



NORTH CAROLINA:

How Distorted Districts Lead to Distorted Laws

By Liz Kennedy and Billy Corriher

October 2, 2017

The principle of “one person, one vote” requires states to redraw their election districts every 10 years in order to account for changes in population.¹ In most states, legislators can manipulate district boundaries to benefit their own political party.² This manipulation, called gerrymandering, weakens voters’ ability to affect election outcomes and exercise accountability over government. Distorted election districts lead to skewed representation and legislators who are less responsive to the voters.

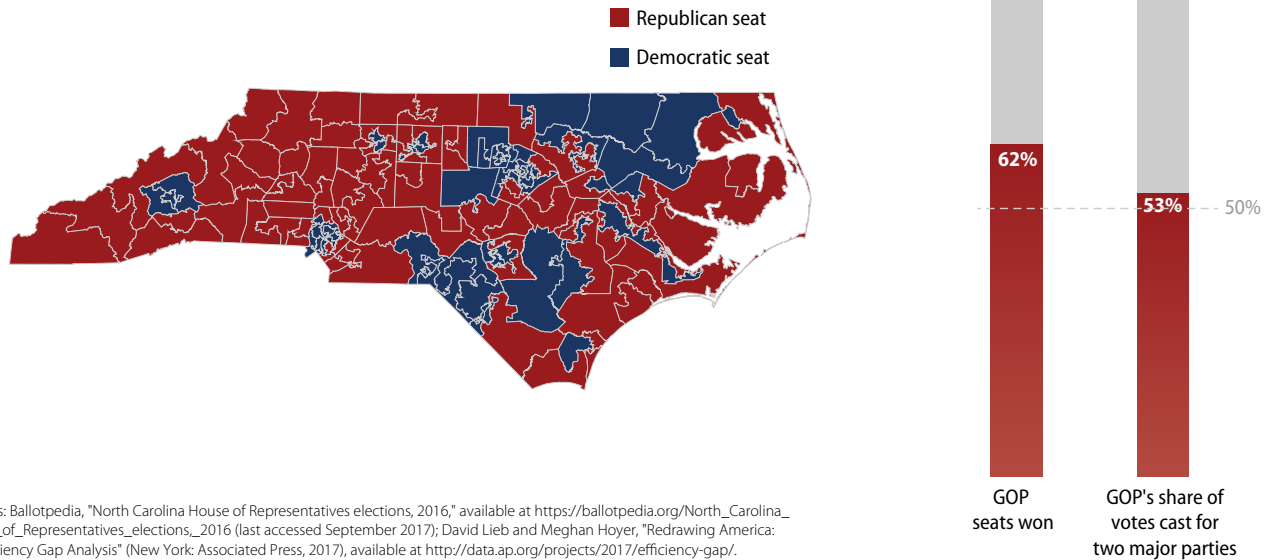
After federal courts ruled that North Carolina’s 2011 redistricting maps discriminated against African American voters,³ legislators drafted new districts and said that the new maps were drawn based entirely on partisan—not racial—criteria.⁴ An analysis by the nonpartisan Campaign Legal Center, however, found that the maps yield “an enormous Republican edge” in elections.⁵ The Campaign Legal Center found that Republicans only needed a statewide vote of 45.7 percent to maintain their majority in the state House of Representatives.⁶

Legislators in North Carolina are insulated from accountability to voters. This has led them to govern in ways that frequently disregard the will of voters:

- **Consumer protections:** A shocking 2 percent of voters supported a 2013 bill to raise the limit on interest charged for consumer finance loans to 30 percent,⁷ but that did not stop the Legislature from passing it.⁸
- **Tax fairness:** More than 60 percent of North Carolina voters supported an extension of the state’s earned income tax credit and an increase on taxes on the wealthy, according to a 2012 poll.⁹ In 2014, however, the Legislature repealed the earned income tax credit and cut taxes for millionaires.¹⁰
- **Civil rights:** The Legislature passed a bill in 2016 that ended local government authority over civil rights in response to a Charlotte law that extended civil rights protections to LGBT people.¹¹ A 2015 poll found that 64 percent of North Carolinians support LGBT nondiscrimination laws.¹²
- **Minimum wage:** The same bill prohibited local increases in the minimum wage,¹³ even though a 2016 poll showed that 76 percent of voters supported raising the minimum wage to \$10 an hour.¹⁴
- **Medicaid expansion:** In 2013, legislators banned the governor from expanding Medicaid,¹⁵ despite the vast majority of North Carolina voters supporting the expansion.¹⁶ This left 300,000 North Carolinians without access to affordable health care insurance.¹⁷

