True Representation

Communities of Color Shape California’s Redistricting
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Published Date
November 2022
Los Angeles, California

With Deepest Gratitude to Our Partners

The 2021 redistricting cycle was truly a collaborative and multi-racial community effort that deepened connections and partnerships across Los Angeles County and throughout the state. It was through our partnership and collective learning as the IVE Redistricting Alliance and the People’s Bloc that we engineered significant impact in the L.A. County and...
California redistricting processes, ultimately resulting in more fair and representative district maps, and strengthening the opportunities for low-income communities and communities of color to elect candidates of choice within this decade. We thank each participant and participating organization for your commitment to racial and economic justice, community empowerment, and movement building that guided our work and raised the bar for future redistricting cycles.

AAPI Equity Alliance, AAPIs for Civic Empowerment Education Fund, ActiveSGV, Alliance San Diego, AltaMed Health Services, Anti-Recidivism Coalition, Asian Americans Advancing Justice–Asian Law Caucus, AWOKE/The GR818ERS, Bay Rising, Black Women for Wellness, California Black Census and Redistricting Hub, California Calls, California Environmental Voters, California Native Vote Project, Casa Esperanza, The Central American Resource Center (CARECEN), Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE), Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA), Communities For A Better Environment, Communities for a New California (CNC) Education Fund, Community Coalition (CoCo), The Community Action League, Comunidades Indígenas en Liderazgo (CIELO), Council on American-Islamic Relations – Los Angeles (CAIR LA), Council on American-Islamic Relations – California (CAIR-CA), Dolores Huerta Foundation, Equality California, IE United, InnerCity Struggle, Khmer Girls in Action, LA Voice, Latino Equality Alliance, Little Tokyo Service Center, Long Beach Forward, Long Beach Immigrant Rights Coalition, Los Angeles Black Worker Center, Mi Familia Vota Education Fund, Newstart Housing Corporation, Nuestro Voto, Orange County Civic Engagement Table (OCCET), Pacoima Beautiful, PICO California, Power California, Salvadoran American Leadership and Educational Fund, SELA Collaborative, Social Justice Learning Institute, South Asian Network, Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE), Tia Chucha’s Centro Cultural, and TransLatin@ Coalition.

Additional thanks to our partners in the California Redistricting Collaborative and the Unity Mapping Table—California Common Cause, California and Los Angeles League of Women Voters, Disability Rights California, MALDEF, and NALEO Educational Fund—for your dedication in monitoring and advocating for the adhesion to the Voting Rights Act and the Voters First Act and ensuring robust and accessible community engagement that helped make this redistricting process even more inclusive of, transparent for, and accountable to all Californians. To Reed Smith for sharing your technical and legal expertise with community stakeholders and guiding us through the complexity of state and federal redistricting laws. And finally, to the California Citizens Redistricting Commission and LA County Citizens Redistricting Commission members and staff, for their dedication to and tireless efforts in service of a fair and impartial redistricting process.
Executive Summary

California’s prosperity has long masked racial inequities across nearly every measure of well-being. Direct causes of these inequities are complex and the collective results of centuries of systemic racism.

Redistricting is a powerful way we can address and reverse racial inequities. Research shows elected officials of color represent the interests of their communities at higher rates than other officials. Elected officials who do not reflect their constituents pass policies that are less effective in addressing the needs of marginalized communities. Such lack of representation can also create a disconnect between voters and their representatives, resulting in disengagement and mistrust of government within the community.

Redistricting matters because it is about power—the power for communities to ensure elected officials support their well-being and address their most pressing needs. From congressional districts down to local school board districts, mapped lines can unite or divide communities with shared interests and history.

In 2021 we witnessed attempts across the country to corrupt the redistricting process, with communities of color often the prime casualties. Yet California’s redistricting process fared particularly well, resulting in communities of color being more empowered to elect candidates of choice while avoiding allegations of partisan favoritism.

Early on, we recognized the redistricting processes at the state level and in L.A. County as opportunities to politically empower voters and residents from impacted communities. Catalyst California (formerly Advancement Project California) convened community-based organizations (CBOs) to form two coalitions: the IVE Redistricting Alliance to work on Congressional, State Senate, and State Assembly seats, and the People’s Bloc partnered with Community Coalition to engage in the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisor’s redistricting process.

Starting in 2019, coalition partners engaged in three primary areas of work to ensure fair district maps were drawn in California and Los Angeles County: community engagement, advocacy, and line drawing. The impact of this work was profound.

