# A Non-Partisan Attempt to Improve Competitiveness in South Carolina's Congressional Districts

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Abstract

The creation of political districts, known as apportionment, has long been known to have important implications for representation and party competitiveness. Under the principle of one person, one vote, political districts are to be drawn so as to encompass an equal number of people within the representational area. Many states, such as South Carolina, implemented districting plans throughout the segregation-era in order to minimize the political power of minorities. However, contemporary districting proposals are dominated by partisan politics. The interest of promoting the political party in power and incumbents, those already in office, controls the apportionment process. Thus, in the 1990s and 2000s, many states created political districts that minimize district competitiveness to favor one party or candidate over another. My project attempts to fulfill the requirements of one person, one vote, as well as race representation required by the Voting Rights Act of 1965, while also increasing the competitiveness of South Carolina's Six Congressional Districts by improving upon the 2002 apportionment plan approved by the South Carolina General Assembly.

### Original Congressional Districts by Race
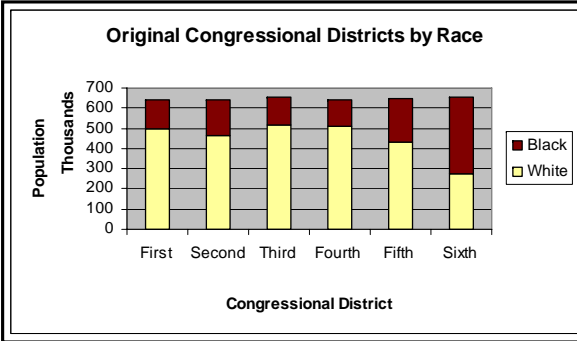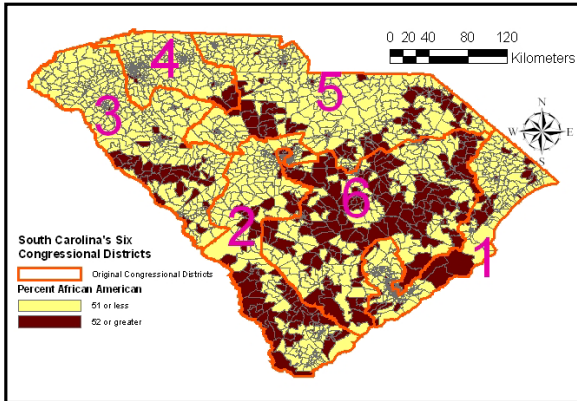
Race

Race has long been a factor in apportionment. The Voting Rights Act of 1965, which bans racial discrimination in voter registration, also creates a right of minority voters to elect candidates and requires federal intervention, or preclearance, where abuse has been prevalent in the past (Monmonier, 2001). In addition, subsequent interpretations have required that when drawing districts, states under preclearance may not split areas in which members of a minority group constitute a majority (Lublin, 1997).

Race and Partisanship

The Voting Rights Act thus creates a situation whereby certain states are required to implement plans that will create electoral situations advantageous for electing minorities. The close correlation between race and partisan voting has created wide-ranging attempts to create majority-minority districts. For example, in the early 1990s following the 1990 census, reapportionment arguments in the South found white Republicans teaming with African American Democrats to create more majority-minority districts. These plans aggregated African American voters in majority-minority districts, creating safe seats for African American Democrats. They also created safer seats for white Republicans as well. For example, South Carolina's Sixth Congressional District aggregates African American voters to the point where African Americans make up 57 percent of the district's population. This district was safe for African American Democrats, while the districts surrounding it became safe for white Republicans. Thus, overall competitiveness in congressional races nationwide decreased significantly in the 1990s and 2000s.

