

Politics

Anxiety begins to ease

Dems make inroads in redistricting fight

NEW YORK, Jan 24, (AP): Democrats braced for disaster when state legislatures began redrawing congressional maps, fearing that Republican dominance of statehouses would tilt power away from them for the next decade.



Burton

But as the redistricting process reaches its final stages, that anxiety is beginning to ease. For Democrats, the worst case scenario of losing well over a dozen seats in the U.S. House appears unlikely to happen. After some aggressive map drawing of their own in states with Democratic legislatures, some Democrats predict the typical congressional district will shift from leaning to the right of the national vote to matching it, ending a distortion that gave the GOP a built-in advantage over the past five House elections.

“We have stymied their intent to gerrymander their way to a House majority,” Kelly Ward Burton, head of the National Democratic Redistricting Committee, said of the GOP.

The nation’s congressional maps won’t be settled for several more months. Republicans in some large states like Florida have yet to finalize proposed changes, giving the GOP a last-minute opportunity to seek an advantage.

But the picture could come into greater clarity this week when New York’s redistricting commission submits to the state legislature a second attempt to draw a map. If the Democratic-controlled Legislature rejects the map, it can take over drawing new lines in Democrats’ favor. That would almost certainly blunt the GOP advantage that has been in place since the last redistricting process in 2010.

Implications

The jockeying in state capitals has implications not just for Democrats’ uphill effort to maintain a majority in the U.S. House in this year’s midterm elections. It will affect the broader balance of power in Washington and state legislatures for the remainder of the decade.

While Republicans say they’ve achieved their goals so far, they’re surprised at how much Democrats have tried to expand the number of seats their party can win. The GOP has taken a markedly different approach by aiming to shore up its vulnerable members’ districts, transforming competitive seats into safe ones.

That’s in part because Republicans already expanded the map with aggressive redistricting after the 2010 census, when they controlled more states. Now, as the lines are adjusted to meet last year’s census figures, they are locking in their gains while Democrats are taking risks to fight back.

In a wave election, Democrats could lose even more seats in the maps they have drawn because they spread their voters so thin, analysts say. And, if political coalitions shift in upcoming years, seats Democrats thought were within reach could suddenly disappear.

“Republicans have given themselves pretty good tsunami protection,” said Michael Li of the Brennan Center for Justice, which tracks redistricting. “But for Democrats, if it rains a little, their house is flooded.”

The Democratic push comes as the party has unsuccessfully fought to ban partisan gerrymandering nationwide - their elections bill barring the practice died in the Senate last week during a Republican filibuster. Li said Democrats, however, are still gerrymandering in states they control, sometimes aggressively as in Illinois, other times relatively lightly, as in New Mexico and Oregon.

In contrast, experts say Republicans, who control more states, have gerrymandered heavily in places like Texas, North Carolina and Ohio. But the GOP’s Ohio maps were tossed out by the state Supreme Court this month, and Democrats are hopeful North Carolina’s high court follows suit with the districts there, part of the reason for the party’s increased optimism.

Opportunity

The next and biggest opportunity for Democrats is in New York, which will test how much power Democrats are willing to give up to fight gerrymandering. Saying they wanted to take partisanship out of redistricting, Democrats there in 2014 backed a ballot measure to put the process in the hands of a bipartisan commission. But the state legislature can overrule the commission. In 2014 it was divided between Democratic and Republican control. Now Democrats have a supermajority in both houses.

The New York Legislature already rejected the commission’s first attempt at maps, and can seize control if it rejects the second one, due by Tuesday.

“The Democratic leadership and those on the far left that run the show in Albany, they’re hellbent to take this process over to derail the commission, and to have the party bosses in Albany draw the maps,” said Nick Langworthy, chairman of the New York GOP. “I think that they looked at a handful of states to give them a shot to hold on to the majority.”

Republicans need only to net five seats in November’s election to gain control of the U.S. House. They started the redistricting cycle controlling line-drawing in states representing 187 House seats while Democrats controlled only 75.

That means the final outcome will inevitably favor the GOP, no matter how hard Democrats fight back, said Kimbrall Brace, a veteran redistricting consultant. “They’re ending up still putting a Republican flavor on the overall plan,” Brace said.

So far, the GOP has gained a handful of seats in the maps that have been finalized, but it’s hard to put a precise number on how many because half of the states have yet to formally adopt maps. If Democrats are aggressive, for example, they could net four seats in New York and largely wipe out the GOP’s national gains. But then Republicans in Florida could counter with a gerrymander.

Still, Republicans have passed up multiple opportunities to pad their margins even more.



Florida Sen. Ray Rodrigues, (center), views redistricting maps on a video monitor as an identical one is displayed behind him during a Senate Committee on Reapportionment hearing in a legislative session in Tallahassee, Fla. (AP)

America

Trial to begin for cops: The federal trial for three former Minneapolis police officers charged with violating George Floyd’s civil rights as Derek Chauvin pinned the Black man’s neck to the street is expected to begin Monday with opening statements, after a jury of 18 people was swiftly picked last week.

