

Outlier analysis for Illinois Redistricting

Austin Asher
Abi Mengesha
Jeremiah Brown

Gerrymandering, the practice of drawing electoral district boundaries to favor one party over another, has a complex history that intertwines with issues of race and representation in the United States. While gerrymandering can be used for purely partisan advantage, its application has often had racially discriminatory effects, sometimes intentionally so. This manipulation of electoral boundaries can dilute the voting power of racial and ethnic minorities, undermining their representation in government.

Historical Roots of Racial Gerrymandering

The origins of racial gerrymandering trace back to the post-Civil War era and the subsequent periods of Reconstruction and Jim Crow. After the Civil War, African Americans were granted the right to vote through the 15th Amendment, leading to significant political participation by Black citizens in the South. However, this progress faced backlash from white supremacists who sought to maintain political and social dominance.

During Reconstruction, the redrawing of electoral districts was used as a tool to limit the political influence of newly enfranchised Black voters. Later, during the Jim Crow era, state legislatures employed gerrymandering along with poll taxes, literacy tests, and other discriminatory practices to further disenfranchise African American voters and ensure white political control.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 and Its Impact

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA) marked a significant turning point. It sought to eliminate the barriers to voting that African Americans faced, including discriminatory redistricting practices. Section 2 of the VRA prohibits voting practices or procedures that discriminate on the basis of race, color, or membership in one of the language minority groups identified in the VRA.

Following the enactment of the VRA, courts began to address racial gerrymandering more directly. Cases like *Thornburg v. Gingles* (1986) set legal precedents for identifying and remedying racial gerrymandering. The courts ruled that district lines could not be drawn in a way that would dilute the voting power of racial minorities.

Contemporary Issues and Gerrymandering in Illinois

Despite the VRA's protections, gerrymandering continues to pose challenges in Illinois. Districts may be designed to pack minority voters into few districts ("packing") or spread them thinly across many ("cracking") to dilute their voting power. Both tactics can prevent these communities from electing representatives of their choice and effectively influencing the political process.

The Supreme Court has recognized that redistricting plans cannot be based solely on racial considerations, as decided in cases like *Shaw v. Reno* (1993). However, distinguishing between partisan and racial motivations in gerrymandering has proven to be complex and contentious.

Redistricting: An Overview

Redistricting is the process by which new electoral district boundaries are drawn. These boundaries determine which voters participate in which electoral districts, fundamentally shaping the political landscape. This process is typically carried out by state legislatures or designated redistricting commissions and is required to be done every ten years to reflect the changes in population captured by the U.S. Census.

How Redistricting is Conducted

The process of redistricting involves several steps and considerations:

Data Collection: Redistricting begins with the collection of detailed population data, primarily from the U.S. Census.

Legal Compliance: Redistricting must comply with both federal and state laws, including the Voting Rights Act, which prohibits district lines from discriminating against racial or minority groups.

Public Input: Many states incorporate feedback from public hearings and community input into the redistricting process.

Drafting Maps: Legislative bodies or independent commissions draft proposed district maps based on population data and legal requirements.

Approval: The proposed maps are then subject to approval by the state legislature and, in some cases, the governor. If approved, they become the new districts.

Potential for Manipulation: Gerrymandering

Gerrymandering is the manipulation of electoral district boundaries to favor one party or class. It is a tactic often criticized for undermining democratic principles by allowing politicians to choose their voters rather than voters choosing their politicians. Gerrymandering can be achieved through:

Packing: Concentrating the opposing party's voters into a few districts to reduce their influence elsewhere.

Cracking: Spreading the opposing party's voters across many districts to dilute their voting power.

Complications in Redistricting

Redistricting is inherently complicated due to several factors:

Balancing Acts: Redistricting efforts must balance various legal and community interests, including compactness, contiguity, and respect for political and natural boundaries.

Political Interests: Partisan interests often complicate the process, with parties seeking to maximize their electoral advantages.

Public Perception: Public trust in the fairness of the redistricting process is challenging to maintain, especially with accusations of gerrymandering.

Lawsuits in Illinois on Gerrymandering

How We Conducted our Project

Sources

<https://www.lawyerscommittee.org/federal-court-upholds-illinois-redistricting-plan-that-gerrymandered-black-voters-in-east-st-louis-area/>

-