

Power

Lines

How the 2011 Redistricting Shapes Minority Representation in the Detroit Region

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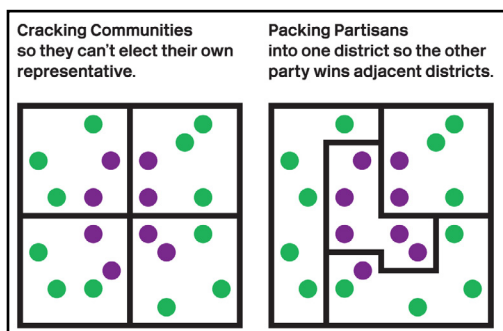
DATA DRIVEN DETROIT 

Every ten years following the Census, the Michigan State Legislature redraws the boundaries of the state's congressional and legislative districts to account for population changes. This process has important political implications and is more than a bureaucratic update of lines on a map.

Recently, the Michigan Senate and House passed the 2011 Apportionment Plan which was then approved by Governor Rick Snyder. These new district boundaries will influence who gets elected and the quality of political representation provided to Michigan citizens.

Data Driven Detroit (D3) has developed the following analysis as well as the attached map packet to help community groups and citizens analyze the effects of the new plans on communities.

Gerrymandering is the process of manipulating geographic boundaries to create political advantage or reduce minority voting power. The two basic techniques of gerrymandering are cracking and packing.



Cracking occurs when a geographic concentration of a certain population is split up into different districts, thus diluting their voting power. If this population had a community-specific problem to address,

they would need to organize with multiple representatives rather than having a single person upon whom they could rely.

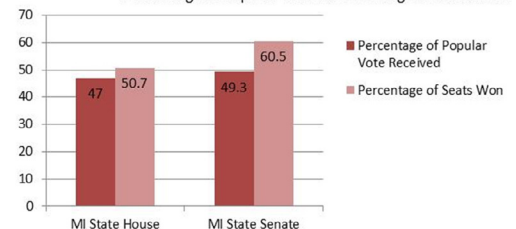
Packing occurs when a district contains a very high percentage of population from a certain group. This reduces the overall voting power of the packed group because it restricts their influence to a smaller number of districts. Packing also makes it easier for opposing groups in the surrounding districts to have a majority.

The Michigan Compiled Laws contain detailed redistricting statutes that were designed to prevent gerrymandering. These statutes dictate that Congressional districts should contain precisely equal populations and the State Senate and State House Districts can only deviate 5% above or below the ideal district population. Population equality among districts is important to ensure that each vote carries the same weight when electing a district representative. All districts are supposed to be contiguous and compact. District lines may only break county and municipal boundaries for the purposes of achieving population equality, but this should be avoided if possible.[1] By mandating compact districts which follow existing political boundaries, these statutes prevent communities with similar interests from being split up into different districts.

Instead of using statutes to inhibit gerrymandering, some states like California, New Jersey, and Iowa have created independent or bipartisan commissions to handle the redistricting process. In Michigan, however, as in most states, the congressional and state legislative district boundaries are drawn by the state legislature and approved by the governor. While the legislature is expected to follow

the statutes in the Michigan Compiled Laws, the 2002 Michigan Supreme Court case *LeRoux vs. Secretary of State* ruled that they are not legally binding. [2] The federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 requires districts with a majority of minority voters to be drawn whenever possible.[3] Plans that do not comply with this legislation can be struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court. In Michigan, because of population density, two Congressional districts in Southeast Michigan must be majority African-American in order to align with the VRA.

MI Legislative Majority 2001 - 2011
Percentage of Popular Vote vs Percentage of Seats Won



When one party controls all aspects of the redistricting process, the district plan will likely create an advantage for this party. In Michigan, Republicans currently have a majority in the state legislature, both House and Senate, and hold the governor's office, so the 2011 plan will likely favor the Republican Party. This was also the case during the 2001 round of redistricting and a Center for Michigan study found that the 2001 State House and State Senate district plans have given a political advantage to the Republican Party. Over the past decade, the GOP received 47% of the statewide vote in the State House and won 50.7% of the seats. In the State Senate, they received 49.3% of the statewide vote and won 60.5% of the seats. [4]

