



New Mexico

Office of African American Affairs

New Mexico Redistricting

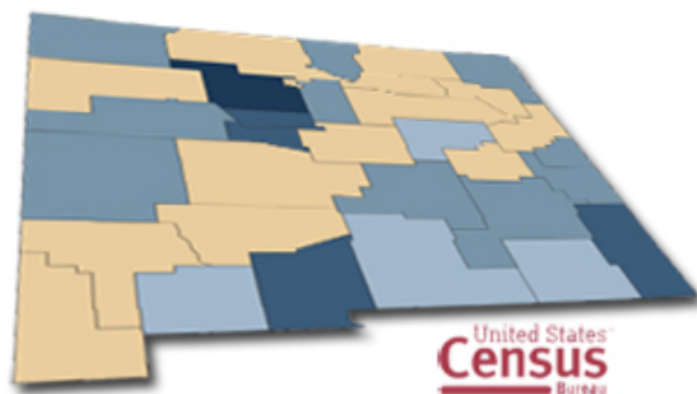
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Once a decade, states are tasked with drawing the lines that make up the state legislative and congressional boundaries. While map drawing isn't the most exciting of political priorities, this process of drawing and redrawing the State Senate, State House of Representatives, and Congressional Districts for New Mexico has major implications on voting and representation.

If you are familiar with the term gerrymandering, then you might already have an idea of how redistricting can affect the vote during elections. The process of redrawing the lines of each district can raise major questions about fairness, equity, and partisanship. An ideal redistricting process will prioritize the preservation of communities of interest, maintain voting power for BIPOC voters, and prevent gerrymandering and partisan districts. However, redistricting has historically been used to manipulate political boundaries in order to favor a certain political party, individual, or constituency over another.



There are a few common criteria that states must follow throughout the redistricting process starting with equal population. Representation is based on population, meaning the more people in an area the more representatives it gets. When populations grow or shrink throughout the state, district lines must accommodate the representation for that growth or decline. The other criteria are contiguity, meaning districts should be physically adjacent, compactness, constituents should live near each other, and maintains communities of interest, which groups people based on common political, social, or economic interest - more on this later.

New Mexico is one of five states that have an independent advisory committee that assists the legislature in withdrawing state lines. The New Mexico Citizen Redistricting Committee is an independent, non-partisan body tasked to develop and propose district maps for New Mexico's Congressional delegation, the New Mexico Senate, the New Mexico House of Representatives, and the Public Education Commission. This independent committee is committed to proposing district lines that are drawn fairly through a transparent, open, and participatory process that allow New Mexican voters to choose their elected representatives, not the other way around.

The challenge faced by Black and African-American communities during redistricting is maintaining Black influence in elections. This is why the requirement to maintain communities of interest is so important. When communities of interest are recognized, BIPOC neighborhoods, precincts, and cities have the opportunity to be contained within one district, increasing the likelihood of a candidate that represents the values of that community being elected.

Containing nearby communities of interest within one district may create a majority-minority district. Majority-minority districts are where the majority of the voting-age population belongs to a single minority, which allows minority voters to elect their candidate of choice. The problems arise when districts are drawn that limit minority populations, making it nearly impossible to have minority influence during an election, or pack minorities within just a couple of districts, limiting the number of candidates who could be elected by minority voters.



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In New Mexico, the biggest issue is the scarcity of districts where there are high Black and African-American populations and having voting influence across multiple districts is even more seldom. Cities like Albuquerque, Hobbs, Clovis, Roswell, Alamogordo, and their accompanying districts are some of the few areas where Black and African-American population is high enough to create election influence, but still too low to create a minority-majority district based solely on the Black population. However, that doesn't mean that the BIPOC voters don't have the ability to command representation in their district.

Another way majority-minority districts can be obtained is to create boundaries where at least 55% of the population are people of color. This is much more achievable in New Mexico because of our state's multicultural landscape which would have districts including a majority of the Hispanic/Latinx, Indigenous and Native-American, Asian-American and Pacific Islander, and mixed-race populations in addition to Black and African-American voters.

Maps during this year's Citizen Redistricting Committee proposed by the New Mexico Black Voters Collaborative help identify the Black and African-American communities of interest and their voting power while maps proposed by the Center for Civic Policy have focused on creating as many majority-minority districts as possible by grouping several BIPOC communities within many districts.

While the Citizen Redistricting Committee is responsible for considering public commentary on maps and district lines, it is the legislature that will have the final say. Lawmakers will gather in the roundhouse during a special session in December to discuss redistricting and the map proposals that are a result of the Citizen Redistricting Committee meetings. A majority vote will decide if the new lines will be adopted.

Public involvement in this process is not only necessary but critical in order to confirm that Black and African American representation is protected and increased wherever possible. The ability to discuss and argue how we believe our communities and residents should be represented on these maps is not something to be taken lightly, as it can dictate the power of our voices at the State and Federal level for 10 years.

Black and African-American New Mexicans have historically been excluded from these kinds of decisions that have serious implications on our communities. Continually we are told that our numbers are too small or insignificant to create an impact in our state. This dangerous way of thinking continues to disenfranchise us, deny us equal representation, and minimize the over 42,000 Black and African Americans that call New Mexico their home.

Sources:

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