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Reapportionment, Regional Politics, and Partisan Gain

Kenneth C. Martis, J. Clark Archer, Robert H. Watrel, Fred M. Shelley and Gerald R. Webster

Geographers and demographers have been analyzing U.S. regional population change for many decades. From the perspective of politics and governance, understanding these population changes over time is very important because seats in the House of Representatives are reapportioned every decade in accordance with the U.S. Constitution. Representation in the House, in turn, affects the distribution of votes in the Electoral College and thus the impact of regional population change affects the presidency as well as Congress. As political geographers we have studied the possible impacts of this population change on elections, issues in Congress and the nation, and if a particular political party has gained or lost in this process. This article is adapted from our recently published co-edited book, *Atlas of the 2012 Elections*, which examines both the short-term and long-term state and regional gains and losses in the House of Representatives and Electoral College to see how the Democrats and Republicans have fared.¹

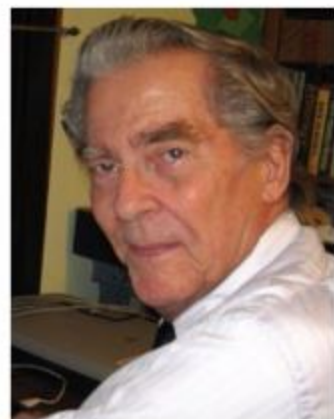
The Regional Geography of Reapportionment

Several seats in the House of Representatives shifted among states between the 2002 election (after the 2000 census), and the 2012 election (after the 2010 census), as shown clearly in Map 1. Seats are moving from the North and Northeast to the South, Southwest, and West. In fact, this general movement has been occurring for several decades. One of our previous books, *The Historical Atlas of State Power in Congress, 1790-1990*, analyzes long-term reapportionment change by calculating and mapping the state and regional ups and downs of the reallocation of seats since the first census in 1790.² Our atlas divides American history into four geographical population/reapportionment eras: Original States and New States (1790-1850); Free States and Slave States (1790-1860); Rural and Urban Places (1870-1930); and Sunbelt and Snowbelt (1970-1990 [and, as mentioned above, this era has continued to 2010]). Each of these four eras had a profound effect upon the regional balance of power in the United States, the issues and legislation brought before Congress, and the election of the president. The Sunbelt is the term given by demographers and geographers to the combined population in-migration/immigration and strong economic growth along the southern tier of America, namely the South and West regions. The Snowbelt, sometimes called the Frostbelt or the Rust Belt, consists of states with out-migration and/or relatively slow population and economic growth along the northern tier.

Map 1 (see pg. 19) shows that nine of the ten states that lost seats in the 2010 census were in the North or Northeast. The only exception to this pattern is Louisiana, which experienced substantial out-migration following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. New York and Ohio were the biggest losers with two lost seats each. Eight states gained in electoral power: four in the South, with Texas (+4) and Florida (+2) the biggest winners, and four in the West. The 2000 census regional reapportionment numbers are very similar, with New York (-2) and Pennsylvania (-2) the biggest losers among many other