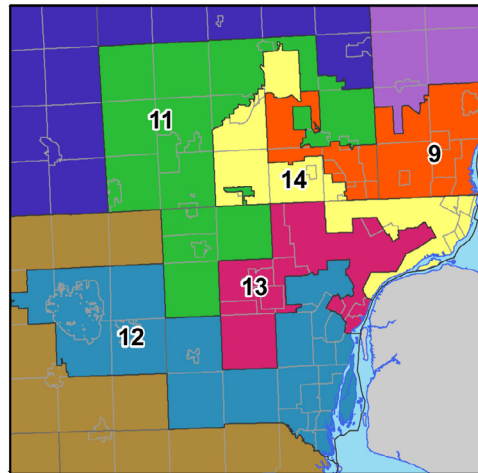
Gerrymandering is not limited to one political party. Illinois is one of the only large states in the nation whose leadership is currently dominated by the Democratic Party and like many Republican controlled states they seem to have used it to their advantage. The Illinois Apportionment plan has been labeled as a “radical gerrymander” and will possibly allow the Democrats to pick-up 6 seats and retake the Illinois House.[5] This shift in power was achieved after “... nearly every Republican district was cut apart or shuffled around, inviting scores of intraparty primaries, or forcing GOP incumbents to run in Democratic strongholds or retire.”[5]

It is difficult to make accurate predictions about the future political effects of the 2011 proposed plans, but through the use of dot density maps displaying the distribution of population by race, we can analyze how these plans will impact minority representation. The 2011 Michigan Congressional and Legislative Apportionment Plans were released online to the public on June 17, 2011, as promised by the Senate’s Redistricting Committee Chairman Sen. Joe Hune, R-Hamburg Township. The level of detail provided by these maps allowed for replication and analysis of the racial composition of the proposed districts.

The Data Driven Detroit (D3) maps available for download at our website show the varied implications of these district plans on racial minorities, expressed through visual representations of population density. D3 created maps of the proposed Congressional, State House, and State Senate plans and also the winning Congressional plan from the Michigan Citizens’ Redistricting Competition. For each plan, maps are available for the whole state, for the Southeast region, and for the cities of Detroit, Grand Rapids, Lansing, and Saginaw. Hispanic, non-Hispanic Black and non-Hispanic Asian populations are the only minority groups large enough and compact enough to stand out on these maps. The dots represent the proximal location of 25-50 people at the block level. As Southeast Michigan contains most of the state’s minority populations, this article’s analysis will be limited to this region. However, the various map packets for download include analysis on Michigan’s major cities affected by the new districts.

According to the 2010 Census, Michigan’s population has declined 0.4% in the past decade. This loss of population means that Michigan also loses a congressional district in the 2011 round of redistricting, going from 15 to 14 districts. The city of Detroit also lost 25% of its population over the past decade so it was expected that it would also lose representation.

Analysis of the State 2011 Congressional Plan



In the 2011 Congressional plan, Detroit is divided between Districts 13 and 14 which along with the swirled shapes of Districts 11, 9, 8, and 12 form a pinwheel of contiguous but not compact districts in Southeast Michigan. This lack of compactness means that if you were to drive along Woodward from downtown Detroit to Pontiac, you would pass through the 14th District three times, the 13th District once, the 11th District twice and the 9th District three times.

Districts 13 and 14 are both more than 50% Black and Detroit residents outnumber their suburban counterparts in each district. However, according to the Detroit News, neither one solely represents Detroit the way that the previous boundaries did.[6]

Detroit is not the only place in the region spread out between districts. Oakland County has four sprawling districts; 8, 9,

11 and 14, none of which is completely contained within its boundaries. The Associated Press warns that this may lead to the entire county being represented by outside individuals, even though it is the second most populous county in the state. [7]

This plan also divides the Hispanic population in southwest Detroit between districts 13 and 14. This community is not populous enough to have a majority in any single district, but this division could be problematic for community members seeking the attention of their representatives. Instead of working with one representative, they would need to coordinate their efforts with two representatives. The plan does a better job with the Asian population near Hamtramck, preserved entirely in District 14.

Analysis of the Winning Plan from the Michigan Citizens’ Redistricting Competition

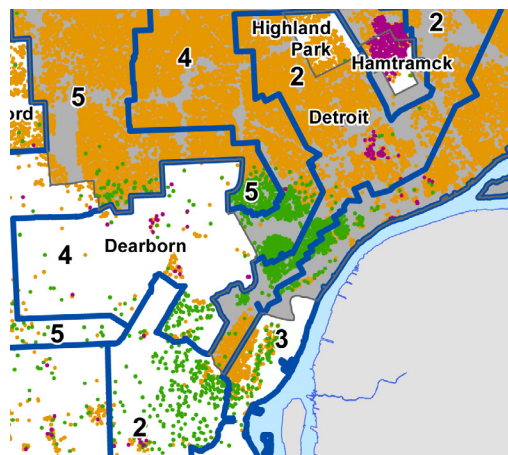
Another noteworthy Congressional plan is a product of the 2011 Michigan Citizens’ Redistricting Competition (MCRC). This non-partisan project empowered citizens to draw their own districts. It provided online interactive redistricting software on the MCRC website and selected a non-partisan panel of judges, including D3 Director Kurt Metzger, to choose the winning plans which were then submitted to the Michigan State Legislature. The winning congressional plan was created by Nathan Inks, an undergraduate student and president of the College Republicans at Central Michigan University.

