or by calling 800-221-7822.



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