



Ending prison-based gerrymandering would aid the American Indian vote in Minnesota

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 practice especially reduces the voting strength of American Indian communities because of both racially disparate rates of incarceration, and the state's tendency to build prisons in disproportionately white areas.

The facts

American Indians are disproportionately incarcerated in Minnesota:

- In Minnesota, American Indians are incarcerated at over eleven times the rate of whites. American Indians comprise just over 1% of the state's population, but are almost 8% of the people behind bars.

The political benefits of prison-based gerrymandering go primarily to areas in which American Indians are underrepresented.

- The five state house districts whose political power is most inflated by prison-based gerrymandering are all districts with a disproportionately small number of American Indian residents.
- Ten disproportionately white state house districts derive at least 2% of their population from the Census Bureau's prison miscount.
- In two state house districts, 56A and 26A, more than half of the American Indian population is incarcerated. In an additional five districts, more than 25% of the American Indian population is incarcerated.
- 85% of the Minnesota's prison cells are located in districts that are disproportionately white. This gives districts that include prisons extra influence over all other districts, including the districts that people in prisons call home.

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.

Minnesota 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. Last year, Senator Higgins and Representative Champion introduced bills that would end prison-based gerrymandering. In order to ensure fair districting over the next decade, any reform bill must pass soon.

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.

For more information see our [Minnesota Campaign Against Prison-Based Gerrymandering](http://prisonersofthecensus.org/mn) page at <http://prisonersofthecensus.org/mn>
To get involved in Minnesota, contact Sarah Walker of the Minnesota Second Chance Coalition at 612.220.2070