

Prison gerrymandering disproportionately harms Louisiana's Black residents

Prison gerrymandering reduces the political power of nearly all Louisiana residents by allowing a few districts with large correctional facilities to claim residents from all over the state. And while it does that, it also enshrines the racial inequities of mass incarceration into the state's democratic institutions.

What is prison gerrymandering?

Everyone in Louisiana is supposed to have an equal voice in their government's decisions, but an outdated and misguided Census Bureau policy that counts incarcerated people in the wrong place gives a few residents of the state a megaphone.

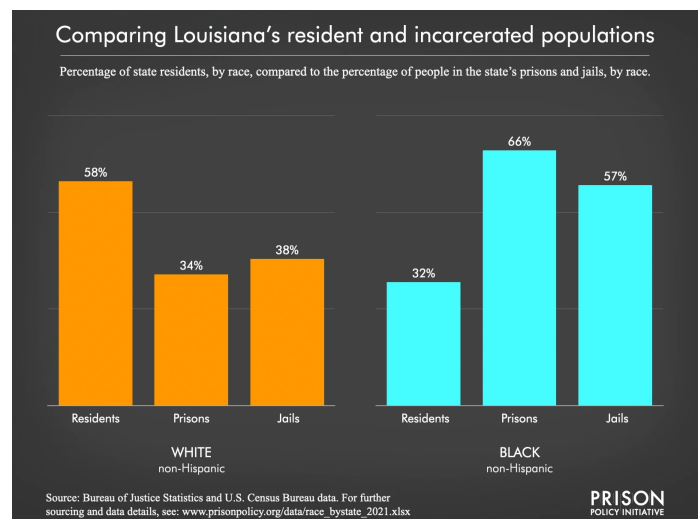
Every ten years, when the Census Bureau conducts its official tally of the nation's population, it incorrectly counts incarcerated people as residents of prison cells rather than in their home communities. When state officials then use that Census data in the legislative redistricting process, they inadvertently inflate the populations of those areas — in violation of constitutional principles of equal representation. This gives residents of state legislative districts that contain correctional facilities a particularly loud voice in government, at the expense of nearly every other person in the state.

In Louisiana's State House District 22, for example, correctional facilities make up roughly 12% of the population. That means that just 88 residents of that district have as much political clout as 100 residents in any other district.

Disproportionate impact for Black residents

In Louisiana, like across the country, mass incarceration has a disproportionate impact along racial lines. Black residents are incarcerated at disproportionate rates and therefore counted in the wrong place more often than Louisiana's white residents:

- Black residents make up only 32% of the state population, but 66% of people in prisons and 57% of people in jails.
- Counting incarcerated people in the wrong place adds up. In just the three most prison gerrymandered districts alone, 7,000 Black people were counted in the wrong place.



Louisiana needs to end prison gerrymandering now

Nearly half of the US population now lives in a place that corrects redistricting data they receive from the Census to avoid prison gerrymandering. States that have ended prison gerrymandering include deep “blue” states like California, “purple” states like Maine and Pennsylvania, and deep “red” states like Montana — where prison gerrymandering-reform legislation received wide bipartisan support.

It's now time for Louisiana to pass legislation ending prison gerrymandering and count incarcerated people at home when drawing districts.

Our full report on prison gerrymandering in Louisiana is available at https://www.prisonersofthecensus.org/news/2025/05/28/louisiana_prison_gerrymandering/