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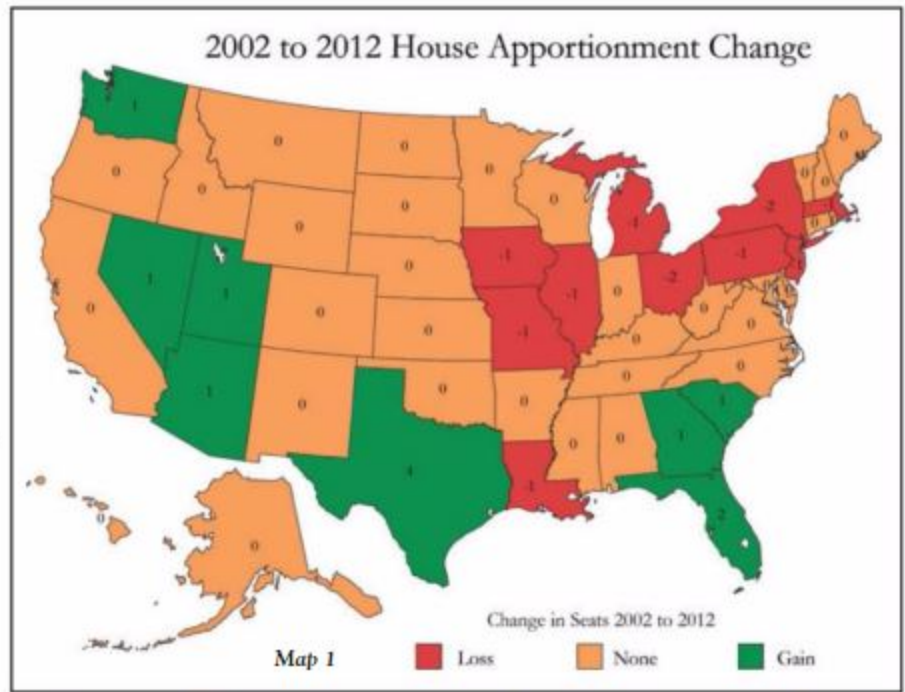
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northern states, and four Sunbelt states (Georgia, Florida, Texas, and Arizona) each gaining two additional seats among many other southern and western states. In 2000 California gained one additional seat, making it the largest House of Representatives state delegation in American history with fifty-three members and fifty-five total electoral votes.

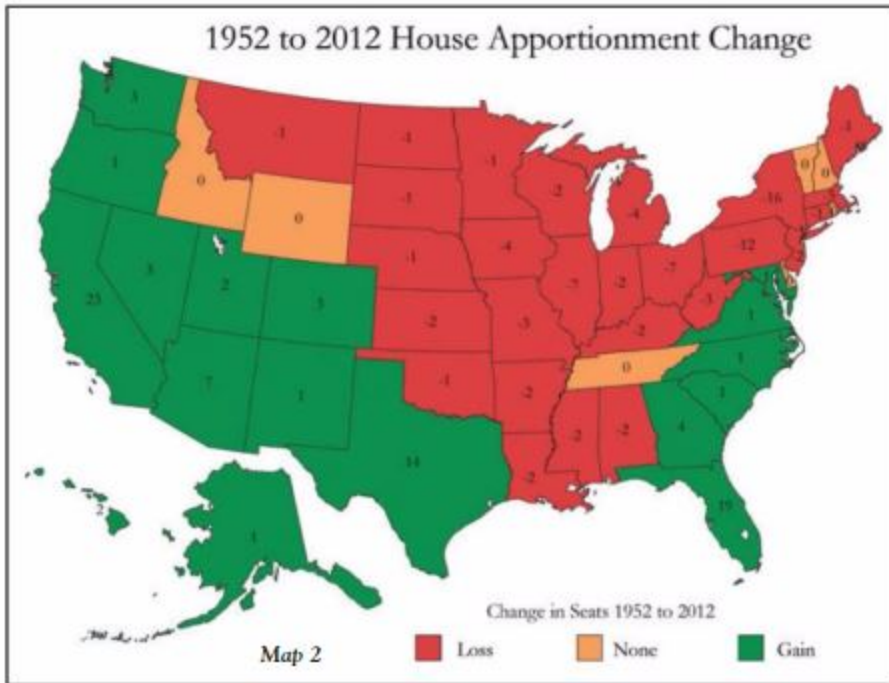
We began our long-term analysis with the 1952-1960 reapportionment cycle to take account of the addition of Alaska and Hawaii, to catch the tail end of the northern urbanization/industrialization period, and to encompass all of the next five cycles, which cover the present Sunbelt/Snowbelt era. The combined congressional losses of the Northern industrial and Midwestern and Great Plains agricultural states over the last half century are staggering, and the historical trend noteworthy. The last northern states to gain in reapportionment were in 1960: Ohio and Michigan each added one seat because of the post-WWII auto boom and related manufacturing; New Jersey gained one, mostly from intra-regional suburbanization from New York City and Philadelphia; and Maryland gained one, reaping the benefit of the expansion of the federal government in Washington, D.C. and resulting suburbanization. Since the 1952-1960 electoral cycle, New York has lost an incredible sixteen seats, Pennsylvania twelve, and Ohio and Illinois each seven.

