



For more information about Prison-Based Gerrymandering, see our website and weekly newsletter at <http://www.prisonersofthecensus.org>

Prison-Based Gerrymandering in Jackson County, WI

The Supreme Court requires counties to update their legislative districts once per decade so that each district contains the same population, giving each resident equal representation in county government. The US Census Bureau counts people where they are incarcerated, not where they are from, and when the Census figures do not reflect the county's population, democracy suffers.

The problem

- The Census Bureau counts incarcerated people as residents of the prison, but Wisconsin law says that incarceration does not change a person's residence. Wis. Stat. § 6.10
- In 2000, the Census Bureau counted 953 people incarcerated at the Jackson Correctional Institution as residents of Bauer Road.
- Each of the 19 districts in the Jackson County Board of Supervisors was supposed to contain about 1,005 people, based on the 2000 census, giving each resident equal influence in government.
- Because the county feared that including the prison in a single district would create a district with only a handful of voters, the county split the prison between four districts.
- The prison is so large, however, that 24% of the population of each of these districts is prisoners. Every group of 76 residents in districts 10, 11, 12, and 19 are given as much influence as 100 residents in other parts of the county.

What counties in other states do

- Mississippi, Colorado and New Jersey require counties with prisons to remove the prison population prior to redistricting, and Virginia law encourages it. Many other counties decide on their own to exclude the prison population prior to redistricting.
- In Michigan, nearly all counties avoided distorting democracy by ignoring the prisoners in drawing the districts, whether the potential for distortion was very large or quite small. Gratiot County modified data to avoid creating a district that would have been 50% prisoners. In Lapeer, using the census would have meant a district with just 6% prisoners, but even there the county clerk told us that they excluded prisoners because the prisoners were "not really residents."

Solutions for Jackson County

- Jackson County should exclude the prison population when it next updates its legislative districts.
- In May 2011 the Census Bureau will be publishing the correctional facility and other group quarters counts, so that counties can choose to use Census data to remove prison populations from the redistricting data. In decades past, these counts were published too late to be useful.

"a false presentation"

"The study found 64 percent of Adams County's 5th and 6th districts, 59 percent of Dodge's 31st District and 53 percent of Dodge's 29th District are prisoners. In these districts, constituents get double the electoral power of other voters. James Layman, the Dodge 31st supervisor, who describes himself as a conservative-leaning independent, says the inequality should be addressed. 'I think that's a false presentation because I don't represent those people,' he says of the prisoners."

—"Fuzzy Math: Is the Census Bureau creating unfair politics in Wisconsin?", by Evan Solocheck, Milwaukee Magazine March 2008