



2021 NORTH CAROLINA REDISTRICTING

What is redistricting and why is it important?

Redistricting happens every 10 years (in years ending in “1”) following the population counts made by the US Census (in years ending in “0”).

This decade’s redistricting will begin in 2021 after 2020 Census results are delivered to the states (See *2020 Census Data Fact Sheet*). Using population counts, redistricting is how the U.S. divides up communities for the purposes of establishing **what voting districts we live in, who represents us, and how those representatives will allocate resources for our communities.**

The districts we draw this year will shape our lives and our communities for the next decade. We must mobilize massive participation in the process among the greatest possible number of people to pressure state and local electeds to draw fair districts, protect our communities of interest, and establish a clear record of community demands so that we can challenge any attempts to rig the process.

Who is in charge of redistricting?

Redistricting is not an automatic process — and varies from state to state.

In North Carolina, redistricting happens on the local, state, and federal levels — anywhere that candidates file, and elections happen, in districts.

On the local level, **town or city councils, boards of county commissioners, and boards of education draw their own districts**, with the help of city or county attorneys, or sometimes outside attorneys or redistricting experts. The North Carolina General Assembly draws three districts: the North Carolina delegation to the US House of Representatives (otherwise known as **Congressional Districts**), the **NC Senate Districts**, and the **NC House Districts**.

Historically, North Carolina’s state and local governments have not always led a fair, open, timely, and transparent redistricting process, which makes community organizing and advocacy essential.

When does redistricting happen?

Redistricting can begin when the US Census Bureau releases data gathered during the prior year’s Census. Because of delays in Census data caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors, the Census Bureau will release a partial form of the data on **August 16, 2021**, and full data on **September 30, 2021**.

State and local governments can begin their redistricting processes after August 16.

In North Carolina, the NC General Assembly will draw state and Congressional before candidates file for the next elections, likely **December 17, 2021**. Under new guidelines laid out by the General Assembly, towns, cities, counties and school boards with districts can draw their maps by **November 17, 2021** or **December 17, 2021**. Public hearings seeking community input may be held on the local level before draft maps are drawn; and must be held after they are drawn and before they are passed.

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Typically, the redistricting process follows the following stages:

1. Census data is released, including population changes and who lives where.
2. Maps are drafted based on the available data.
3. Public hearings about draft maps are held where community input is given.
4. Maps are approved by the relevant state and local governments.
5. The next elections are held using the maps drawn during this process.

What is the Voting Rights Act, and why does it matter for redistricting?

Historically, the redistricting process has been used to prevent communities of color from gaining political power. People in power have either “**packed**” communities into a small number of districts when they could effectively control more. Power-hungry politicians could also “**crack**” communities into many districts, effectively making it impossible for any of them to exercise power in their district.

Passed in 1965, Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) is a nationwide prohibition against voting practices and procedures (including redistricting plans) that discriminate on the basis of race, color or membership in a language minority group. The Voting Rights Act protects the creation of “majority-minority districts,” which contain a majority of a racial or linguistic community.

In the 1960s the US Supreme Court also said that **districts must be more or less equal in population in order not to violate the constitutional principles of Equal Protection**,

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in a series of decisions that came to be known as “**One Person, One Vote**.” Starting in the 1960s, after each US Census, there has been litigation over how districts are drawn and whether they violate the principle of “One Person, One Vote” among other issues.

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 talk about what makes it unique when compared to surrounding communities, as 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 stories and describing concerns to policy makers. Examples include community members working to repair their area after a natural disaster or a neighborhood organizing to have a high school built closer to them.



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