California’s new maps significantly increase opportunities for district representation in communities of color. Two factors drove this success: 1) independent redistricting commissions and 2) robust community-based engagement of low-income people of color that exemplifies the vital and unique role communities of color hold in strengthening our democracy.
Overall, the coalitions were **successful** in:
- Keeping communities of interest (COIs) whole and/or in preferred district configurations.
- Maximizing the number of districts with large numbers of people of color, even when competing priorities increased the difficulty in establishing alignment.
- Seeing their district line configurations in the final maps.
- Creating future opportunities for further community power building and electing candidates of choice.

Along with these significant wins, **challenges remain** with the new district maps:
- Some communities of interest and/or neighborhoods were still split.
- Some COIs were paired with more white/affluent parts of a district.
- Some Latinx majority-districts may not have a large enough margin to be effective.

**Four major takeaways emerged** from the 2021 redistricting process:
1. Community engagement generates more representative district maps.
2. Independent redistricting commissions more frequently lead to more responsive, transparent, and inclusive redistricting processes.
3. Engaging community members in redistricting is challenging and cost-intensive.
4. An effective and inclusive redistricting process increases opportunities for more responsive and representative government.

**Redistricting and Representation Moving Forward**

To guide the advocacy and mapping efforts of our coalition, we developed a Power-Building Opportunity Index which identifies opportunities to build an engaged political base that prioritizes and unifies the voices of low-income residents and people of color. The index also suggests a blueprint for power-building opportunities across the state.

Appropriate representation and the equitable outcomes it generates remain elusive and will require many future reforms within and beyond the redistricting process, including:
- Creating independent redistricting commissions across all local jurisdictions
- Further expanding district-based elections—as opposed to at-large representation
- Increasing the number of district seats in local jurisdictions
- Expanding the electorate
- Exploring new voting models
- Reforming money in politics

Through our Political Voice team, Catalyst California continues to champion reforms to increase the descriptive representation of voters of color. **A healthy and equitable democracy must break the boom-and-bust cycles of election-focused engagement**
California’s prosperity has long masked racial inequities across nearly every measure of well-being. Despite having the world’s fifth largest and third fastest growing economy, the economic gains of communities of color in California continue to lag behind those of their white counterparts. The per capita income of California’s Black residents is 55% of white residents’. That figure is 38% for Latinx residents and 46% for Native American residents. These inequities are mirrored across other measures of prosperity such as education, housing, and health. The direct causes of these inequities are complex, but collectively they represent the results of centuries of systemic racism.

Research on descriptive representation, representation that shares traits and experiences with the group that elected them, shows elected officials of color represent the interests of their communities at higher rates than other officials. Increased prioritization of those interests often takes the form of sponsoring legislation in response to their community’s interests—promoting their community’s achievements through floor speeches, and direct engagement with community members. For example, Asian American elected officials are more likely to have a deeper understanding of the societal and psychological impact of anti-Asian hate and violence, and therefore are better able to develop policy solutions that address the unique needs of Asian American communities. Elected officials who do not reflect the community are more prone to one-size-fits-all approaches that miss the specific cultural and historical context of those they represent.

This ultimately leads to policies that are less effective in addressing the needs of marginalized communities. Furthermore, the absence of descriptive representation can create a disconnect between voters and their representatives, resulting in disengagement and mistrust of government within the community. Descriptive representation plays a significant role in ensuring the needs of communities of color are met throughout the policy-making and budgeting processes, yet these communities remain underrepresented across California. For every 100,000 residents, California’s white population has 4.6 elected officials of the same race. For the state’s Black and Native American populations, the representation rate is at 1.5 and for Asian, Pacific Islander, and Latinx residents only 1 of every 100,000 residents identifies with the same race as their representatives. Coupled with the resource impact of $675 billion in federal funds distributed based on the census count, Catalyst California launched census and redistricting campaigns to increase the ability of people of color and equity-minded community members to elect candidates of choice.
In 2021, we witnessed the redistricting process corrupted across the nation as partisan gerrymandering enabled both political parties to manipulate seats in their respective states at the expense of voter choice. Communities of color remain one of the prime casualties in many of these states. Alabama, for example, split its Black voters across districts—diluting their voting power and diminishing their ability to elect candidates of choice for the next decade.

