



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

Prison-based gerrymandering in Arizona

The Census Bureau counts incarcerated people as residents of their prison addresses, rather than at their legal home residences. This little-known policy has a big impact on how our elections work. When Census prison counts are used for redistricting, communities with large prisons get extra representation, and the voting rights of everyone else are diluted.

The problem

Crediting many of Arizona's incarcerated people to a few locations, far away from home, enhances the political clout of the people who live near prisons, while diluting the voting power of all other Arizonans.

- Maricopa County contains 59% of Arizona's population, but is home for 64% of the state's prisoners. The political effect of this disproportionate incarceration rate is magnified by the fact that few prisoners are incarcerated in Maricopa — the county contains only 19% of the Arizona's state prison cells.
- Each state house district in Arizona should have 171,021 residents. District 23, however, has only 158,743. As a result, 92 residents of the 23rd district have the same electoral power as 100 residents of a district without a prison.

The practice especially reduces the voting strength of minority communities because of racially disparate rates of incarceration.

- Latinos are only 25.3% of the total population of Arizona, but they occupy 35.8% of the state's prison cells.
- American Indians are also disproportionately incarcerated—while they make up less than 5% of the population of the state, they are 6.3% of the state's prison population.
- Latinos and American Indians are incarcerated at significantly higher rates than whites in the state—members of both groups are about twice as likely as whites to be incarcerated.

The solution

The constitutional principle of "One Person One Vote" requires that political power be equally distributed on the basis of population, without special treatment for particular regions or industries.

Arizona should follow the lead of Delaware, Maryland, and New York and pass legislation to end prison-based gerrymandering. Where possible, incarcerated people should be counted as residents of their home communities. No district should be given extra representation just because it contains a large prison.

Prison-based gerrymandering hurts everyone who doesn't live next to a large prison, but the communities that experience disproportionate incarceration pay the highest price of all. Basing legislative districts on actual population would give all communities the same voice in government regardless of whether or not they contain a large prison.

State constitution says a prison is not a residence

"For the purpose of voting, no person shall be deemed to have gained or lost a residence by reason of being present or absent... while confined in any public jail or prison."

Arizona Constitution, Article VII, § 3.

The Pinal/Buckeye solution

Some local governments in Arizona have already taken common sense steps to avoid the distortion of prison-based gerrymandering:

- The town of Buckeye excluded the prison population when drawing electoral districts—if they did not, the prison would have been a district all by itself with no voters.
- Pinal County rejects the Census Bureau's prison count when drawing county board of supervisors districts. Otherwise the people who live near the prisons would have more political influence than residents of other county districts.

For more information, and links to more research, data and press coverage about prison-based gerrymandering in Arizona, see our Arizona 2010 Census Guide at <http://www.prisonersofthecensus.org/50states/AZ.html>.