

## Black migration changes the political landscape in many states

Written by Nadra Kareem Nittle - America's Wire  
Tuesday, 05 July 2011 17:20

---



African-Americans once were clustered so heavily in urban areas that the terms “Black” and “inner city” came to be used almost synonymously. According to the 2010 U.S. Census results, that time is history.

While Blacks have by no means vanished from cities, unprecedented numbers have headed for the suburbs or left the big cities of the North and headed south. As legislative districts are redrawn, nonpartisan groups and both political parties are watching how this unexpected migration will affect local and state elections.

Moreover, redistricting experts say the Black exodus from cities such as Detroit, Cleveland and Philadelphia contributed to placing Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania among the 10 states that will lose congressional seats because of reapportionment after the census. With Republican governors in 29 states, the GOP has greater influence over redistricting than Democrats.

But it is unclear whether the migration of African-American voters will change the number of congressional districts where Black candidates can win. Rob Richie, executive director of FairVote, based in Takoma Park, Md., notes that Republicans often join civil rights leaders in supporting African-American legislative districts rather than creating politically diverse districts where the Black vote could decide close elections.

“Republicans have a political interest in concentrating the African-American vote,” Richie says. “When Blacks are concentrated, they can’t have their votes in as many districts. It’s a trade-off.”



Experts on redistricting foresee multicultural coalitions emerging in formerly all-Black

## Black migration changes the political landscape in many states

Written by Nadra Kareem Nittle - America's Wire  
Tuesday, 05 July 2011 17:20

---

communities and people of color eventually gaining more political clout in suburbs and exurbs.

In California, the independent Citizens Redistricting Commission will carve out the state's electoral districts for the first time. Voters authorized having a nonpartisan board, not legislators, delineate these districts in passing the Voters First Act (Proposition 11) in 2008. To ensure that new districts don't dilute Black voting power, grass-roots organizations mobilized to present the commission with recommendations for keeping communities of color intact. New district lines must be drawn by Aug. 15.

Although Black flight from California cities is changing demographics, experts say that is unlikely to shake up the state's political scene.

"The 2010 census showed that there has been a drift of the Black population away from the coastal areas to more inland areas in California," says Michelle Romero, a fellow at The Greenlining Institute, which is based in Berkeley and advocates for racial and economic justice. "But fortunately in Los Angeles, there's the potential to build multi-ethnic coalitions of voters after this new redistricting cycle."

From 2000 to 2010, the Black population in Los Angeles County dropped from 9.8 percent to 8.7 percent, according to census findings. In Alameda County, which includes Oakland and other San Francisco Bay areas, the drop was from 14.9 percent to 12.6 percent.

Erica Teasley Linnick, coordinator of the African American Redistricting Collaborative in Los Angeles, doesn't view Black migration from California's urban cores as a threat to Black voting power. When African-Americans leave California cities, she says, Latinos and Asians with similar political interests usually replace them.

"In Los Angeles, you've had coalitions coming together to vote in Tom Bradley (the city's first Black mayor) to now Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa," says Teasley Linnick, who also notes that Blacks who have moved from Los Angeles gained political representation in the city's outlying areas. For instance, Wilmer Amina Carter, a Black woman, has represented the state's 62nd Assembly District in the Inland Empire region bordering metropolitan Los Angeles, since 2006.

Marqueece Harris-Dawson, president and CEO of Community Coalition, a social and economic advocacy group for South Los Angeles, agrees that Black flight from the city will not undercut African-American voting power.

"It's been happening over a 20-year period," he says. "It's not a dramatic change, so it's not significant enough to curtail African-American political representation."

In fact, experts say Republicans in California face new challenges underscored by the census count. Three million more Latinos moved into California between 2000 and 2010, resulting in predictions that Republicans may lose ground after new electoral districts are drawn. Analysts say Democrats could gain as many as five seats in the State Legislature, enough to form a supermajority.

