

The Daily Reveille

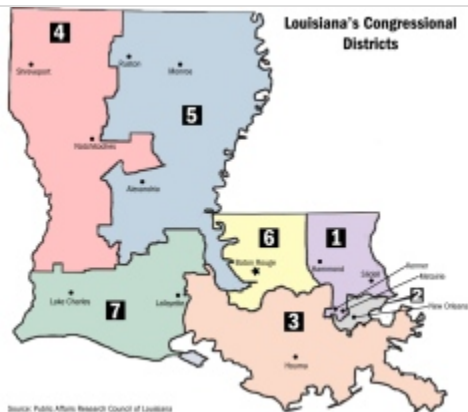
Louisiana to lose congressional seat in redistricting

By [Matthew Albright](#)

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graphic by CAITLYN CONDON / The Daily Reveille

Before legislators begin battling over the budget in this year's session, they will first fight to redraw the state's congressional districts.

Redistricting is the highly politicized process of drawing the lines that divide the state's congressional districts to reflect changes in population.

Every 10 years, the U.S. Census reveals population trends across the country. Some states' populations grow more quickly than others.

That affects how many representatives the state can send to the U.S. House of Representatives, the house of Congress in which states are represented based on population sizes.

Census figures show Louisiana's population grew by only 1.4 percent over the past decade, putting it among the slowest-growing states. Meanwhile, other states' populations exploded — Texas, for example, grew by 21 percent, adding as many new residents as Louisiana's total population.

As a result, Louisiana's delegation in the House is shrinking from seven representatives to six, meaning the State Legislature has to remove one congressional district, spreading its area and population out to the others.

Bob Mann, University political communications professor and former communications director for Gov. Kathleen Blanco, says the lost seat means this year's redistricting process will be more of a fight than usual.

"In a perfect world where we weren't losing a seat, this wouldn't be that contentious," he said. "The [representatives] would just tell the legislature, 'Hey look — this is what everybody wants.' And the legislature would do it."

But because the state is losing a seat, one of the representatives will lose his seat.

"The way these districts are drawn could make or break some of these guys' political careers," Mann said. "So you're going to see [these representatives] playing big-time politics in the legislature."

Mann predicted Rep. Jeff Landry, a Republican representing District 3, is one of the most vulnerable, because he is the newest and one of the least funded. He said Landry would likely have to battle Rep. Charles Boustany, the Republican from District 7.

The legislature must also redistrict its own boundaries to account for population shifts within the state. Ten-year Census figures show Baton Rouge growing while New Orleans declines, for example, a trend most analysts attribute to Hurricane Katrina.

Mann says the legislative redistricting is usually more contentious because legislators have an active stake in the resulting maps. Accusations of gerrymandering — a political tactic where legislators use redistricting to bolster their own political prospects — are common.

State redistricting could also lead to power shifts in state politics. Baton Rouge's increased population, for example, will likely translate into increased political clout, which Mann said might benefit the University.

"Assuming these people are a little more sympathetic to LSU, it may very well help us out in the long term," he said.

The legislature will address redistricting in a special session starting March 20. That session must end by April 13, giving legislators an unusually short time to address the issue.

The process starts in the House and Senate Governmental Affairs committees, which have scheduled joint meetings allowing public input into the process, according to the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana. Those committees will alter the current maps with the census data and input from the public and other legislators.

Those maps must be approved by both the House and the Senate. Since redistricting maps are technically laws, the governor can veto those maps if he deems them inappropriate.

Finally, the U.S. Justice Department must approve the maps to make sure they are in line with the Voting Rights Act.

Once approved, the districts are officially changed for the next election — in this case, November of this year.

Contact Matthew Albright at malbright@lsureveille.com

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