Counting for Representation

How a population count changes seats and district lines

9-12.GOV.31 "Describe the census and its role in redistricting and reapportionment, including the role of Baker v. Carr."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline who the census counts, circle the words reapportionment and redistricting, and number the sentences explaining what Baker v. Carr did and did not decide.

When the Count Changes the Lines

1 At a crowded school board meeting, a resident asks why the lines around her congressional district might change. The answer starts with the census, a count of people living in the United States every ten years. The Constitution requires this count to determine how many seats each state receives in the U.S. House of Representatives. People are counted where they usually live, not where they vote. Children and residents who are not citizens count too. When one state's share of the national population grows, it may gain a House seat, while another state may lose one.

2 This shift in seats among states is called reapportionment. After the 2020 census, the fixed total of 435 voting House seats was divided among the 50 states using population counts. Next comes redistricting, the drawing of new district boundaries within a state. A state that gains or loses a House seat must redraw its congressional districts. Even if its seat total stays the same, population shifts within the state can make its old districts uneven. Lawmakers or a commission may redraw lines so residents have representation in districts with nearly equal populations.

3 But what if officials refuse to fix districts that have become badly unequal? In Baker v. Carr (1962), Tennessee voters challenged state legislative districts that had not been updated despite decades of population change. The Supreme Court ruled that federal courts could hear such claims under the Constitution's Equal Protection Clause. It did not draw new lines or itself set a strict equal-population rule. Later decisions developed the one-person, one-vote principle for legislative districts. Thus census counts supply population data, reapportionment assigns House seats to states, redistricting adjusts boundaries, and Baker v. Carr helped make unequal districts subject to court review.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why can children and residents who are not citizens affect how many House seats a state receives?

2. If a state gains a House seat, what changes through reapportionment, and what must happen through redistricting?

3. Why might a state redraw congressional districts even if its number of House seats stays the same?

4. If voters challenge badly unequal state legislative districts, how does Baker v. Carr matter, and what did that ruling not do?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine Cedar State gains a House seat after a census, while its inland towns grow faster than its coast. In four sentences, explain what the census reveals, what reapportionment changes, what redistricting must address, and how Baker v. Carr could matter if lawmakers ignore unequal state legislative districts.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · 9-12.GOV.31

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline who the census counts, circle the words reapportionment and redistricting, and number the sentences explaining what Baker v. Carr did and did not decide. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why can children and residents who are not citizens affect how many House seats a state receives?	**The census counts them where they usually live, and census population counts determine each state's share of House seats.**
2	If a state gains a House seat, what changes through reapportionment, and what must happen through redistricting?	**Reapportionment gives the state another House seat. Redistricting redraws its congressional district boundaries.**
3	Why might a state redraw congressional districts even if its number of House seats stays the same?	**Population may have shifted within the state, leaving its old districts with uneven populations.**
4	If voters challenge badly unequal state legislative districts, how does Baker v. Carr matter, and what did that ruling not do?	**It established that federal courts could hear such constitutional claims. It did not draw district lines or itself set a strict equal-population rule.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The census shows Cedar State's population and where people live, including faster growth in its inland towns. Reapportionment gives Cedar State another U.S. House seat. Redistricting must redraw congressional boundaries for the added seat and address uneven populations in state legislative districts. If lawmakers leave badly unequal state legislative districts untouched, Baker v. Carr supports federal court review of a constitutional challenge.

Accept explanations that distinguish assigning House seats among states from drawing districts within a state. For Baker v. Carr, accept federal court review of unequal state legislative districts, but not a claim that the ruling itself established a strict equal-population rule.