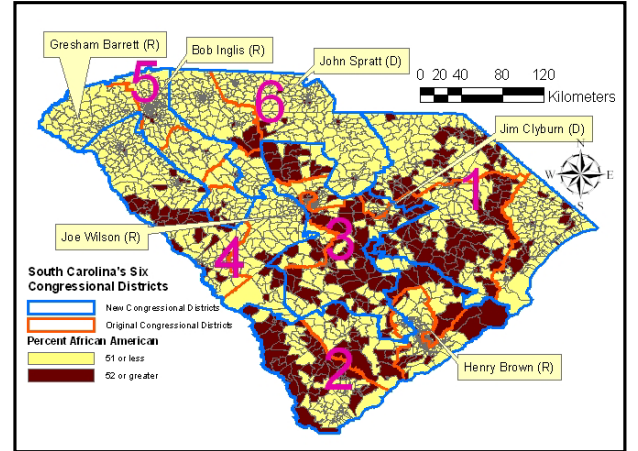### New Congressional Districts by Race
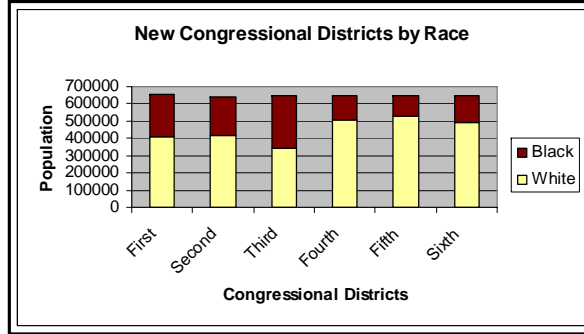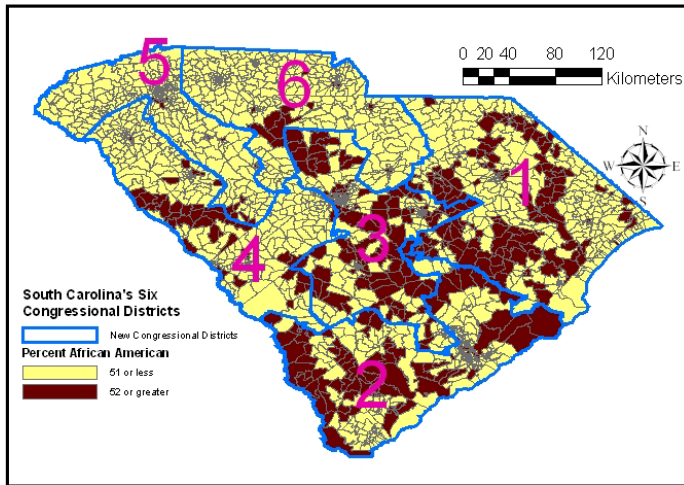
References

Lublin, David, *The Paradox of Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 6-9, 120.

Monmonier, Mark S., *Bushmanders and Bullwinkles: How Politicians Manipulate Electronic Maps and Census Data to Win Elections* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 3-4.

Methodology

I attempted to retain the contiguousness of South Carolina's 46 counties. Thus, my project made every effort to include county borders as borders for the new congressional districts. In addition, I also referenced the race data for the precinct level. Trial and error allowed me to create the new congressional districts, by aggregating bordering counties until they approached the goal of roughly 668,669 voters per district. My goal of increasing the competitiveness of the districts also required that I slightly increase the competitiveness of South Carolina's majority-minority district to create more competitive districts nearby.

Analysis

The competitiveness of the First, Second, and Third Congressional Districts are increased. The Third, what was once the majority-minority Sixth District, now contains barely a majority of African American voters. The First and the Second now contain roughly 38 percent African American voters, making these districts potentially competitive in a two-party contest. Take the First District for example. Assuming Republicans gain 10 percent of the 39 percent African American vote and 75 percent of the 61 percent white vote, a generic Republican candidate could expect to gain 49.7 percent of the vote, while a generic Democratic candidate would receive 50.3 percent. The Sixth District, what was once the Fifth District containing 39 percent African Americans, now is much less competitive, with only 26 percent African Americans. The level of competitiveness is based upon recent trends in South Carolina that African Americans give 90 percent of their votes to Democrats, while whites give 75 percent of their votes to Republicans. Thus, the Third District should be safely Democratic, the First and Second should be competitive between both parties, and the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth are safe Republican seats. Further, the First district has no incumbent congressmen, while the Fifth district has both Gresham Barrett and Bob Inglis. The other congressmen would face altered districts that may benefit or detract from their reelection ability. Thus, neither party can claim an improved electoral situation due to this apportionment plan. However, Republicans and Democrats have a basis for easily creating apportionment plans that may benefit the electoral outcomes of their party, while continuing to maintain the requirements of one person, one vote and South Carolina's status under the Voting Rights Act of 1965.