**However, California’s redistricting process fared particularly well, resulting in our communities of color being more empowered to elect candidates of choice while avoiding lawsuits alleging partisan favoritism in the new statewide maps.**

California’s new maps significantly increase minority-majority districts (where constituents who comprise a particular racial/ethnic minority hold 50% or more of the district’s citizen voting age population (CVAP)) and minority-influence districts (districts where a minority constituency possess at least 30% CVAP). Two factors drove California’s general success:

- Utilization of independent redistricting commissions to draw districts (including the Congressional, State Senate, State Assembly, and Board of Equalization, and L.A. County Board of Supervisors district lines).
- A growing community-based infrastructure across the state that meaningfully engaged low-income people of color and other historically marginalized communities—many for the first time—in both state and local redistricting processes.

Four major takeaways resulted from this recent redistricting cycle in California and Los Angeles County:

1. Community engagement generates more representative district maps.
2. Independent redistricting commissions more frequently lead to a more responsive, transparent, and inclusive redistricting process compared to other bodies, such as appointed or advisory redistricting commissions, and by elected officials themselves.
3. Engaging community members in redistricting is challenging and cost-intensive; resourcing community-based organizations with existing on-the-ground relationships is key.
4. An effective and inclusive redistricting process increases opportunities for more responsive and representative government.

**What is Redistricting and Why Does it Matter**

Redistricting is used by all government jurisdictions to redraw political district boundaries after the census. It determines who can participate in elections and whose voices will be most influential in electing candidates, shaping the kinds of laws and policies that can be
enacted over the next ten years. Communities change over time, and with new census data, district lines must be redrawn so all districts have equally sized populations. How a map is drawn creates the demographic makeup and political lean of a district. This process has the power to unlock the political voice of communities that have long been marginalized. Alternatively, the process can be manipulated so that maps favor one party or group, potentially removing the influence of marginalized individuals and communities, which is called “gerrymandering”. Redistricting matters because it is about power—the power for communities to ensure elected officials support their well-being and address their most pressing needs. From congressional districts down to local school board districts, mapped lines can unite or divide communities with shared interests and history—impacting their ability to elect candidates of choice, and subsequently, whether communities are likely to be prioritized or neglected by their respective representatives.

Community Engagement in the 2021 Redistricting Process

Catalyst California recognized the redistricting processes at the state level and in L.A. County as opportunities to politically empower voters and residents from impacted communities and ensure that those communities have fair lines. To achieve these goals, we convened statewide, regional, and local networks of community-based organizations (CBOs), particularly networks that implement Integrated Voter Engagement (IVE) strategies and prioritize issues of racial and economic equity, to form two coalitions. The IVE Redistricting Alliance engaged in the state’s redistricting process for Congressional, State Senate, and State Assembly seats, and the People’s Bloc partnered with Community Coalition to engage in the Los Angeles County’s Board of Supervisors redistricting process and statewide districts within L.A. County.

IVE Redistricting Alliance

- AAPIs for Civic Empowerment Education Fund
- Alliance San Diego
- Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Asian Law Caucus
- Bay Rising
- California Black Census and Redistricting Hub
- California Calls
- California Environmental Voters
- California Native Vote Project
- Catalyst California
- Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE)
- Communities for a New California (CNC) Education Fund
- Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
- Council on American-Islamic Relations-California (CAIR-CA)
- Dolores Huerta Foundation
- Equality California
- IE United
- Mi Familia Vota Education Fund
- Orange County Civic Engagement Table (OCCET)
- People’s Bloc
- PICO CA
- Power California
Community engagement built underrepresented communities’ knowledge of and capacity to impact the redistricting process, including how to identify and advocate for their communities of interest (COIs), and to guide coalition partners’ district line-drawing.

Advocacy to the California Citizens Redistricting Commission (CCRC) and/or the LA County Citizens Redistricting Commission (LACRC) informed their community engagement processes, mapping procedures, line-drawing process, and final maps.

Line drawing of district maps were submitted to the CCRC and LACRC, conducted in coordination across coalition partners and their respective bases to ensure internal alignment, inclusion of diverse COIs, and stronger representation for impacted communities.

Since 2019, coalition partners engaged in three primary areas of work to ensure fair district maps were drawn in California and Los Angeles County:

1. **Community engagement** built underrepresented communities’ knowledge of and capacity to impact the redistricting process, including how to identify and advocate for their communities of interest (COIs), and to guide coalition partners’ district line-drawing.

2. **Advocacy** to the California Citizens Redistricting Commission (CCRC) and/or the LA County Citizens Redistricting Commission (LACRC) informed their community engagement processes, mapping procedures, line-drawing process, and final maps.

3. **Line drawing** of district maps were submitted to the CCRC and LACRC, conducted in coordination across coalition partners and their respective bases to ensure internal alignment, inclusion of diverse COIs, and stronger representation for impacted communities.