J. Kueng, Thomas Lane and Tou Thao are broadly charged with depriving Floyd of his civil rights while acting under government authority. All three are charged for failing to provide Floyd with medical care and Thao and Kueng face an additional count for failing to stop Chauvin, who was convicted of murder and manslaughter in state court last year.

Legal experts say prosecutors have to prove Kueng, Lane and Thao willfully violated Floyd’s constitutional rights, while defense attorneys are likely to blame Chauvin for Floyd’s murder, which was videotaped and triggered worldwide protests, violence and a reexamination of racism and policing. (AP)

Ship changes course: A cruise ship that was supposed to dock in Miami has instead sailed to the Bahamas, after a U.S. judge granted an order to seize the vessel as part of a lawsuit over \$4 million in unpaid fuel.

Cruise trackers show Crystal Symphony currently docked in the Bahamian island of Bimini.

“We all feel we were abducted by luxurious pirates!” passenger Stephen Heard Fales posted on Facebook.

Some passengers were taken by ferry to Port Everglades in Fort Lauderdale on Sunday. The ferry ride was apparently “uncomfortable due to inclement weather,” according to a statement from a Crystal Cruises spokesperson. The company said guests were also taken to local airports, but wouldn’t comment on the lawsuit.

It was not immediately clear how many passengers were aboard, with one news outlet reporting 300 and another, 700. According to the company website, the vessel can carry up to 848 passengers. (AP)

6 dead in Milwaukee: Six people were found dead in a Milwaukee home in what police are investigating as multiple homicides, authorities said.

Milwaukee police responded about 3:45 p.m. Sunday to assist with a welfare check at the residence where four men and one woman were found dead, Milwaukee Assistant Police Chief Paul Formolo said during a Sunday evening news conference.

The Milwaukee County Medical Examiner’s Office tweeted early Monday that the body of an additional person, a man, was recovered from the home. The identities of the dead were pending.

A motive and information about any suspects was not immediately known, Formolo said. Police have not said what caused the deaths, but Formolo said there is no information to suggest that there is a threat to the community.

“It is important not to feel numbed by the ongoing violence in our community. A horrible crime has again occurred,” Acting Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson said in a statement Sunday night. (AP)

Chicago girl, 8, dies: An 8-year-old Chicago girl who was walking with her mother when she was shot in the head and killed by a gunman targeting someone else on the city’s Southwest Side has been identified.

The Cook County medical examiner’s office identified the victim Sunday as Melissa Ortega of Chicago. A police report said she was walking on the street with her mother Saturday afternoon when someone fired shots at a 26-year-old alleged gang member who was leaving a nearby store, according to the Chicago Sun-Times. Police believe he was the intended target.

The girl was pronounced dead Saturday at a hospital. The man police believe was the intended target was shot in the back and was hospitalized in critical condition. Authorities did not have an update on his condition Sunday.

No one was in custody Sunday in connection with the shooting. Police Superintendent David Brown said the department “will not rest until the perpetrators” are brought to justice. (AP)

Pandemic stalls progress

Graduation rates dip across US

WASHINGTON, Jan 24, (AP): High school graduation rates dipped in at least 20 states after the first full school year disrupted by the pandemic, suggesting the coronavirus may have ended nearly two decades of nationwide progress toward getting more students diplomas, an analysis shows.

The drops came despite at least some states and educators loosening standards to help struggling students.

The results, according to data obtained from 26 states and analyzed by Chalkbeat, are the latest concerning trend in American education, which has been rocked by a pandemic that left many students learning remotely last year and continues to complicate teaching and learning. Some fear that the next several graduating classes could be even more affected.

“It does concern me,” said Chris Reykdal, the schools superintendent in Washington state, where the graduation rate fell by about half a point. “I don’t ever want to see a decline. We’ve made such steady progress.”

In 2020, when schools shuttered for the final months of the school year, most states waived outstanding graduation requirements and saw graduation rates tick up. But the picture was different for the class of 2021. In 20 of 26 states that have released their data, graduation rates fell. Comprehensive national data will likely not be available until 2023.

Those declines were less than a percentage point in some states, like Colorado, Georgia and Kansas. Elsewhere, they were larger. Illinois, Oregon, and North Dakota saw graduation rates drop 2 points, and Indiana, Maine, Nevada, South Dakota, and West Virginia saw declines of at least 1 point.

Where rates increased, growth was modest. Florida had seen graduation rates jump by more than 2 points every year for a decade but gained just a tenth of a point in 2021, even as state officials waived certain diploma requirements.

“We do have to be concerned that grad rates are down and that some number of kids that earned a diploma, they’ve learned less than prior years,” said Robert Balfanz, a professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Education and director of a research center focused on high school graduation. “What we’re going to have to learn in the future is, how great is the concern?”