His plan does not split up the Hispanic population in southwest Detroit or the Asian population near Hamtramck, placing them both in District 12. He also drew the two minority-majority African-American districts required by the Voting Rights Act without sacrificing compactness to the same degree as the Republican’s proposed Congressional plan. Inks commented on the Republican plan, confess-

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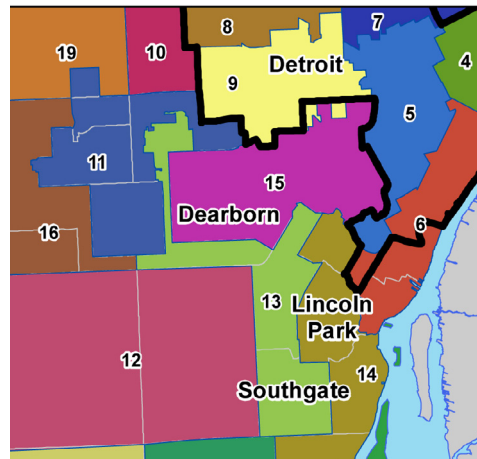
ing that “when I saw District 14 from the proposed map, even I cringed because of how awkward and mangled it was. Such gerrymandering takes the focus off of the good things the GOP has done for the state and makes the party look like they need to ‘cheat’ to win.” [8] Inks’ plan still divides Detroit into two districts, but it is a much cleaner and compact division. This allows District 12 of his plan to be more contained within the boundaries of Detroit than Districts 13 and 14 of the Republican’s proposed plan, so it creates a district that Detroiters could call their own.

Analysis of the State 2011 Michigan Senate Plan



The Republican’s proposed State Senate plan is also characterized by a lack of compactness. Craig Ruff, a senior policy fellow at Public Sector Consultants who is associated with the Republicans, defended the lack of compactness by attributing it to the Voting Rights Act’s mandate to draw five black majority-minority districts in Michigan[9][10]. The long and skinny shape of District 1 allows it to contain the distant communities of Redford, Hamtramck, and Grosse Pointe. The Asian population in the Hamtramck area is preserved in District 1, but Detroit’s Hispanic population is cracked into four pieces between Districts 2, 3, 4 and 5. This is even more problematic for the quality of their representation than the cracking of the proposed Congressional plan.

Analysis of the State 2011 Michigan House Plan



There are 110 State House districts in Michigan, so these districts are much smaller than the Congressional and State Senate districts. Half of Detroit’s districts are within the city limits. The neighboring districts are unremarkable except for an unexpected deviation from the city boundary between districts 9 and 15. This plan is more compact than the others, but there are still some odd-shaped districts, most notably District 13 and 14 which are both significantly elongated. However, it should be noted that the unique “barbell” shape of Dearborn Heights is to blame for this lack of compactness in the north of District 13. The Asian community near Hamtramck is preserved in District 4, but again the compact Hispanic population in southwest Detroit is still split, this time between Districts 5 and 6.

The 2011 proposed Congressional and Legislative plans generally do not provide compact districts and they consistently divide the Hispanic population into different districts. However, the Asian population located near Hamtramck was never divided. There is a strong racial division between white and black populations along the Detroit city limits. This means that the state legislature needs to find a balance between following the Detroit city boundary and avoiding the packing of Black populations. The Michigan Citizens’ Redistricting Competition shows us there are ways to achieve that balance without sacrificing compactness and splitting communities of interest.

References:

- [1] Michigan Compiled Laws. M.C.L. §§ 3.63 (1999), 4.261(1996)
- [2] LeRoux v Secretary of State, 465 Mich 594 (2002)
- [3] Voting Rights Act. 42 U.S.C. 1973 to 1973aa-6. (1965)
- [4] Center for Michigan. “Special Report: How political map-making leaves voters with uncompetitive, pre-determined elections” February 10, 2011
- [5] Greenbaum, Mark. “Democrats’ revenge in 2012: a radical Illinois gerrymander” Christian Science Monitor, online. June 8, 2011
- [6] Bouffard, Karen. “New state House, Senate district plans head to Senate” Detroit News, online. June 22, 2011
- [7] The Associated Press. “Democrats say GOP needlessly rushing Michigan’s redistricting” June 16, 2011.
- [8] Michigan Citizens Redistricting Competition 2011.
- [9] Egan, Paul. “GOP’s Senate redistricting map weakens Detroit, Wayne County. Detroit News, online. June 17, 2011.
- [10] Henderson, Stephen. “Strange lines for voters: New districts, and attempts to defend them, take convoluted turns” Detroit Free Press, online. June 23, 2011.