The combined congressional/Electoral College losses of the Snowbelt states, of course, are equal to the combined gains of the Sunbelt states. The three growth poles of the Sunbelt, California (+23), Florida (+19) and Texas (+14), are the biggest gainers. Some of the biggest percentage gains are in the previously sparsely settled West. Arizona has gained seven seats, going from a delegation of just two in the Eighty-Seventh Congress (elected in 1960) to nine elected in 2012. Nevada has gone from one House member as recently as 1980 to four in the 2012 election.

Map 2 illustrates the geographical pattern of changes in apportionment to the U.S. House of Representatives, and thus the Electoral College, for the entire 1952-2012 period. During this time frame, eighty-seven seats, that is, 20 percent of the House, were transferred between the states. Only seven states did not have a net change in their House delegation during this period, including four small-population states that kept the mandatory one representative: Alaska, Delaware, Vermont, and Wyoming. Forty-three states had their House delegations change: seventeen states gained representatives and twenty-six lost representatives.

As Map 2 shows, the regional pattern of reapportionment change since the 1952-1960 election cycle is striking. The states that lost representation are in one large area encompassing the Northeast, North Central, and much of the inland portion

1952 to 2012 House Apportionment Change



of the United States. In reality this area incorporates at least four major regional demographic trends. The Northeast and Great Lakes states have gone through deindustrialization; the inland Midwest and Great Plains states have experienced declining farm population; four southern states have gone through large African-American out-migration and slow growth; and two Appalachian states have undergone mining mechanization and a general decline in extractive industry employment.

The states that gained in reapportionment are in two geographical sections. One comprises the Southeast coastal states, anchored and dominated by Florida. That section has benefitted by such variables as individuals seeking a warmer climate, retirement trends, reasonable house prices, favorable business climate, and many other Sunbelt-related factors. Map 1 illustrates that, looking at the long term, the South is not one homogenous region of growth – more a region of sunspots rather than a continuous Sunbelt. The other growth section is the Southwest and Pacific Coast. In this large region of an expanding economy and spectacular landscapes, numerous variables attract in-migration and immigration: the oil and gas industry and business advantages of Texas, the development of high-tech industry, the climate and environment of California, the affordability of Arizona and Nevada. All in all, the three growth pole states of

Florida, Texas, and California comprise fifty-six of the eighty-seven seats, or 65 percent of all the seats gained.

The Political Geography of Reapportionment

In the last several decades, there has been a clear reallocation of regional power in the United States. But how has this reallocation translated into partisan power? Has it benefited Republicans or Democrats? At first glance, one would assume the declining Democratic North and expanding Republican South would have made the Republican Party the clear winner in the reapportionment process. A number of commentators after the last two censuses have suggested this is the case. However, when examining the long-term Sunbelt/Snowbelt era historical data, the trend is somewhat more complex. To explore this further, we studied the 2012 elections using the reapportionment of seats in the Sunbelt/Snowbelt era. The gains and losses are calculated based upon the state House delegation size at the time of the 1952-1960 reapportionment cycle versus the House size at the 2012 election.

