



## What is redistricting and why does it matter?

Our elected local, state, and federal representatives adopt the laws that affect every aspect of society. They have a big impact on our income, safety, education, roads, housing, the food we eat, the air we breathe, and the many services we use.

Most of these representatives are elected from districts – from school board districts to Congressional districts – and the way that people are grouped into districts has a big influence on who can get elected and what values they promote. For example, a district with mostly farmers will likely elect a representative who will fight for farmers' interests, while a representative from a big city will likely have different priorities. The same is true for districts with large populations of the same race or the same political party.

Regrouping people and redrawing these district lines is called redistricting. Under the constitution, redistricting happens after each decade's Census to adjust the districts and make them roughly equal in population size. The way the lines of a particular district are redrawn to include or exclude certain kinds of people will directly affect who can win the next election. And the way many districts are redrawn can affect who controls a school board, city council, state legislature or even Congress. That's why redistricting is so important – it directly affects who wins elections and who adopts the policies that govern our lives.

There are many factors that can go into redrawing the lines – and the whole redistricting process should be open and allow people in the districts to participate in what's going on. In North Carolina, the representatives themselves are authorized to redraw the lines for their own governmental body. But the map they draw can be challenged in court as not properly taking into consideration key factors, such as making the district relatively compact, not dividing up communities with closely similar interests, and not violating the Voting Rights Act's protection of minority voters in districts with a history of discrimination. Individuals and community groups can also learn how to use these various factors to draw their own map with district lines, and that map could eventually be viewed by a court or the US Justice Department as more fair than the one drawn by the political representatives and their experts.

A group of people who want to shape the political future of their community can have a powerful influence on the redistricting process. Here are some preliminary research steps for learning about redistricting in your county, while working with a Democracy North Carolina staff person.

# **Working Mission & Principles of The Alliance for Fair Redistricting and Minority Voting Rights (AFRAM)**

## **Proposed Mission**

The Coalition will advocate for fair redistricting in North Carolina by encouraging, publicizing and organizing broad public participation and education in the redistricting process. By “fair redistricting” we mean civic participation to defend and advance the voting rights and voting effectiveness of peoples of color through redistricting in North Carolina in accordance with the Voting Rights Act and the U.S. Constitution. We will carry out united, multi-racial, coordinated work at the state level and encourage and support work at as many local levels as possible.

While the strategy will differ in different localities, at the North Carolina state level the Coalition will advocate for redistricting plans that make the least change necessary to accommodate population changes.

## **Draft Principles of the fair redistricting coalition in NC**

1. **Transparency:** The redistricting process should be open and transparent. The data, timelines, criteria, goals, draft maps, etc. should be matters of public record, easily accessible on the internet.
2. **Meaningful Participation:** The redistricting process should allow for participation by the general public through extensive public hearings and clear guidelines for the public submission of proposed redistricting maps. Elected officials should demonstrate how the plans they adopt are responsive to the comments and concerns expressed by the public.
3. **Minority Voting Rights:** Redistricting plans must provide African Americans and other racial and ethnic groups protected by the Voting Rights Act an equal opportunity to participate in the political process and elect representatives of their choice. Redistricting plans should not have the purpose or effect of making minority voters worse off than they are under the existing district plan.
4. **Coalition Districts:** Where justified by voting patterns, coalition districts that empower previously disenfranchised people of color should be enacted. People of color coalition districts should be encouraged where they are feasible and strategic.
5. **Legality:** A redistricting plan shall comply with the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, the provisions of the federal Voting Rights Act, and relevant state and local laws.