## Black migration changes the political landscape in many states

Written by Nadra Kareem Nittle - America's Wire  
Tuesday, 05 July 2011 17:20

---

The shift to having an independent panel redistrict California communities makes it difficult for Republicans to devise a redistricting strategy, according to Matt Rexroad, a GOP strategist in Sacramento.

“As always, the Republican strategy is to recruit good candidates and make sure their message resonates with voters, just like at any other time,” he says. “Sometimes, it’s worked and, well, sometimes it hasn’t.”

But what effect will Black flight from California cities and the surging Latino population have on the GOP statewide? Rexroad says the Republican Party and African-American community typically share interests in redistricting.

“You’ve found Republicans and African-Americans arguing for the same district configurations,” he says. “African-Americans want their votes consolidated to win urban seats.”

This time around, however, some California activists want the Black vote less concentrated to exert wider influence, Rexroad says, adding that the enormous growth of the Latino population is not necessarily bad news for Republicans. He notes that in California’s Central and Imperial valleys, for instance, Latinos tend to lean to the right.

“They’re largely responsible for Proposition 8 passing,” he says, referring to the ban on gay marriage. “They’re very conservative on social issues.”

While Republicans may not gain power where Blacks have departed, Blacks who have headed south will probably not be able to turn red states blue in the near future, says Herb Tyson of Tyson Innovative Government Relations Solutions in Washington, D.C.

The Black migration “doesn’t help Democrats because the South is so heavily skewed Republican you would have to have a huge representation of African-Americans to make a difference statewide,” he Tyson says.

On the other hand, in cities such as Atlanta, the Black population is so large that African-Americans relocated there from throughout the nation won’t change the political landscape. The Atlanta area now has the greatest number of Blacks in the country outside of New York City. For years, Chicago held that distinction. Moreover, three-fourths of the 25 counties in which the Black population rose most over the past decade are in the South.

In Texas, the Black population grew by 22 percent, in part because of Hurricane Katrina refugees who relocated there permanently. With the Latino population also growing, by 42 percent, minorities could alter the political landscape that Republicans have controlled.

Meanwhile, five counties with the greatest number of Blacks 10 years ago—Los Angeles County, Philadelphia County, Wayne (Detroit), Cook (Chicago) and Kings (New York City)—all lost African-Americans. Democratic pollster Ron Lester stresses that populations in northeastern states dropped overall but says he doesn’t expect that to have much political impact.

## Black migration changes the political landscape in many states

Written by Nadra Kareem Nittle - America's Wire  
Tuesday, 05 July 2011 17:20

---

"The loss has been spread around," Lester says. "It's a lot of college-educated voters who are leaving."

Lester also questions the notion that population declines in northern states will benefit Republicans in that region or nationally. "In places like New York, I don't think that's going to help them pick up a seat in Congress," he says. "I think that right now, you have [43] members of the Congressional Black Caucus. When redistricting is over, you'll have the same number."

In the historically Black District of Columbia, the African-American population decreased by 11.5 percent between 2000 and 2010. In contrast, the Black population in nearby Charles County in Maryland doubled as African-Americans departed the District.

David Bositis, senior research associate at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies in Washington, D.C., doesn't expect the Black population decrease to have a huge impact on the city's political scene.

"By and large, white voters have almost always had a major say in D.C. politics, so the fact that D.C. is becoming less Black isn't really changing the politics," Bositis says. "The exception is Marion Barry. He was the only politician in D.C. who was able to win without white support." The former mayor is a City Council member.

Nationally, Black movement away from cities will eventually give minorities more political clout in areas where they settle, Bositis says. He adds, though, that this phenomenon will take time because the Black and Latino population is on average younger than the white population.

"Certainly in the future, it's going to represent an advantage but not immediately because younger people are not as politically active as older people are, and the white population is getting quite old," he says.

*America's Wire is an independent, non-profit news service run by the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education. America's Wire is made possible by a grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. For more information, visit [www.americaswire.org](http://www.americaswire.org) or contact Michael K. Frisby at [mike@frisbyassociates.com](mailto:mike@frisbyassociates.com)*