We divided the states into three categories based upon the consensus 2012 pre-election analysis: safe Republican (24), safe Democrat (18), and swing (8).³ The eight swing states are New Hampshire, Virginia, Ohio, Wisconsin, Iowa, Colorado, Florida, and Nevada. When examining the reapportionment trends of the 2012 swing states, the results

are mixed. New Hampshire remained the same during this period; Virginia (+1), Colorado (+3), Florida (+19) and Nevada (+3) gained, but Ohio (-7), Wisconsin (-2), and Iowa (-4) lost. However, Florida's gain is so large, the sum of the swing state total shows a net thirteen-seat gain, but, of course, President Obama eventually won all the swing states in 2012.

In 2012 eighteen states were considered safe for Democrats in the presidential election (plus the District of Columbia, which was given three electoral votes by the XXIII Amendment, providing safe electors to the Democrats since the 1964 presidential election). The safe Democratic states were California (+23), Connecticut (-1), Delaware (0), Hawaii (+1), Illinois (-7), Maine (-1), Maryland (+1), Massachusetts (-5), Michigan (-4), Minnesota (-1), New Jersey (-2), New Mexico (+1), New York (-16), Oregon (+1), Pennsylvania (-12), Rhode Island (0), Vermont (0), and Washington (+3). In the safe Democratic states, in 2012 at least, thirty seats were gained over the last half century (mostly in California), but forty-nine were lost, for a net loss of nineteen House seats and presidential electors. Since the political geography of the Electoral College in recent years favors the Democrats in the North, Northeast, and Pacific Coast states, the Democrats are on the losing trend in the North, but on the gaining trend in the Pacific Coast.

The twenty-four states considered safe for Republicans in the 2012 pre-election analysis were Alabama (-2), Alaska (+1), Arizona (+7), Arkansas (-2), Georgia (+4), Idaho (0), Indiana (-2), Kansas (-2), Kentucky (-2), Louisiana (-2), Mississippi (-2), Missouri (-3), Montana (-1), Nebraska (-1), North Carolina (+1), North Dakota (-1), Oklahoma (-1), South Carolina (+1), South Dakota (-1), Tennessee (0), Texas (+14), Utah (+2), West Virginia (-3), and Wyoming (0). At the 2012 elections the safe Republican states gained thirty seats, but also lost twenty-four, for a net gain of only six House seats and electoral votes since 1952-1960. These gains are mostly in Texas and Arizona, with the growing southern state of Georgia also contributing. Republican losses occurred in a number of Appalachian, Great Plains, and several slow-growing southern states. The long-term data at this juncture shows that not all Republican-leaning areas are growing; in fact, seventeen of the twenty-four currently solid Republican states

have either lost or recorded no gain in the Sunbelt/Snowbelt era.

The long-term Sunbelt and Snowbelt era demographic trend shows the Democratic Party losing presidential electors and potential House members in Democrat-friendly states. Nevertheless, the Republicans have only gained slightly. This seeming contradiction is accounted for by the swing states, primarily Florida. In fact, changes in all three categories are driven by the Sunbelt's major growth poles. The three large growth pole states mentioned above are split among California (+23) safe Democrat, Texas (+14) safe Republican, and Florida (+19) swing. The increase in the swing state Florida electors is one of the reasons it has played a critical, and sometimes decisive, role in recent presidential elections.

Table 1 compares the top ten states in House representation and presidential electors from the beginning of our study period to the most recent 2010 census and the 2012 election. It illustrates the astonishing growth of the influence of Florida on the American political scene. Florida is not even listed as one of the top ten states in the 1952-1960 reapportionment cycle. Shocking as it may seem, as recently as the 1960 election, states like Alabama and Minnesota had more representatives and electoral votes (9/11) than Florida (8/10).

five seats/electors. Although Republicans have made great strides in controlling the Deep South, Map 2 shows the long-term gains in the southeast coastal states have actually been quite small and offset with losses in the Great Plains and other places. Although the Democrats have recently dominated the North and Northeast, this region is declining in seats/electors, but still has many states with a large population base. In addition, the Democrats control the sizable California vote (the fifty-five electors are 10.2 percent of the entire Electoral College and 20.4 percent of the 270 needed to secure the presidency) and other Pacific Coast states. Furthermore, Democrats have also made significant inroads in some growing western places like New Mexico, Colorado, and Nevada through immigration and in-migration from Democrat-friendly areas.