FIGURE 9
Distorted districts in North Carolina

More than half of voters chose Republican candidates for the North Carolina House of Representatives in 2016, but the GOP secured a supermajority of seats



Endnotes

- 1 *Reynolds v. Sims*, 377 U.S. 533 (1964).
- 2 Christopher Ingraham, "This is actually what America would look like without gerrymandering," *The Washington Post*, January 13, 2016, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/01/13/this-is-actually-what-america-would-look-like-without-gerrymandering/?utm_term=.8d2318ba5cbf.
- 3 *Covington v. North Carolina*, 2017 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 759 (M.D. N.C. Jan. 4 2017).
- 4 Melissa Boughton, "Attorneys for Covington plaintiffs allege constitutional violations in new maps, offer lawmakers alternatives," *The Progressive Pulse*, August 23, 2017, available at <http://pulse.ncpolicywatch.org/2017/08/23/attorneys-covington-plaintiffs-allege-constitutional-violations-new-maps-offer-lawmakers-alternatives/#sthash.sZxnpN8.dpbs>.
- 5 Memorandum from Ruth Greenwood to the House Select Committee on Redistricting and Senate Redistricting Committee, "Proposed 2017 House and Senate Redistricting Plan: Efficiency Gap Analysis," August 22, 2017, available at <http://www.campaignlegalcenter.org/sites/default/files/Memo%20re%20NC%202017%20Proposed%20House%20and%20Senate%20plans%20v4.pdf>.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Public Policy Polling, "NC voters continue to look down on state government," June 17, 2013, available at <http://www.publicpolicypolling.com/main/2013/06/nc-voters-continue-to-look-down-on-state-government.html>.
- 8 Rob Schofield, "Another bill for Governor Cooper's veto list," NC Policy Watch, June 11, 2017, available at <http://www.ncpolicywatch.com/2017/07/11/another-bill-governor-coopers-veto-list/>.
- 9 North Carolina Justice Center, "NC Justice News: Unemployment Insurance + Poll Shows Support for Public Investments + The Governor's Budget," May 22, 2012, available at <http://www.ncjustice.org/?q=nc-justice-news-unemployment-insurance-poll-shows-support-public-investments-governors-budget>.
- 10 Michael Leachman, "Unhappy New Year: North Carolina Eliminates Its EITC," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, January 13, 2014, available at <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/unhappy-new-year-north-carolina-eliminates-its-eitc>; Alexandra Sirota, "Preliminary Analysis of Joint Tax Plan: Still a big tax cut at the top," *The Progressive Pulse*, July 16, 2013, available at <http://pulse.ncpolicywatch.org/2013/07/16/ preliminary-analysis-of-joint-tax-plan-still-a-big-tax-cut-at-the-top/>.
- 11 Camila Domonoske, "North Carolina Passes Law Blocking Measures To Protect LGBT People," NPR, March 24, 2016, available at <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/03/24/471700323/north-carolina-passes-law-blocking-measures-to-protect-lgbt-people>.
- 12 Public Religion Research Institute, "The American Values Atlas: North Carolina, LGBT Nondiscrimination Laws," available at <http://ava.prii.org/#lgbt/2015/States/lgbtdis/m/US-NC> (last accessed September 2017).
- 13 Domonoske, "North Carolina Passes Law Blocking Measures To Protect LGBT People."
- 14 Public Policy Polling, "Trump Could Make Life Hard for Burr in NC," March 22, 2016, available at <http://www.publicpolicypolling.com/main/2016/03/trump-could-make-life-hard-for-burr-in-nc.html>.
- 15 Associated Press, "Lawmakers to vote on Medicaid expansion ban," *Times-News*, February 26, 2013, available at <http://www.thetimesnews.com/20130226/lawmakers-to-vote-on-medicaid-expansion-ban/302269874>.
- 16 Mark Binker, "Poll: NC voters back health care expansion," WRAL, January 26, 2016, available at <http://www.wral.com/poll-nc-voters-back-health-care-expansion/15274337/>.
- 17 *Ibid.*