

Review of the 2021 Redistricting Maps of Texas
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Abstract

This paper is an opinion on the Republican Party's redistricting map for 2021 and its present and future implications for people in Texas. First, this paper describes the background of the redistricting process and gerrymandering. Then, it explores how the current population changes in Texas might influence the state's voting patterns and the Republican Party's influence. Following this, it examines how the Republican Party in Texas has diminished the LatinX and Democratic vote by gerrymandering districts in favor of Republican and White voters. The evidence is given by examining voting districts' population rates of LatinX, people of color, and White voters in a few districts. Then viewing the entirety of the state and comparing the number of districts that contain political voter bases of each party. This opinion also provides a summary of current legal actions to counter the new district map in Texas. It ends by illustrating why social workers and social work students should care about policies and government procedures.

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The Republican Party in Texas has restricted votes by creating laws that weaken the voting power of particular groups. One of those laws is significantly redistricting to maintain the Republican Party's clout in the Texas legislature; this is called gerrymandering (ACLU, 2021). The Republican Party has held a stronghold in this state for over 20 years (Batheja, 2021) and redistricted to ensure its perpetuation. In 2021, the United States Census Bureau Decennial Population Report came in, and it was once again time for redistricting.

Background

Redistricting is a process of creating sections known as districts in a geographical area to determine the number of elected representatives each district shall have based on its population size. Redistricting ensures that each district's population has equal representation in government. Before the 1960s redistricting laws were not standardized and states assigned the number of representatives as they saw fit. As a result, when populations began increasing, lower density

areas had more representatives than higher density areas (ACLU, 2021; Loyola Law School, n.d.-b). Some states would go for decades without redistricting, and some legislatures did it because they favored the interests of the rural areas (Stebenne, 2012). Others did it to retain their Congressional House seats due to the 1911 law that limited the number of total seats in the U.S. House (Stebenne, 2012). Some congressional representatives redistricted areas to follow partisan principles and personal agendas. Moreover, states redistricted areas out of racial discrimination (Stebenne, 2012).

During the 1960's, the Supreme Court heard several cases about redistricting that violated voting rights, and they ruled that the "one person, one vote" was tantamount to the 14th amendment (ACLU, 2021). The Supreme Court also ruled that states had to redistrict the appropriate number of representatives for each district's population based on the U.S. Census Bureau's decennial reported data (Loyola Law School, n.d.-b). Only seven states use independent commissions to redraw district maps certifying unbiased equal representation for all voters (Loyola Law School, n.d.-a). Texas is not one of those states (ACLU, 2021).

The New District Maps

Partisan politics and racial discrimination have not stopped because of social changes, laws, and people of color reaching high-level government positions. Texas is a prime example of this and is a battleground state (Oak, 2020). This past 2020 presidential election was a narrow win for Donald Trump, with a 5.6% lead over Joe Biden ("2020 Election Results Texas", n.d.). The closest elections for Texas were in 2016, the Republican candidate won by 9%, in 1996, when the Republican candidate won by 5%, in 1992 Republican candidate won by 3.2%, and in 1976 when Jimmy Carter, the Democratic candidate, won the state by a 3.1% margin. All other elections before 1976 were a win above a 10% margin for the Republican party (Samuels, 2020;

270ToWin, n.d.). Texas may be on a trend toward a more liberal-leaning state using past election rates as a basis for future election outcomes.

This last presidential election was also when the U.S. Census Bureau conducted its demographics study of the country, opening the gates for redistricting. The report was something the Republicans did not see coming. Texas saw a considerable increase in its population, with nearly 4 million people added to the state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021a). Of those 4 million people, 2 million people are LatinX, and people of color contribute 90% of the state's growth (Ura et al., 2021). Texas gained two congressional seats in the United States Congress, the most of any state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021b). The LatinX population now is at 39.3%, and the White population is at 39.8%, a vast increase in the LatinX population within the last few years. The LatinX population's size is now even with the White population in Texas, a majority-minority state (Ura et al., 2021).

With such drastic changes in population, it meant changing the district lines where the Republican Party will win indefinitely. The Republican majority legislature in Texas passed the redrawn district maps in October 2021 ("History for HB1", n.d.; "History for SB4", n.d.; "History for SB6", n.d.). The Texas Republican Party made sure to break up those substantial LatinX populations in areas with higher White inhabitants.

For instance, the previous Congressional District 33 spanned from Fort Worth to Dallas with Irving included. The district contained a 48% population of LatinX voters and a 25% White voter population, with people of color making up the rest. Republicans' counter maneuver for Congressional District 33 was to move Irving into Congressional District 6. The redrawn Congressional District 6 starts from Irving and stretches to Wells, Texas, 165 miles away. Congressional District 6 has a 60% population of White voters and a 21% population of LatinX

voters (Astudillo et al., 2021). While also ensuring other districts around it had higher White populations (Texas Legislative Council, n.d.-a, Texas Legislative Council, n.d.-b).

