

# The Washington Post

## Census data realigns congressional districts in key political states

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For years, the population center of the United States has been migrating from the snowy driveways and industrial towns of the Northeast and Midwest toward the warm skies and wide-open spaces of the South and West.

It is a shift that could change the political landscape for years to come.

On Tuesday, the Census Bureau rearranged the political map to account for population trends documented in this year's census, taking congressional districts from Democratic-leaning states such as New York and Massachusetts and adding them to Republican states such as Texas and Arizona.

The 2010 Census found that the American population had grown by about 9.7 percent, to 308,745,538 residents, since 2000. It was the slowest rate of growth since 1940.

The new numbers determined which states would gain and lose seats in the House of Representatives. Since the number of House districts is fixed at 435, reapportionment takes place every decade to ensure that they remain roughly equal in population.

The new map has the effect of transmitting

political clout to a heavily Republican region that has steadily gained in population and influence.

Texas, for example, grew by 20 percent during the past decade. As a result, the Census Bureau assigned it four additional congressional seats. Arizona's population swelled by nearly 25 percent, leading to a gain of one seat.

The changes come at the expense of such Democratic strongholds as New York and Massachusetts and Rust Belt states such as Michigan, Pennsylvania and Ohio. Of the 10 states that lost seats, eight backed Barack Obama in the 2008 election.

"Especially because of the 2010 election, Republicans are in a better place than they have been in decades," said Clark Bensen, a

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consultant with Polidata, a political data firm.

But there's a catch. Much of the population growth is attributed to Hispanics, who tend to vote Democratic. As a result, Republican candidates won't necessarily have a lock on all of the seats created.

Hispanics accounted for about half of the population gains in Florida, Arizona, Nevada and Texas, said Bill Frey, a demographer with the Brookings Institution. More than half the newcomers to Texas are Hispanic, he added. In Georgia, African Americans and Hispanics contributed more than half the growth.

The new configuration does offer Republicans a clear, if modest, advantage in the next presidential election. The Republican-leaning states that won new congressional seats will gain the same number of votes in the Electoral College, which could give the Republican nominee an edge in 2012. Republicans could gain a six-vote advantage in the Electoral College. In 2008, Obama beat Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) by 192 electoral college votes.

With Republicans in control of many state legislatures and governorships after November's historic election, the GOP will have the upper hand during the politically charged battles that take place in the states every decade over the redrawing of


congressional boundaries.

This does not give Republicans the ability to draw the lines anywhere they choose. Certain states with a history of racial discrimination are required by the federal Voting Rights Act to draw boundaries in a way that does not put minority populations at a disadvantage.

In Texas, for example, which gained four new seats, Republicans will likely be able to create two districts that will lean heavily Republican. But the state will probably be forced by the Voting Rights Act to create two majority-Hispanic districts. Those will likely lean Democratic, canceling out the advantage.

Nevada was the fastest-growing state in the past decade, increasing its population by about 35 percent. On the other end of the spectrum, Michigan saw its population

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decline by 0.6 percent.

Because of the nation's population growth during the decade, the average congressional district will have 710,767 residents, compared with 646,942 in 2000. Back in 1790, the figure was 34,000.

Texas, as expected, gained the most seats, moving from 32 to 36. Florida was the only other state to gain multiple seats, adding two, which brings it to 27.

Six states gained a single seat: Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, South Carolina, Utah and Washington.

The biggest losers were New York and Ohio, which each lost two seats. Eight states - Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, Michigan, New Jersey and Pennsylvania - each lost one.

On Monday, White House spokesman Robert Gibbs played down any effect the change might have on Obama's reelection prospects, noting that the census simply accounts for population shifts and does not dramatically change the political balance.

"I don't think that shifting some seats from one area of the country to another necessarily marks a concern that you can't make a politically potent argument in those new places," he said.

Hispanic advocacy groups, which heavily promoted the census to Latino families this year, say the new political map has the potential to significantly increase the community's political clout.

"The Latino community participated in the census in full numbers," said Gloria Montano-Greene, director of the District office for the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials. "Now we will be transitioning that really intense advocacy campaign to say, 'This is the next step to make sure that your community is counted and that your voice is being heard.'"

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