*The California Constitution defines a community of interest as a population which shares common social and economic interests that should be included within a single district for purposes of its effective and fair representation.* [this comes from the state commission website https://www.wedrawthelinesca.org/faq]
As seen in Figure 1, the redistricting process was a multi-year campaign that involved numerous steps, many of which were iterative in nature, complex, and required high levels of staffing capacity (i.e., legal, policy analysis, mapping, organizing, etc.) from community partners to ensure an inclusive process of underrepresented voices. Community engagement was key in informing our coalitions’ advocacy at every step of the redistricting process—from the application and selection process of commissioners, to the approach and accessibility of public hearings, all the way through the drafting and adoption of new district maps.

Constant collective advocacy was essential to the success of California’s and LA County’s redistricting process. Engaging in the redistricting process, and especially drawing district lines, was a first for most of our coalition partners and their community bases. Despite the steep learning curve, our collective advocacy played a major role in shaping the redistricting process.

*These activities took place at a later point in 2020 for the People’s Bloc, given the different timelines for LA County’s redistricting process.

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Table 1: Community Engagement: IVE Redistricting Alliance and the People’s Bloc

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of people engaged throughout the redistricting process (workshops, emails, social media, etc.)</td>
<td>367,172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of community meetings/workshops held</td>
<td>461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of cities partners engaged in city council redistricting processes</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of counties partners engaged in supervisorial redistricting processes</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of school districts partners engaged in school board redistricting processes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Totals are reflective of the majority of coalition partners who were able to provide information in time for this report.

Results for Our Collective Impact

IVE Redistricting Alliance’s and the People’s Bloc’s deep engagement in the redistricting process—in conjunction with the advocacy by democracy groups, such as California Common Cause, the California and Los Angeles League of Women Voters, MALDEF, and NALEO Educational Fund—amplified the voices of underrepresented communities throughout L.A. County and the broader state.

Success and Challenges for California’s New Maps

At the state level, the California Citizens Redistricting Commission (CCRC) led an inclusive and welcoming process of diverse community voices, and was responsive to many recommendations to better facilitate public participation throughout each stage. As an independent redistricting commission, they strived to maintain transparency in the process and freedom from partisan bias, while demonstrating their committed adherence to the Voting Rights Act and respecting diverse COIs as much as possible. This increased the IVE Redistricting Alliance’s ability to advocate and inform the CCRC’s line-drawing process, resulting in significant wins for impacted communities, albeit not free of challenges.
As seen in Table 2, the new maps show increases in the number of Latinx-, Black-, and Asian-majority and/or influence districts. California gained six Congressional, three State Senate seats, and five State Assembly Latinx-majority districts. This corresponded with a decrease in the number of Latinx-influence districts, as eight Congressional, seven State Senate, and five State Assembly seats were lost. Some of the losses in minority-influence districts can be attributed to consolidating those communities into minority-majority districts. Additionally, California gained an Asian-majority Assembly district, while maintaining the same number of Asian-influence Assembly districts. However, one Congressional and one State Senate Asian-influence district were lost. For Black Californians, no majority districts were gained, primarily due to their relative population size, however, there were gains made by adding two new Congressional Black-influence districts, while protecting the same number of State Senate and State Assembly influence districts.

Table 2: Changes in Representation under California’s final 2021 Redistricting Maps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># of Latinx-Majority Districts</th>
<th># of Latinx-Influence Districts</th>
<th># of Black-Majority Districts</th>
<th># of Black-Influence Districts</th>
<th># of Asian-Majority Districts</th>
<th># of Asian-Influence Districts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Former Congressional Map</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Congressional Map</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former State Senate Map</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New State Senate Map</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former State Assembly Map</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>New State Assembly Map</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PPIC Blog Post, Jan 12, 2022
Overall, the IVE Redistricting Alliance partners were successful in:

- **Keeping most of their COIs and/or neighborhoods whole and/or in preferred district configurations:** Core AAPI COIs were kept whole at all levels in the Bay Area, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Orange County, Northern California, Sacramento, and San Francisco. Most of the Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian (AMEMSA) communities were kept together in south Buena Park, La Palma, and Cypress in Orange County and Cerritos and Artesia in Los Angeles County at all levels. Black COIs were kept together at most government levels in the Bay Area, Inland Empire, City of Fresno, Kern, Kings, Los Angeles, Sacramento, and San Diego Counties. Additionally, the Salton Sea and its majority-Latinx, working-class neighbors in Eastern Coachella Valley and Imperial Valley were united at every level of government for the first time.