Last year’s senior class saw school disrupted in distinct ways. In Nevada’s Washoe County schools, for example, the graduation rate tumbled by 2.6 points as many teens worked longer hours or spent more time caring for siblings.

Carly Lott, a counselor at Hug High

School in Reno, grew concerned last year as the hours on her students’ pay stubs, which the school collects to offer elective credits, rose from 20 to 30 a week to 40 to 50. Some students worked during remote school days, while others took late-night shifts that left them too tired to concentrate on schoolwork.

Lott made sure students knew about the district’s food bank and grew used to asking, “Do you absolutely need to work, or can you cut back?” As course failures stacked up, a trend schools reported nationwide, counselors nudged seniors to come to school in person to make up missed credits.

“If they were at home, they weren’t engaged - they were doing other things,” Lott said.

One of last year’s graduates, 19-year-old De’karius Graham, had an up-close view of how 12th graders struggled.

Interaction

There was no prom to look forward to, and all his senior classes at Florida’s Polk County schools were online, an experience he describes as “low social interaction, low teacher interaction.” He often turned to YouTube to figure out confusing assignments.

“It was a lot of self-teaching and self-motivation,” he said. “I was just really alone with it all.”

At the same time, Graham was running his own landscaping business to make money and helping seven school-age siblings with their homework. He also spent time working with a close friend who struggled with online assignments without reliable internet.

Other students got derailed. Eighteen-year-old Lailani Greaves had been behind before the pandemic but was aiming to graduate with the class of 2021. Without in-person connections, her motivation plummeted.

“I didn’t have a clear head where I was focused and able to go every day and catch up on some work and log in to the computer,” she said. “Just talking to a computer - it didn’t feel real.”

The New York City student contemplated dropping out and getting her GED but ultimately transferred to a smaller high school and is hopeful she’ll graduate this year.

“I realized that I could go farther with my high school diploma,” said Greaves, who wants to pursue a career in medicine.

Despite those challenges, statewide graduation rates are still typically higher now than they were a few years ago. But the modest declines are striking departures from recent trends.

In 2001, an estimated 71% of U.S. students who started ninth grade at a public high school graduated four years later. By 2019, that number had jumped to 86%, although the nation’s way of calculating that has changed slightly.

On its face, that increase is one of the biggest recent success stories in American education. A recent Brookings Institution study concluded that the gains were a result of new federal pressure on states and schools and found little evidence that the long-term improvements were due to lower standards.

The causes are much debated, though. A 2015 NPR investigation found that many students graduated with the help of hasty, low-quality credit recovery courses. Some of the states with the nation’s top graduation rates, like Alabama and West Virginia, also have very low test scores.

Some fear that cumulative effects of the pandemic stand to hit future graduating classes hardest. In both Oregon and Nevada, the share of high school freshmen who finished last school year on track to graduate was about 10 percentage points lower than before the pandemic. This school year, attendance has also been unusually low.

Lott worries many seniors won’t graduate on time this year, either.

“We have a significant group of kids on our campus who failed an entire year of high school,” she said. Those students get extra check-ins with Lott, who says it will be hard but not impossible to make up those classes through online credit recovery.

“I tell them, there will be a time that you’re going to want to give up,” she said. “That’s when we need to talk with you, because we can help you through that motivational slump.”

Schools have received large sums of federal aid that could be used to help students to graduate, but Washington’s Reykdal said schools have recently been focused on staffing and safety.

“If I had talked to my districts a year ago, they all would have said graduation and recovery, and right now they’re saying more PPE, finding substitutes,” he said.

Still, some educators are hopeful last year’s dip represents an anomaly. In Peoria, Illinois, where the graduation rate fell 4 points after climbing steadily for years, Superintendent Sharon Desmoulin-Kherat thinks the district’s expanded “safety net” for struggling students will help.

Every week, a team of educators identifies students with failing grades for extra support. The district has also added ways for working students to earn credits in the evenings or on weekends, and has hired three “navigators” to help students who are in the juvenile justice system to finish school.

MEDICAL CLASSIFIEDS

Take care of your health



To advertise in this page please call: (+965) 24813566 Ext.: 513 or E-mail: advt@arabtimesonline.com

To advertise on this page

Please call: 1838281 E-mail: advt@arabtimesonline.com

www.arabtimesonline.com

Introducing NEWMELAN NANO TECHNOLOGY

The evolution of depigmentation

- Eliminates hyperpigmentation in a short time
- Boost skin beauty
- Important lifting effect
- Redensifies the dermis and improves skin texture
- Promotes neocollagenesis
- No recovery time required. Patients can resume their usual activities immediately
- Suitable for all skin types

Dr. Abdul Nazar MBBS, MD (DVD) Dermatologist & Cosmetologist

SHIFA AL JAZEERA MEDICAL CENTRE Farwania

Phone: 24 734 000, Hotline: 60 749 749

Behind Maghateer Commercial Complex & Opp. Police station, Farwania