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Illinois Redistricting Commission  
James R. Thompson Center

*The Institute for Politics*

Legislative  
Redistricting in  
Illinois

A Summary Report

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Preface:

For the purpose of this paper:

Reapportionment – is defined as the process of re-dividing the state’s population by the number of legislative districts and using that figure as the target population average for all districts –

Redistricting – is the actual drawing of legislative boundaries so that each district comes as close as possible to the targeted population figure.

Also the generally accepted requirements that in reapportionment/redistricting in Illinois each district must have:

1. Close population percentages
2. Compact and contiguous boundaries

In reality:

number one – has been generally followed

number two – has often been associated with “love” because

like love – compact and contiguous legislative districts in Illinois is often been solely in the eyes of the beholder

## Four Main Themes in Illinois Redistricting

### Theme One: Territory v. Population

An ongoing issue in Illinois since the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Key – population growth of Chicago and Cook County.

From 1870-1910 Chicago's population grew from a little less than 300,000 to almost 2.2 million.

Frightened rest of state so much – no legislative redistricting from 1901 to 1955.

1955 reapportionment/redistricting took place for two reasons.

1. Suburban growth around Chicago
2. An agreement between newly elected Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley and Illinois Governor William Stratton.

The deal – “Little Federal System”

House – reapportionment based on population

Senate – reapportionment based on territory

1960's – Supreme Court decisions – “one man/one vote” killed the little federal system –

Territory no longer part of reapportionment

## Theme Two: Geographic Loyalty v. Political Loyalty

Key downstate Democrats –

Chicago took over the Illinois Democratic Party in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Party loyalty would favor more districts for Chicago

Geographic loyalty – preserve districts downstate

Helping downstate Democrats –

1. No redistricting for over 50 years (1901-55)
2. Cumulative voting

Recent Reapportionment/Redistrictings

1955 – 1965 – 1971 – 1981 – 1991 – 2001 and the elimination of cumulative voting in 1980 continues to create political problems to maintain potential Democratic downstate districts.

## Theme Three: Incumbent v. Challenger

Self-preservation – Redistricting the legislature’s most political act

Two political axioms come to mind –

1. “A political statesman is a person running unopposed for re-election”
2. “A good map-maker is worth 500 precinct workers”

Theme three – is a critical part of wheeling and dealing associated with Illinois redistricting – complicates mapmaking and is a key factor in creating the amazing end-game process of drawing a name out of a hat to break a redistricting deadlock.

## Theme Four: Race v. Party Loyalty

Last quarter 20<sup>th</sup> century – race has risen to be a key factor in Illinois redistricting.

This theme is made up of various parts – most important are Fairness – Court Decisions and Political Advantage – It is the latter that causes most of the tension – Why?

African-Americans since the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have been the most reliable Democratic constituency.

Thus –

1. Democrats – want to fracture out black voters so that they can become critical players in non-majority black districts.
2. Republicans – want to pack in as many black voters in districts – so that they do not become players in non-majority black districts.

Adding to the race theme in recent years – has been the surge of Hispanic voters who also want their fair share of the districts. Though not as Democratic Party oriented as African-American voters in either their numbers or their party preference – they have become in recent years another solid Democratic voting bloc.

Summary—

Given this state's unique geo-political history and its current demographic make-up, I can only wish this commission good luck in coming up with a reform minded and fair plan to depoliticize the reapportionment and redistricting in this state.

In my view since 1955 the only time legislative redistricting went somewhat smoothly was the 1971 effort – where party pros avoided the somewhat bizarre 1970 constitution mandated legislative commission process if a deadlock occurred. They also avoided getting the courts involved. As many of you know they took the state's 59 districts – divided them up 28 Democratic favorable and 28 Republican favorable and left the remaining -3- somewhat competitive. By Illinois redistricting standards – this was real reform implementation – it has not happened since!