

# Illinois Lawmakers Enact Gerrymandered Political Maps

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SPRINGFIELD - Illinois Democrats voted Aug. 31 to enact legislative maps that guarantee their majority in the state's 177 legislative districts.

The General Assembly called an [emergency session on Aug. 31](#) to redraw the legislative maps they passed this June. The previous maps were passed to avoid handing the redistricting process over to a bipartisan commission but used American Community Survey, or ACS, five-year estimates along with other sources, rather than the usual U.S. Census numbers.

The COVID-19 pandemic delayed the 2020 Census results, which provides officials the data they need to be able to draw up legislative maps. The Census results did not arrive until mid-August, but the Illinois Constitution establishes a [deadline](#) for the General Assembly to pass a plan by June 30, or the responsibility is delegated to a bipartisan commission made of four Democrats and four Republicans.

The ACS data the General Assembly used undercounted the Illinois population by almost [42,000](#) people, leaving reform groups worried that a significant chunk of Illinoisans was not represented in the legislative maps.

Republicans [filed a lawsuit](#), saying that without using census data, the map was unconstitutional and therefore not “effective” as required by the Illinois Constitution and should be sent to the bipartisan backup commission. The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) [also filed a lawsuit](#) to toss out the plans for not using official census data.

Once the accurate census data was available, it became clear that the earlier passed maps would not meet the population requirements set down by the U.S. Supreme Court, and the original maps would be thrown out in court. Districts generally need to be equal in population [within a 10% deviation](#).

The General Assembly held multiple hearings to redraw the map before the new maps were passed, but minority advocacy groups have called the process a sham, and Change Illinois Executive Director Madeline Doubek said that the new maps are worse than the ones rushed through originally, [according to reporting by WJOL](#).

The good-government group Common Cause Illinois eventually boycotted the hearings, [releasing a statement](#) that, “t each opportunity in this redistricting process, it’s as if lawmakers went out of their way to ensure the creation of these maps had as little public input as possible. Rejecting an independent bipartisan redistricting commission, politicians chose to draw maps themselves. They did so behind closed doors, with a series of hearings attempting to add a veneer of public access. Yet, these hearings were consistently hastily scheduled, poorly noticed to the general public, and sparsely attended. As a result, the maps... will not be crafted of public input, but of pure politics.”

According to [reporting from NPR Illinois](#), Valerie Leonard, the co-founder of North Lawndale Alliance and witness at redistricting hearings, said of the maps that, “Someone had a very, very deliberate way of drawing this ... You didn’t care about our voting rights. And this dilutes Black voting power to the hilt.”

Much of the controversy that the redistricting process has drawn from these groups could have been avoided had the Illinois Constitution been amended to take redistricting

out of the hands of lawmakers and put in the hands of an independent redistricting commission. [Fifteen states](#) have already established such commissions for legislative redistricting, some with [positive results](#).

Illinois needs to do the same if it is ever going to avoid the partisan gerrymandering that has been the hallmark of past redistricting cycles and the justified anger of constituents who feel unrepresented in state government.