- **Maximizing the number of minority-majority districts and minority-influence districts:** The West San Gabriel Valley Assembly district and the Fremont-Berryessa Assembly districts became Asian-majority districts. Two new Black-influence Congressional districts were created, one encompassing Inglewood, Compton, and Hawthorne, and the other including Culver City and Hyde Park. Seven Assembly, four Senate, and four Congressional Latinx-majority districts were created in the Inland Empire, while Orange County gained its first Latinx-majority Senate district.

- **Seeing their district line configurations and recommendations reflected in the final maps:** New district maps in Los Angeles were similar to the map configurations of our partner, the California Black Census and Redistricting Hub, with Black CVAP at 30%+ in core districts at all levels. Some Latinx-majority district configurations were also similar to our partners’ lines in Orange County and the Central Valley, and AAPI district configurations in the Bay Area, Orange, and Los Angeles counties were similar to those proposed by our partner, Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Asian Law Caucus and their network.

- **Course-correcting the CCRC’s line drawing:** Through community advocacy, our partners helped prevent the splitting of more COIs and additional cuts to the CVAP percentages for certain communities of color, including some in the Bay Area and San Diego for both AAPI and Black COIs, as well as for AAPI and AMEMSA COIs in Orange County.

- **Creating future opportunities for further community power building and electing candidates of choice:** As a result of our partners’ advocacy that helped informed the new district maps, we are now have increased likelihood of governments that are more responsive to and representative of low-income communities of color across many regions, including for LGBTQ communities in Coachella Valley, Long Beach, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.
Along with these significant wins, challenges remain with the new district maps:

- **Some COIs and/or neighborhoods were still split.** For example, the South Asian communities were split into different districts at all levels in the Central Valley. Several Black COIs were split at one or more levels of government in City Heights, the City of Fresno, El Cajon, Riverside County, Sacramento, and Southeastern San Diego. Also, the Coachella Valley was split at all levels in the Inland Empire.

- **Some COIs were paired with more white/affluent parts of a district.** This circumstance potentially limits impacted communities’ ability to elect candidates of choice, such as the problematic pairings of Black communities in Vallejo with East Contra Costa and Old Fig Garden with Clovis in the Central Valley. Some AAPI COIs was paired with more affluent/coastal areas, such as those in Orange County, the Bay Area, Los Angeles, and San Diego.

- **Potentially ineffective Latinx majority-districts were created.** Particularly in the Central Valley, despite having more than 50% of the CVAP in some districts, the CVAP percentages may still not be high enough to ensure the Latinx community will elect candidates of choice. A legacy of voter suppression and the hostile political context have historically constrained Latinx from turning out at the polls.

**Success and Challenges for Los Angeles County’s New Maps**

In Los Angeles County, a newly formed Citizens Redistricting Commission (LACRC) oversaw the process of redrawing lines for the County’s five supervisorial districts. Modeled off the state-wide approach, the LACRC sought to carry out an independent and resident-informed redistricting process for the County’s ten million residents. Throughout 2021, the LACRC and its staff orchestrated a robust process of public meetings and hearings to gather COI information, view publicly submitted maps, and hear public testimony. While the process was not without challenges—including growing pains of the newly formed commission—its results represent a step forward in the ability of historically underrepresented communities to elect candidates of choice. Most significant, for the first time in the County’s history, a majority of the citizen voting age population (CVAP) in two of the five districts are Latinx. Combined with an additional Black-influence coalition district, communities of color are now strongly positioned to elect candidates of choice in a majority of the County’s five districts.

Overall, the People’s Bloc partners were successful in:

- **Advocating for two Latinx CVAP majority districts:** District 1 remains a Latinx majority seat and is joined by District 4.
• **Maintaining a coalition district where the Black community should maintain strong electoral influence:** This brings LAX into the district as an economic asset.

• **Influencing the final map and setting the direction of the mapping process:** Of the 113 draft maps submitted, the LACRC selected the People’s Bloc’s initial map as one of four early templates. Ultimately, the Bloc’s map became the template the commission refined as they released updates and sought additional public comment. Our architecture set the direction of the final map, and the numerous response maps that the Bloc submitted moved the commission to their final configuration.

