



For more information about prison-based gerrymandering, see our website and weekly newsletter at <http://www.prisonersofthecensus.org>

Prison-Based Gerrymandering in Georgia Counties

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

The problem

The Census Bureau counts incarcerated people as residents of the prison, but people in prison can't vote and are not residents of the surrounding community. The practice of including prisons in local government districts leads to serious distortions of political power within county governments.

For example, residents of Butts County District 3 are given twice as much influence over county affairs as residents of other districts because 49% of District 3 is incarcerated at the Georgia Diagnostic and Classification Center. Other counties have significant prison-based gerrymandering problems:

County Commission District	Vote enhancement caused by prison population
Baldwin County District 2	17%
Baldwin County District 4	37%
Coffee County District 2	13%
Dodge County District 2	20%
Evans County District 1	23%
Habersham County District 3	17%
Mitchell County District 2	29%
Treutlen County District 5	22%
Washington County District 2	20%
Wayne County District 4	34%

The problem is not limited to county governments. Prisons cause distortion in representation in city and state governments as well.

The solution

At least six Georgia counties (Calhoun, Dooly, Macon, Tattnall, Telfair and Wilcox), two Georgia Cities (Garden City and Milledgeville) and more than 100 local governments around the nation avoided prison-based gerrymandering by not including the prison populations in their districts when drawing city or county lines. As a result, each district has an equal population of actual residents.

Ideally, the Census Bureau would not count prisoners as residents of the county with the prison. But counties can fix the problem themselves by removing the prison populations prior to redistricting.

All Georgia localities with large prisons should ensure that the next redistricting process excludes prisoners from the population counts so that each district has an equal population of actual residents.

See our Georgia 2010 Census Guide at <http://prisonersofthecensus.org/50states/GA.html> for more data, resources, and updates. 12/16/10

Georgia law says a prison cell is not a residence:

Incarceration is not a voluntary movement, so a prison cell is not a residence under Georgia law:

“A person shall not be considered to have gained a residence in any county or municipality of this state into which such person has come for temporary purposes only without the intention of making such county or municipality such person's permanent place of abode.”

(Georgia Annotated Code § 21-2-217(3).)