

Changing Connecticut's Redistricting Process

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Issue

This report (1) describes Connecticut's current redistricting process, including who is responsible for redrawing the district lines, and (2) discusses whether the state could change this process before redistricting occurs after the 2020 census.

Summary

Every 10 years, Connecticut redraws its Congressional and legislative district lines through redistricting. Both federal and state law require redistricting, through which voting districts must follow the one-person, one-vote principle established by the U.S. Supreme Court (see e.g., *Reynolds v. Sims*, 377 U.S. 533 (1964)). The U.S. Census Bureau administers a decennial redistricting program, which provides states with the population data necessary for redistricting. (For more information on the upcoming program, called the 2020 Census Redistricting Data Program, see OLR Report [2016-R-0250](#).)

Connecticut's constitution sets out the state's redistricting process. Generally, the process requires a bipartisan legislative committee to prepare the redistricting plan and the legislature to approve it. If the legislature does not timely approve the plan, a commission, consisting of legislators and one state elector, is formed to do the job. The Connecticut Supreme Court has the authority to compel the commission to complete its task or the court can draw the district boundaries itself, if the commission fails to do so.

Connecticut's redistricting process may be changed, but only by amending the state constitution. In order for any changes to take effect in time for the state's next redistricting, a proposed constitutional amendment would need to be ratified by electors at the 2020 general election. This is because states may begin the process of redrawing district lines when they receive population data from the Census Bureau, which will occur in the spring of 2021.

To appear on the 2020 general election ballot, a proposed amendment must be approved by a three-fourths majority in both chambers of the General Assembly either during the 2019 or 2020 legislative sessions. If a proposed amendment passes during either session, but only by a simple majority, it would be referred to the 2021 General Assembly. And if that legislature passes the proposed amendment by a simple majority, it would appear on the 2022 general election ballot.

Current Redistricting Process

The state constitution requires that an eight-member, bipartisan committee (i.e., the Reapportionment Committee) prepare a districting plan and that the General Assembly approve it with a two-thirds vote of each chamber's membership. The committee is composed of legislators.

In general, by February 15 of the year following the decennial census (e.g., 2021 for the upcoming redistricting), the top four legislative leaders must each designate two committee members. Historically, each leader has designated two legislators from his or her own party's caucus in the Senate or House of Representatives.

If the General Assembly does not approve a plan by September 15 of that year, a nine-member commission (i.e., the Reapportionment Commission) is formed. The top four legislative leaders must each designate two commission members, whom the governor appoints. As with the committee, in the past, each leader has designated two legislators from his or her own party's caucus. The eight appointees then select a state elector as a ninth member.

The Reapportionment Commission must prepare a plan, by November 30 of that year, that is certified by at least five members; the commission's plan is not subject to General Assembly approval. If it does not agree on a plan, the constitution empowers the state Supreme Court to compel the commission to complete its task. Alternatively, the court can draw the district boundaries itself, which it must do by February 15 of the second year following the decennial census (e.g., 2022 for the upcoming redistricting).

(For both the committee and the commission, the constitution establishes a different procedure if there are members of more than two political parties in either chamber.)

2020 Redistricting Timeline

The 2020 Census Redistricting Data Program is divided into five phases. Phase 1 began in 2015 when the Census Bureau announced it in the Federal Register. Phase 5 will likely conclude in 2024 after states provide recommendations for the 2030 program and the bureau publishes a summary report.

States redraw their district lines during Phase 3. Under this phase, by April 1, 2021, the Census Bureau will deliver population counts for standard census tabulation areas (e.g., towns, districts, and census blocks) to all states, as required by P.L. 94-171.

If Connecticut changes its redistricting process through a constitutional amendment, any changes would need to be in effect by Phase 3. Thus, electors would need to ratify the proposed amendment at the 2020 general election.

Amending the State Constitution

Any legislator may propose an amendment to the state constitution; a proposed amendment is introduced as a joint resolution. A resolution approved by at least three-fourths of the membership of each house of the legislature is placed on the ballot at the next regular state election. A resolution approved by a majority of the membership of each house but less than three-fourths is referred to the General Assembly session held after the next regular state election, where it must be approved by majorities in both houses before being placed on the ballot. If a majority of the electors voting on the proposed amendment vote in the affirmative, it becomes part of the state constitution ([Conn. Const. Art. Twelfth](#)).

For example, an amendment proposed during the 2019 or 2020 session must be approved by three-fourths of the membership of both houses (i.e., at least 27 votes in the Senate and 114 in the House) to appear on the 2020 general election ballot. If a proposed amendment passes in 2019 by a simple majority of the membership of both houses but less than three-fourths (i.e., between 19 and 26 votes in the Senate and 76 and 113 in the House), it would be referred to the 2021 General Assembly. If that legislature passes the proposed amendment by a majority of the membership in both houses, it would appear on the 2022 general election ballot.

(The Connecticut Constitution may also be amended through the constitutional convention process, which OLR Report [2015-R-0240](#) reviews in greater detail (see [Conn. Const. Art. Thirteenth](#)). The last constitutional convention in the state occurred in 1965. Because this process occurs so infrequently, we do not discuss it here.)

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