• In part, because the People’s Bloc was able to influence the initial configuration of the County map, we were very successful in **protecting COIs identified by low-income residents of color.**

  - The Eastside is intact and remains in District 1, where residents have been building community power for decades.
  - Metro LA AAPI COIs of Chinatown, Little Tokyo, Koreatown, Historic Filipinotown, HiFi, and Thai Town—with one exception—are whole and in their preferred districts.
  - Much of the San Gabriel Valley AAPI COIs are together in District 1, including all of the East San Gabriel Valley COIs (Hacienda Heights, Rowland Heights, Walnut, and Diamond Bar) as well as Alhambra, San Gabriel, Monterey Park, and Rosemead in West San Gabriel Valley.
  - The eight cities of Southeast L.A. (Bell, Bell Gardens, Cudahy, Maywood, Huntington Park, Lynwood, South Gate, and Vernon) are together with the unincorporated area of Walnut Park in District 4, helping create a new, Latinx majority district.
  - Central L.A. and South L.A. COI are largely whole and include LAX.

"**The bottom line is this: if not for the strenuous and passionate advocacy of the People’s Bloc, the L.A. County redistricting commission would not have arrived at two Latinx districts for the first time in the history of this county. The final map was originally based on a People’s Bloc map. While later iterations weakened that vision, the strength of the Bloc’s map kept this commission moving in the right direction. It’s a huge, historic, and unprecedented win.**"

- Frank Cárdenas, Los Angeles City Council Redistricting Commission Executive Director

Along with these significant wins, challenges remain with the new district maps:

• **Revisions to the map lowered CVAP numbers in Districts 1, 2, and 4,** leaving smaller margins for communities of color to elect candidates of choice.
The commission pushed District 2 to the coast, bringing whiter and more affluent communities into a district that has historically represented Central L.A. and South L.A. Introducing these interests threatens to split supervisor priorities across communities with very different needs and lived experiences, making power building in District 2 even more crucial.

The final map split West San Gabriel Valley, separating Asian American communities in Temple City and Arcadia from other COIs in District 1.

Thai Town was split. A dispute over the boundaries of Thai Town resulted in a final version of the map that separates multiple blocks that the community considers part of the neighborhood.

What’s Next

California’s and Los Angeles County’s 2021 redistricting successes via independent redistricting commissions exemplify the vital and unique role impacted communities of color hold in strengthening our democracy. They amplify the political representation and inclusion of historically marginalized communities and, as a result, bring us closer to creating more responsive, representative, and participatory governments for all.

Facing Forward: Equitable Representation Post-Redistricting

Next, we analyze the prospects to continue building community power in California’s new maps and the policy reforms that can further maximize opportunities to elect candidates of choice.

Power-Building Opportunities in California’s New Maps

To guide the advocacy and mapping efforts of Catalyst California and our redistricting partners in the People’s Bloc and the IVE Redistricting Alliance, we developed the Power-Building Opportunity Index. The index is a composite of data-driven indicators selected by our coalition partners, including demographic, community, and power-building data. In combination with Community of Interest (COI) data sourced from resident engagement, the Power-Building Opportunity Index aims to identify opportunities to build an engaged political base that prioritizes and unifies the voices of low-income residents and people of color. Coalitions among communities with shared interests that can be geographically united promote effective districts during the mapping process and help provide an analysis of draft maps developed by redistricting commissions. The Power-Building Opportunity Index was made publicly available to assist grassroots and voter engagement organizations in their mapping efforts for a more equitable California.
At the conclusion of the redistricting process, the index proved to be a long-term resource. By incorporating updated 2020 census data, the updated Power-Building Opportunity Index provides insights on demographic shifts alongside new district lines and includes a suggested blueprint for power-building opportunities across the state. Regions (high in the index) represent communities with shared experiences and living conditions that have the potential to drive progressive policies and more equitable outcomes. Many of these regions are ripe for political change with sufficient resources invested in community organizing and voter participation.

Power-Building Opportunity Indicators

- Composite: Population by Race/Ethnicity
- Composite: Citizen Voting Age Population by Race/Ethnicity
- Composite: Immigrant Population by Race/Ethnicity
- Composite: Limited English Speaking Population (LEP) by Race/Ethnicity
- Composite: Population with a Disability by Race/Ethnicity
- People with Post-Secondary Education
- Population Below 200% of Federal Poverty Level
- Housing Cost-Burdened Population (30%+ of income spent on housing)
- Migrant Student Population
- Pollution Burden
- Eligible Voter Turnout
- Proposition 15 Results

Index scores are grouped into five categories and assigned from lowest to highest opportunity. A higher index score represents more power-building opportunities for progressive-minded, low-income people of color and is presented in a darker shade. Census tracts with data only available for two or fewer indicators do not receive an index score. The online interactive version of this map allows you to view the index with city boundaries, Assembly Districts, Senate Districts, Congressional Districts, and Los Angeles County Supervisor Districts as overlays. Explore the Power-Building Opportunity Index map and data on our website.
The updated Power-Building Opportunity Index reveals the depth of power-building opportunities across the state. Examples include:

- Traditional strongholds of community power such as South Los Angeles, Oakland and San Francisco.
- Untapped influence in historically underrepresented areas such as Central Valley districts that encompass the core City of Fresno, Bakersfield, Merced, Modesto and Stockton as well as National City and Chula Vista area in San Diego.
- New opportunities from shifting lines or demographics such as those in Supervisorial District 4 of Los Angeles County (SD4), Assembly Districts 65, 69 and 72 in Orange County, Congressional District 41 in Riverside County, and Assembly District 47 in Santa Barbara County.