A number of political and demographic trends could alter the above alignment of safe or swing states for both parties. Over time, whole regions have realigned. The South, previously solid Democratic, is now mostly Republican; New England, previously staunch Republican, now leans Democratic. In addition, individual states can go through a quick and complete realignment. For example, West Virginia was one of the most loyal Democratic states in the last half of the twentieth

Carolina as a swing state in 2012, since President Obama carried it in 2008. Our study is a snapshot of apportionment and long-term partisan gains or losses with full knowledge that possible future swings and realignments could alter present trends.

Notes

1. J. Clark Archer, Robert H. Watrel, Fiona M. Davidson, Erin H. Fouberg, Kenneth C. Martis, Richard L. Morrill, Fred M. Shelley, and Gerald R. Webster, eds., *Atlas of the 2012 Elections* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).
2. Kenneth C. Martis and Gregory A. Elmes, *The Historical Atlas of State Power in Congress: 1790-1990* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1993).
3. The determination of safe Democrat, safe Republican, and swing states was based on a consensus of numerous sources. Each source has its own methodology and access to a wide variety of polling data. See <http://blog.constitutioncenter.org/2012/05/defining-the-swing-states-for-2012/> and <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/07/explaining-the-timess-battleground-state-ratings/>. Presidential polling became more meaningful and prevalent once Governor Mitt Romney secured the Republican nomination, and, of course, polling was conducted intensively up to Election Day. During the polling process, various sites had upwards of sixteen states in the toss-up category. In a survey of twelve media organizations, our eight swing states were most mentioned. See http://blog.lib.umn.edu/cspg/smartpolitics/2012/08/will_the_real_battleground_sta.php. In addition to our eight swing states, eight others were included; most widespread among these were Wisconsin and North Carolina. However, as the election neared, Wisconsin was determined by most to be leaning or safe Democrat, and North Carolina leaning or safe Republican. See <http://www.cnn.com/election/2012/ecalculator/#?battleground>, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/thestreet/2012/11/06/battleground-states-to-watch-for-this-election/>, <http://www.politico.com/2012-election/swing-state/>, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/post/the-9-swing-states-of-2012/2012/04/16/gIQAuBuXaLT_blog.html, and <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/10/abc-news-moves-pennsylvania-minnesota-from-safe-to-lean-obama/>. All these websites were accessed in October 2014.

Table 1. Top Ten States in House Representation and Presidential Electors

1950 Census and 1952-1960 Election Cycle	2010 Census and 2012-2020 Election Cycle
1. New York 43/45	1. California 53/55
2. California 30/32*	2. Texas 36/38
3. Pennsylvania 30/32*	3. Florida 27/29*
4. Illinois 25/27	4. New York 27/29*
5. Ohio 23/25	5. Illinois 18/20*
6. Texas 22/24	6. Pennsylvania 18/20*
7. Michigan 18/20	7. Ohio 16/18
8. Massachusetts 14/16*	8. Georgia 14/16*
9. New Jersey 14/16*	9. Michigan 14/16*
10. North Carolina 12/14	10. North Carolina 13/15

*tied

In the 2012 presidential election, President Obama won twenty-six states and the District of Columbia with 332 electoral votes. Those twenty-six states have a net loss of five seats since 1952-1960. Obama's Republican opponent, Governor Mitt Romney, won twenty-four states with a net reapportionment gain of

century, but now is solid Republican, at least on the presidential level. Also, the Hispanic vote is growing in such places as Arizona and North Carolina, which may even be categorized as swing rather than safe Republican states by the time of the 2016 or 2020 presidential elections. In fact, some observers initially placed North