Irving was also in Senate District 9 with a 55% White voter population and a LatinX voter population of 23%. This district narrowly voted for Trump. To ensure the number of LatinX voters would not rise, the Texan Republican Party moved Irving to Senate District 16, which already had a more substantial Democratic presence. Senate District 16 ranges from Grand Prairie to Irving to Richardson, then down to Balch Springs, with a majority population of 46% White voters and 28% LatinX voters (Astudillo et al., 2021).

Another district on the Senate Map which had a change is Senate District 10. The earlier map had equal proportions of people of color within 413 square miles. Black voters were at 20%, LatinX voters were at 21%, Asian voters were at 5%, and White voters were at 54%. The new map of Senate District 10 now covers 6,233 square miles and has White voters at 62%, Black and LatinX voters at 17%, and Asian voters at 4%. For an area that also had a growing population of minorities, the map was extended to create an advantage for White voters (Barragán, 2021).

Moving or condensing the LatinX voter population is the goal where Republicans believe LatinX voters may vote for or lean Democratic. The major cities in Texas that have the highest population rates and higher rates of LatinX and liberal voters have been condensed and slimmed on the new district maps. The Texas congressional map holds a majority of White voters at 65%. Congressional districts that hold a LatinX voter majority are only 18.4% (Ramsey, 2021). Ramsey (2021) expands on this more, showing that out of the 150 House Districts there was a White majority in 89 districts, and 30 districts had a LatinX majority. In Senate Districts, 20 of them had a White majority, and only 7 districts had a majority of the LatinX population. The

White population still has the most voting power in a state that can attribute its growth to over 90% of people other than White.

Even when looking only at voter political parties, the Republican Texas Legislature made sure they would hold the majority of districts. In the previous congressional map, 14 districts were competitive. Congressional districts that had a majority of a Republican base were a total of 13, and 9 districts had a majority Democratic base. The new map ensures that the congressional districts in Texas have 23 districts that are majority Republican. With 12 districts holding a Democratic majority, three districts will be competitive arenas. Even if those competitive and Democratic strong districts won out, that would only account for 15 districts. It does not create a fair election and only assures the Republican Party's power ("2022Redistricting.", n.d.). The Princeton Gerrymandering Report Card grades the new congressional district map an F, the new Senate District map also gets an overall F (Princeton Electoral Innovation Lab & RepresentUS, 2021a; Princeton Electoral Innovation Lab & RepresentUS, 2021c). The House District map received a C but still favors the Republican party (Princeton Electoral Innovation Lab & RepresentUS, 2021b). Even from an outside academic source, the current district maps favor the old power in Texas rather than the growing population would show.

These new district maps show how the Republican Party has made it, so the Democrats and people of color are dispersed throughout the districts and in as few districts as possible. There has been a case brought to the courts by the Department of Justice in the U.S. District Court for Western Texas over these new district maps (Coronado & Riccardi, 2021). Representatives of District 10 have also filed a lawsuit in Texas within the same U.S. District Court (Aguilar, 2022). The Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDF)

has also filed a lawsuit against Texas redistricting maps in the U.S. District Court for Western Texas (Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2021). Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) have also brought its case to Texas' redistricting map fighting against the dilution of the Asian vote (NPR & All Things Considered [Podcast], 2021).

Conclusion

Texas has a long history of diminishing the vote of people of color and the liberal vote. The Republican Party in Texas has weakened the voting power of the Democratic Party by ensuring Democratic majority districts are condensed to as few districts as possible. The Republican Party has done this by dispersing the LatinX and people of color's population to multiple districts, losing the number of competitive districts, and weakening the voting power of people of color and liberal-leaning voters. In my opinion, the state of Texas does not have equal representation, and there is an infringement of voting rights. People and organizations, such as MALDEF and Representatives of District 10 have taken action to stop this, yet things have not changed.

Social workers and social work students can positively influence this area. The National Association of Social Work calls on Social Justice, Service, Dignity and Worth of the Person in its ethics (National Association of Social Workers, 2017). Is it not the duty of social workers to serve their community by informing them of the hurdles in place? Is it not part of service to find ways of connecting their community to organizations and people that help them with the protection of their voting rights? Is it not Social Justice for social workers and students themselves to participate in policy, government, and social issue movements to ensure that significant systemic oppressions do not prevail? Is it not the Dignity and Worth of a Person by

making sure each person has the right to vote, have their vote be fairly counted, and heard by representatives?

Voting is not the only issue: it is the system and those in policy positions that deny and devalue the voting rights of people of color and liberal voters. Voter participation is crucial and allowing people of color and liberal votes to be counted could make the difference in social justice issues. There are many issues this affects which include climate change, education, cost of housing, abortion rights, imprisonment rates, and many more. If people in the United States, let alone Texas, continue to vote in a rigged system, how will things ever change?

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