Redistricting and Representation Moving Forward

Despite the generally favorable redistricting outcomes for residents of color in California’s 2021 redistricting cycle, descriptive representation and the equitable outcomes it can help generate remain elusive and will require many future reforms within and beyond the redistricting process.

Improving the Redistricting Process:

Expand and improving IRCs across all local jurisdictions. – Independent Redistricting Commissions (IRCs) are a redistricting governing body where residents, not politicians, control the line-drawing process. In most redistricting processes, state legislators or city councils control how districts are drawn. Because many of these legislators desire districts that will be favorable for their reelection campaigns, an inherent conflict of interest leads to districts that work to the benefit of elected officials rather than their constituents. Additionally, legislatively driven processes are much more susceptible to partisan gerrymandering, as the party in power can create districts designed to maintain their ability to control the government. Appointed commissions and advisory bodies are often susceptible to partisan influence as well since the selection process or ultimate approval of maps reside with partisan actors.

In California, the state established its California Citizens Redistricting Commission in 2010, and in 2016 Senate Bill 1108 authorized all California cities and counties to create independent citizen redistricting commissions. Since then, jurisdictions like Los Angeles County, San Diego, Oakland, and Long Beach have adopted the IRC model. As California has become a model for the use of IRCs, the adoption of this tool must spread further at the local level. In 2021, the City of Los Angeles became an unfortunate example of how processes that are not truly independent fail. L.A.’s redistricting process includes an Advisory Commission, but it lacked any formal power to adopt maps. Instead, the City
Council holds decision-making over district lines. L.A.’s redistricting process erupted into territorial infighting between council members that ultimately led to the rejection of the Advisory Commission’s maps and the community input that informed them in favor of a rushed ad-hoc mapping process led by the Council. Leaked audio obtained by the Los Angeles Times gave us a window into the frightening reality that can play out in legislatively driven redistricting processes. In a conversation steeped in anti-Black and -anti-Indigenous racism, councilmembers strategized pitting L.A.’s communities against each other to protect their personal political power. Among other things, IRCs lead to fairer, more effective, more equitable maps that safeguard against partisan and self-interested forces and should be adopted locally across the state.

As multiple jurisdictions have used IRCs throughout California, lessons learned are beginning to emerge. Codification of these lessons can ensure more effective and increasingly equitable commissions moving forward. Examples include the need for robust staffing and resources, strengthening commissioner outreach strategies to ensure a diverse pool of candidates, improving commissioner onboarding and training, providing or enhancing the Voting Rights Act and other legal or technical support, improving and standardizing community engagement and transparency, and increasing accessibility and language access standards.

**Representation Reforms Impacting Redistricting:**

**Address district structures across California.** – Regardless of who has authority over the mapping process, the objectives set forth for that governing body can limit the opportunity for more equitable representation before the line-drawing process even begins. For example, at-large elections preempt the redistricting process by eliminating districts altogether. At-large districts have long been viewed as a form of voter suppression, where the will of the majority can effectively suppress all representation from marginalized groups. In her descent to Shelby County v. Holder, a Supreme Court decision that invalidated key parts of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, Justice Ginsberg identified at-large elections as a “second-generation barrier” to voting rights. Here in California, at-large elections are still the norm in local races. While many of the largest cities have moved to district-based voting systems, as of May 1, 2020, only 155 of California’s 482 cities elect their councils by districts. The number of district-based elections has grown rapidly over the last two decades, primarily due to legal challenges made possible by the California Voting Rights Act of 2001. While some cities are moving to district-based elections to avoid the financial costs of a lawsuit, others like Santa Monica have spent years fighting to protect at-large voting.

