

THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Inland Southern California in store for political gains

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The Press-Enterprise

March 9, 2011

California's political landscape lurched to the east Tuesday as new census numbers point to a major increase in representation for Inland Southern California over the next decade.

The region is home to some of the most overpopulated congressional and legislative districts in the state. It stands to gain several additional congressional, Assembly and state Senate seats at the expense of the state's coastal areas, which grew at a much slower rate.

The changes won't be known until the Citizens Redistricting Commission redraws the state's political map this summer to reflect population changes since the 2000 census. Under any scenario, however, the region's past decade of exceptional growth will be felt from Congress to the state Legislature.

Veteran incumbents of both parties can only watch and wait as the independent panel begins to crunch Tuesday's data.

"It will continue the trend of having the Inland Empire play a larger role in state politics," former Inland lawmaker Jim Brulte said.

CROWDED DISTRICTS: Tuesday's census data will be used to redraw California's political map to reflect population changes during the past decade. Some of the state's most overpopulated congressional and legislative districts are in the inland area. They will need to shrink.

CONGRESS		Target population for Calif. districts	2010 population	Percent overpopulated
45th Congressional District	Murrieta, Moreno Valley, Palm Springs	702,905	914,209	30.06%
44th Congressional District	Riverside, Corona, San Clemente	702,905	844,756	20.18%
25th Congressional District	Palmdale, Santa Clarita, Victorville	702,905	844,320	20.12%
49th Congressional District	Temecula, Perris, Oceanside	702,905	797,428	13.45%
41st Congressional District	Redlands, San Jacinto, Yucca Valley	702,905	797,333	13.41%
STATE SENATE				
State Senate District 37	Corona, Moreno Valley, Palm Springs	931,349	1,215,876	30.55%
State Senate District 17	Lancaster, Hesperia, Santa Clarita	931,349	1,098,146	17.91%
State Senate District 18	Bakersfield, Barstow, Twentynine Palms	931,349	1,048,811	12.61%
State Senate District 36	Temecula, Murrieta, El Cajon	931,349	1,036,001	11.24%
State Senate District 5	Fairfield, Davis, Stockton	931,349	1,032,613	10.87%
ASSEMBLY				
Assembly District 65	Hemet, Beaumont, Yucca Valley	465,674	611,978	31.42%
Assembly District 15	Walnut Creek, Stockton, Galt	465,674	591,394	26.95%
Assembly District 36	Lancaster, Victorville, Palmdale	465,674	584,284	25.47%
Assembly District 64	Riverside, Moreno Valley, Palm Desert	465,674	583,532	25.31%
Assembly District 66	Temecula, Riverside, Fallbrook	465,674	566,837	21.75%

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

State districts

In 2001, lawmakers crafted congressional and legislative lines that maximized political parties' advantages on Election Day. Out of roughly 780 elections since 2002, there have been only eight upsets of that partisan order.

The next maps, however, will be drawn based solely on population, preserving communities of interest and ensuring compliance with voting-rights laws. Commissioners can't tailor districts for a particular party or candidate.

There are multiple potential legislative remapping scenarios in the Inland Empire.

In the state Senate, Senate Minority Leader Bob Dutton, R-Rancho Cucamonga, is likely to lose Riverside. The city hangs off the bottom of Dutton's San Bernardino-centric seat.

The city could become part of the Senate district of Bill Emmerson, R-Hemet, which extends all the way to Blythe. The county's population growth means there could be room for a whole new Senate seat in the county's eastern half.

In the state Assembly, the barbell-shaped Upland-to-Yucaipa district of Assemblyman-elect Mike Morrell, R-Rancho Cucamonga, is virtually certain to disappear.

The same goes for the wandering Riverside-to-Palm Desert district of Assemblyman Brian Nestande, R-Palm Desert.

There also is the possibility that next year's redraw will produce more competitive districts.

Democratic voter registration has inched upward in both counties in recent years. As of November, Democrats held a small registration lead in San Bernardino County and trailed Republicans by five percentage points in Riverside County.

Yet the current legislative and congressional delegations include just a handful of Democrats, none of whom represent western Riverside County.

In addition, the huge growth in the region's Hispanic population -- 78 percent in Riverside County alone -- could help Democrats' chances in the historically GOP-leaning area. Political experts view Hispanics as leaning toward Democrats, although their voting rates trail other racial and ethnic groups.

Tuesday's data shows that Latinos are now 40 percent of the voting-age population in Riverside County, up from 31.1 percent in 2000. In San Bernardino County, Latinos are 44 percent of the voting-age population, up from 34.6 percent in 2000. An unknown percentage is ineligible to vote because they are not citizens.

Hans Johnson, a senior fellow at the San Francisco-based Public Policy Institute of California, was lead author of a report that predicted a rise in Latino registered voters in the Inland area from 24 percent in 2005 to 33 percent in 2015.

"Latinos tend to be more liberal than white residents in the region," he said. "That could change the politics of the region, but it's a very slow process."

Karthick Ramakrishnan, an associate professor of political science at UC Riverside and an expert on immigration, said that many of the Latinos newly eligible to vote will be young, and young people are less likely to vote than older people and don't pay as much attention to state and local races.

"They're not as connected with local politics," he said. "It will take awhile for their political impact to be felt."

Federal seats

The region's five-member House delegation, which has remained unchanged for the last decade, is likely to be thrown into upheaval.

Some members might have their districts move out from under them. Political consultant Matt Rexroad expects some members to retire and others to follow their districts.

"If Darrell Issa's new seat doesn't include any of San Diego County, do you think he's just going to go home?" said Rexroad. The current district of Issa, R-Vista, also includes part of Riverside County.

"These districts are going to slide to the east, no question about it," Rexroad added. "But no member of Congress is going to say, 'I'm not going to move 50 miles to the east to run.'"

While it is uncertain how the commission will redraw the map, most scenarios bode well for Democrats.

"It's not going to be lopsided the way it is now," Rep. Joe Baca, D-Rialto, said of the new map, which will be used in the 2012 elections. "If I was a Republican, I'd be running scared."

Baca, whose district is heavily Democratic, is expected to be safe in most redistricting scenarios.

Reps. Mary Bono Mack, R-Palm Springs, Ken Calvert, R-Corona, and Jerry Lewis, R-Redlands, each could find themselves in more vulnerable positions, depending on where the commission chooses to trim their districts.

Bono Mack's district, which includes Moreno Valley, Murrieta, Hemet and Riverside County's desert communities, is the most overpopulated in the state. Its Coachella Valley base is increasingly Hispanic. And it has the single most Latino-heavy California district now represented by a Republican.

"It all depends on the lines," said Jack Pitney, a government professor at Claremont McKenna College. "One could see a district where she ends up with a relatively white, Republican district - - or she could end up smack dab in the middle of a Hispanic district, and that would make re-election very difficult."

The same uncertainty also exists for Calvert's district -- which includes Riverside, Corona, Norco and part of Orange County -- and Lewis' district -- which contains Redlands, Yucaipa, Highland and parts of the Pass, the San Bernardino Mountains and the High Desert.

Staff writer David Olson contributed to this report.