



Prison Gerrymandering

Prison Gerrymandering is a form of Gerrymandering that few ever think about. But with 2.3 million prisoners in the U.S., it is actually a real issue.

The way that the Census Bureau counts people in prison leads to a significant distortion at state and local levels.

- The Census Bureau counts incarcerated people as residents of the towns where they are incarcerated, although in 48 states, they are barred from voting.
- Most return home after being released.
- Since elections districts as well as Federal and State aid are allocated on the basis of population, rural locations with prisons gain an added benefit, while urban locations, that are the homes for many of these prisoners are disadvantaged.
 - In Illinois 60% of all prisoners are from Chicago. Yet 99% of these prisoners are counted in districts outside of the city. This decreases the urban population and increases the downstate population.

When prisoners are counted in the census, the impact of the drawing of districts can be significant.

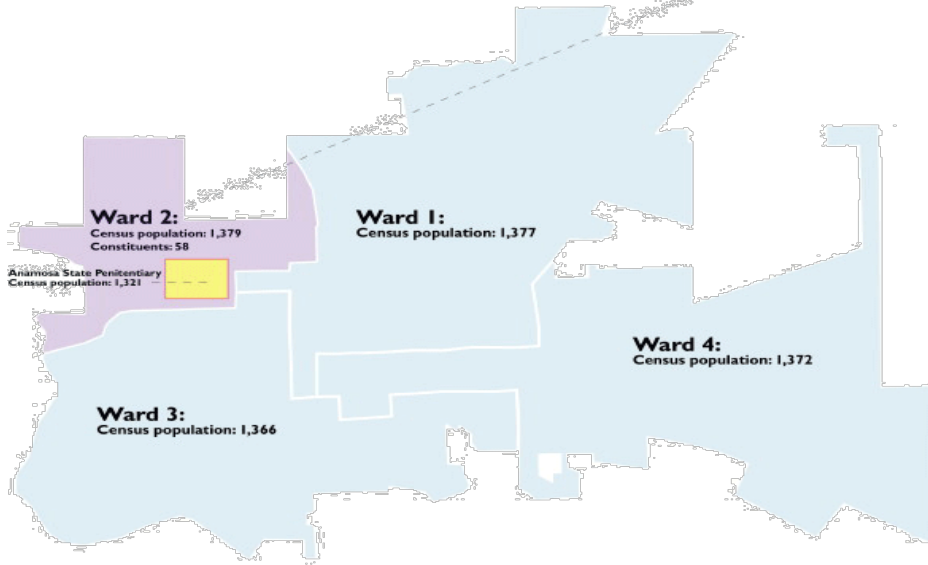
- The prison population allowed the N.Y. Senate to draw an 8th upstate district.

In some areas, the prison population comprises a major share of the population, although prisoners in all but two states are not allowed to vote. This can lead to some strange results.

Anamosa is a small town in Iowa. The prison population comprises about 25% of the population of the town. All of the prisoners are in Ward #2.

City Council Wards in Anamosa, Iowa

Ward 2 has all the perks of a City Council seat while representing only 58 constituents



In this ward, a total of 58 people, excluding prisoners, resided in ward #2. Since prisoners cannot vote, this means Ward #2 had only 58 potential voters.

In an election, Danny Young was elected to the City Council from Ward #2, with 2 votes, one from himself and one from his wife. The math would indicate that residents of Ward #2 had roughly 58x the voting power of residents of other wards.

Fortunately, Anamosa changed its electoral system by removing prisoners from the population count, but many other places still continue to count their prison population.

For example:

- In Missouri, Fulton has a district that is 47% incarcerated, while Chillicothe has a district that is 39% incarcerated.

While Prison Gerrymandering is not the most critical issue in U.S. politics, it represents a simple injustice that can and should be corrected.

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