Historically, the move to district-based elections has been a powerful solution to increasing the voice of marginalized communities. As districts have taken root in many California jurisdictions, some advocates are championing additional measures to further address
representation gaps. Cumulative voting is one example in which voters cast multiple votes matching the number of seats. This allows underrepresented communities to concentrate their multiple votes on a single candidate in a process known as “plumping” to increase their likelihood of minority representation. Similarly, advocates argue proportional representation offers a different electoral method that would create more equitable representation. Proportional representation can be structured in many ways, but at its core, it relies on dividing votes among multi-member districts to ensure all voters receive representation in proportion to the percentage of votes in their respective districts.

**Increase the number of district seats in local jurisdictions.** – District-based elections are not the only structural challenge for redistricting bodies. The number of districts can also present a barrier to equitable systems, especially in our larger jurisdictions. L.A. County, for example, is home to more than ten million people yet has only five Supervisorial Districts. At roughly two million people per district, it is virtually impossible to ensure the ability to elect candidates of choice for many racial and ethnic groups despite hundreds of thousands of residents. For the Asian American, Black, Native American/Alaskan Native, and Pacific Islander communities, there are simply too few residents, or they are too dispersed throughout the County to represent a majority of voters in districts so large. These demographic realities prevent many communities from descriptive representation at the Board of Supervisors and threaten the Black community’s influence in District 2.

**More Equitable Representation Beyond Redistricting:**

The goal of ensuring voters of color could secure effective representation through the ability to elect candidates of choice was a core aspect of Catalyst California’s rationale for getting involved in the census and redistricting, but it cannot end there. Descriptive representation depends on many factors beyond redistricting, and we must continue to pursue reforms to strengthen the voice and influence of historically marginalized communities. In California, potential reforms broadly fall into three factors: who votes, how we vote, and who runs.

- **Expanding the Electorate:** Who votes in any given election in California is determined by many factors, including registration, turnout, eligibility, and even the census count and subsequent redistricting to establish which races a voter participates in. Reforms like Motor Voter \(x^{iv}\), same-day registration, and online voter registration, have made our elections fairer and more inclusive, but more is needed to protect and increase the vote. Some cities are exploring non-citizen voting \(x^{v}\) to move residents into the civic process, while the state is considering enhancements to Motor Voter and automatic voter registration to further increase registration rates.\(^{xvi}\)

- **Exploring New Voting Models:** How people vote in California was strengthened in 2001 by the California Voting Rights Act\(^{xvii}\) and again in 2016 by California Voter’s Choice
Act (VCA). The VCA allows counties greater flexibility in how, when, and where voters cast their ballots. Twenty-seven of California’s 58 counties will participate in the VCA in 2022. While it is easier to cast a ballot than ever before, there is much we can do to change the structural conditions of elections to increase the likelihood of representatives who are accountable to communities. For example, California has a split ticket with a top-two primary. Exploring models like ranked choice voting and proportional representation offer alternative ways, especially for underrepresented groups, to express their preference for candidates without fear of “throwing away” their votes.

- Reforming Money in Politics: Who can run for office is limited structurally by eligibility qualifications. However, the role of money in politics informally shapes candidate viability. As election spending has increased, candidates with access to wealth benefit from significant advantages in campaign staff and advertising. Regardless of the accuracy of the census count, or the effectiveness of the district, money wields an outsized voice in elections, which has rewarded wealthier and whiter candidates. Fortunately, many potential reforms can curtail money’s influence in politics. Public financing, democracy vouchers, contribution limits, and disclosure laws bring some degree of promise. Many of these have been tested in cities across the state and are ripe for broader expansion.

Through our Political Voice team, Catalyst California continues to champion reforms to increase the descriptive representation of voters of color. A healthy and equitable democracy must break the boom-and-bust cycles of election-focused engagement and move toward long-term, continuous power building. As we conclude the redistricting process, we are engaging with partners and conducting research to inform future campaigns. As Catalyst California continues to support this work, we call on:

- Funders to prioritize investments in democracy reform, especially resources allocated directly to movement and organizing groups led by and rooted in communities of color. Their ability to engage and mobilize their communities is critical in this fight and woefully under-resourced.

- Community-based organizations to continue prioritizing and engaging in democracy reform work. We know the demands on CBO staff, volunteers, and those they partner with are vast, and the needs of the communities they serve pull their efforts and priorities in many directions. Yet, ensuring their communities are represented in the policy-making and budgetary process is the long-term strategy we need to address the urgencies our communities face in an ongoing and sustainable way.

To learn more about this work or to ask questions about how to engage in it, please contact Director of Political Voice, Aaron Robertson (arobertson@catalystcalifornia.org).
Endnotes

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ii https://www.racecounts.org/issue/economic/

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xvi https://sfelections.sfgov.org/non-citizen-registration-and-voting

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xx https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voters-choice-act/vca-counties

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