

Community Involvement DISTRICT DECISIONS



★ ★ Grades 11-12

Skills and Objectives:

- Students will use a timeline to learn about reapportionment and redistricting.
- Students will debate redistricting based on municipal boundaries vs. population counts.

Getting Started:

- Review the legislative branch of our government: the House of Representatives and Senate.

- Introduce the concepts of reapportionment and redistricting, emphasizing these points:

1. The Census Bureau collects population totals; **reapportionment** decisions are made by Congress; **redistricting** decisions are made by state legislators.
2. Before the 1960s, apportionment of state legislature seats was often based on land area not population, so a sparsely populated area could have the same congressional clout as a more densely populated one.
3. Courts today have interpreted the “one person, one vote” principle to mean congressional, state, and local districts must be composed of approximately equal population totals. Redistricting occurs to reflect changes in relative numbers of people living in each state.
4. Population redistribution within states affects redistricting. Redistricting by population can often lead to oddly shaped districts that don’t conform to **municipal** boundaries.
5. After the 1990 Decennial Census, lawsuits were filed challenging several newly drawn congressional districts. The most well-known of these cases involved North Carolina’s 12th District, which was a ribbon-like, 160-mile long district that was drawn, in compliance with the Voting Rights Act, to redress prior discrimination against minorities in North Carolina. Although African-Americans make up nearly 25 percent of North Carolina’s population, an African-American had not been elected to congress from that state in over 100 years.

- A political party with control of a state legislature may try to “gerrymander” district boundaries to favor its party over others. Political **gerrymandering** is not illegal. However, courts have ruled in the North Carolina case that “racial gerrymandering” is illegal.

- Discuss whether gerrymandering in any form should be legal. What factors should be considered in drawing congressional districts?

Chalkboard Definitions

reapportionment: the reassignment of congressional representation based on changes in state populations.

redistricting: drawing new congressional district boundaries.

municipal: relating to a town, city, or urban area.

gerrymandering: redrawing district boundaries to give a political party or other group an electoral advantage.

Using the Activity Worksheets:

- Distribute copies of pages 13 and 14. Review the redistricting timeline with students, then have them research the redistricting process in their state. To assist them in their research, refer students to the Web sites on page 14.

- Have students complete page 13, then review their responses.

- Divide students into four groups. Explain that the groups will debate a proposed change in the way congressional districts are drawn. There will be two duplicate debates. To help

students prepare, have them research and answer the debate prep questions.

- Next, have the groups read the debate statement and choose sides. Explain that, during the debate, each side will be allowed to speak twice for up to 10 minutes, once to present their argument, and once for rebuttal of the other side’s argument. The side in favor of the debate statement will go first and will receive an extra one minute counter-rebuttal at the end.

- Have groups present their debates. Discuss the issue. **Which side receives more support?**

Extension:

- Have students find out more about their own congressional voting district. **Who is their representative?** Students can check the library or visit www.house.gov/writerep.

Answers:

1. Students should note trends: representation (and population) in the Northeast and Midwest have declined since 1960; while representation has increased in the South and West. 2. Answers will vary and might include: a smaller tax base; a strain on natural resources. 3. Answers will vary. Growing regions should insure that issues important to them are debated in Congress.

