



Information on Redistricting from the Louisiana Redistricting Summit

A Louisiana Redistricting Summit was presented by the LSU Reilly Center for Media and Public Affairs and Fair Districts Louisiana on January 19, 2018. The daylong seminar had panels on Louisiana's Redistricting History, National Trends in Redistricting, Voices of Louisiana's Future, and The Politics of Redistricting, and Looking Ahead: Opportunities for Reform. The keynote address, "Good Government Matters," was given by Commissioner of Administration Jay Darden. LWVLA members who were present included Joyce Corrington, Ellen Torgrimson, Andrea Dube, Julie Harris, and Vivian Guillory. The following notes are a summary of information learned at this summit.

The United States 2020 Census will be completed April 1, 2020. By December 31, 2020, state totals will be released. Detailed data needed for redistricting will be released over time. The LA Constitution requires that redistricting be completed by December 31, 2021.

The Secretary of State's website explains that reapportionment applies to any "local governing authority, including but not limited to any police jury, city or parish council, or school board which is required under the constitution or laws of this state or of the United States to reapportion its voting districts following each decennial census." (La. R.S. 18:1921).^[1]

However, the greatest attention is given to reapportionment of the Congressional and state legislative districts. This is a legislative responsibility, but the Governor has veto power over the redistricting legislation and has traditionally had much influence over the final bills. If the Louisiana Legislature cannot agree on a redistricting plan, the Louisiana Supreme Court will be required to do so.

It is not expected that there will be large population shifts in 2020 and thus the number of Louisiana Congressional Districts should remain the same. In the past "packed" districts have been designed to give a minority group a majority of voters, but this practice often results in other districts that are almost totally composed of majority voters. This practice is being questioned and might result in redistricting of Congressional Districts in 2021.

^[1] <https://www.sos.la.gov/ElectionsAndVoting/GetElectionInformation/LearnAboutRedistricting/Pages/default.aspx>

All state senator and state representative districts in Louisiana are also subject to redistricting. Typically the House and Governmental Affairs Committee recommends redistricting maps for state representative districts, and the Senate and Governmental Affairs Committee recommends redistricting maps for state senator districts. Great deference is given to what the committees decide because the bills are complex, and the bills are usually approved by the floor and the other house since amendments are difficult to agree on.

The present legislature will not be responsible for redistricting. Prior to the 2021 redistricting, the Fall 2019 state elections will have resulted in new state senators and representatives with four year terms. Because of term limits, many of these will be new and inexperienced.

Everyone agreed on the principles that SHOULD guide redistricting. Districts should be contiguous (should not consist of separate parts), compact (a circle is the most compact form), and preserve communities of interest. A new principle being promoted is competitiveness; either political party should be able to win an election in every district.

Protection of incumbents has often been a consideration in the past. It is common practice for a state senator or representative to be asked what he/she wants his district to look like.

It is a concern that under the Supreme Court ruling in Citizens United, "dark money" from out of state lobbyists could influence redistricting.

While a number of states now have redistricting commissions (with power varying from absolute [CA] to merely advisory), of the 11 state representatives and senators on panels who were questioned about whether or not they were in favor of such a commission for Louisiana, all said no with the exception of Rep. Walt Leger, who thought an advisory committee might be useful. Creating such a committee would require first a resolution setting up a study group, a recommendation by the study group to create such a committee, and then legislation creating it. A commission with more than advisory power would likely require a Louisiana Constitutional Amendment.

Citizens groups were advised to

- question 2019 candidates for the legislature and governor on redistricting issues,
- lobby the house speaker, the president of the senate and legislators on appointments to the House and Senate Governmental Affairs Committees, and
- push to have redistricting maps developed early in the process and to prefile redistricting bills earlier so that the public can have input on redistricting bills.

There is now software available that will allow citizen groups to propose their own redistricting maps. Whether or not the legislators tasked with redistricting will pay attention to such advice is questionable. There did seem to be a general consensus among the speakers and panelists that because of social media, it would be much more difficult for the legislature to push redistricting plans through without citizen awareness.