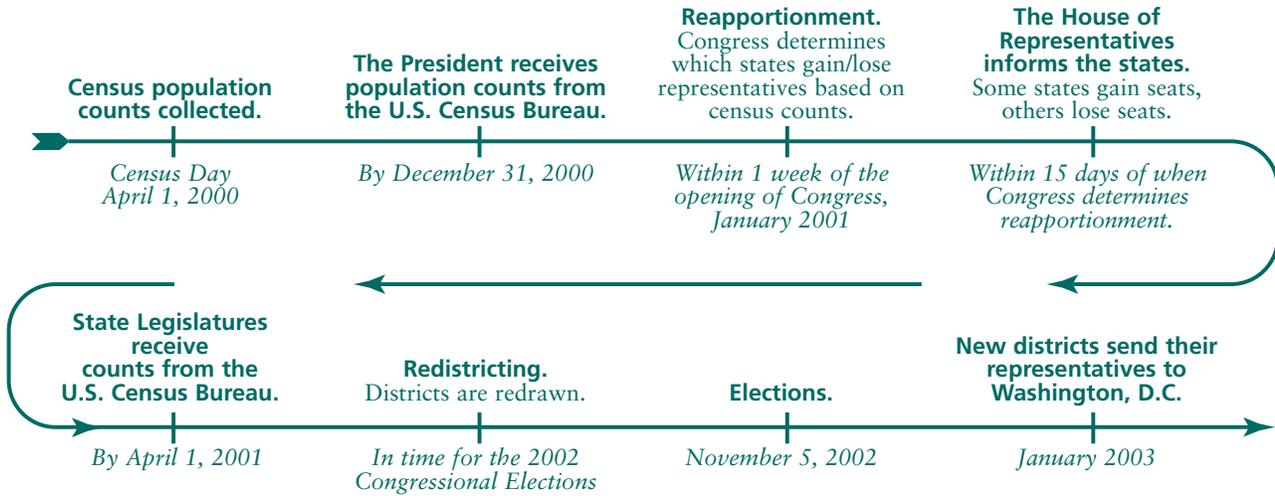




District Decisions

Census population counts play an important role in how we are represented in the House of Representatives. When a state's population changes significantly (compared to the rest of the country), the House of Representatives adds or subtracts a representative from that state. This is called **reapportionment**. When state populations change, the state legislatures use census population counts to draw new district boundaries. This is called **redistricting**. The timeline below shows you how the process works:

Census Redistricting Timeline



Now use this table to answer the questions below.

Congressional Representatives by Region:					
Region		1960	1970	1980	1990
Northeast	CT, MA, ME, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT	108	104	95	88
South	AL, AR, DC, DE, FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WV	133	134	142	149
Midwest	IA, IL, IN, KS, MI, MN, MO, ND, NE, OH, SD, WI	125	121	113	105
West	AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY	69	76	85	93

1. What does this table tell you about changes in the nation's population? Why do you think these changes have taken place? _____
2. How have these changes affected these regions? _____
3. How do you think shifts in regional population might affect the goals or priorities of the House of Representatives? _____



District Decisions (continued)

● Drawing districts so that they have equal populations means that some districts have larger or smaller land areas than others. It also means that these districts can divide or cross **municipal** boundaries. A neighborhood may be part of two or more voting districts! What if federal districts were drawn according to county, city, town, or neighborhood boundaries? How would that affect our representation in Congress? Would it compromise the “one person, one vote” principle upon which our democracy is based? Should voting districts be based on municipal boundaries and not population counts? Read the debate statement below.

Debate Statement: Congressional districts should be based on municipal boundaries, not population counts. Yes or No.

Debate Prep Questions

Conduct research to find the answers to these questions. If necessary, use a separate piece of paper.

1. How many voting districts are there in your state? Do any of them cross municipal boundaries?

2. How often has your state redrawn voting districts over the past 50 years? _____

3. Based on your state’s population distribution, would a change to municipal voting districts mean that some representatives represented twice as many people as others? How often might this occur? _____

4. How might your state’s districts be redrawn to conform to municipal boundaries? _____

● You may wish to visit these Web sites while preparing for your debate:

<http://www.ncsl.org/statevote98/redis1.htm>

The National Conference of State Legislature’s Web site has information on redistricting issues.

www.ncinsider.com//redistrict/redistrict.html

This site provides additional information about redistricting rulings involving North Carolina’s 12th district.

<http://www.senate.leg.state.mn.us/departments/scr/redist/red907.htm>

This site, developed by the Senate Counsel to Minnesota, contains information on recent Supreme Court decisions regarding redistricting.

<http://www.ncsl.org/statevote98/statesites.htm>

This site contains district maps for some states.

Tips for Your Debate

1. Do the research. Find out all you can about the redistricting process.

2. Use examples. Look for specific instances from the past that will support your claim, like court cases.

3. Get organized. Create a list of factors that the proposed change would affect. Then create an outline that addresses them.

4. Be prepared. The winning side in a debate is usually the one that has done more preparation.