

Our Opinion: It's all about politics

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At least this time, Republican legislators admitted their goal was to achieve partisan advantage. They vigorously denied it in 2011 when they created North Carolina's congressional districts. Sen. Bob Rucho, chairman of the N.C. Senate's redistricting committee, insisted there was "no other way" lines could be drawn to comply with constitutional and statutory requirements.

Yet they found a way Thursday — a dramatically different way, although still with the intent of maintaining Republican control in a remarkable 10 of 13 districts.

The legislature convened in Raleigh to comply with an order from a panel of federal judges who found that the 1st and 12th districts were formed using racial criteria. Map-makers were given orders in 2011 to make the black voting-age population larger than 50 percent in both districts. The judges said it was wrong to set racial quotas.

The new districts are less obviously gerrymandered. They're more compact, and they split fewer counties. But they still cleverly pack heavy doses of Democratic voters in just three districts, making the other 10 districts friendly for Republican congressional candidates.

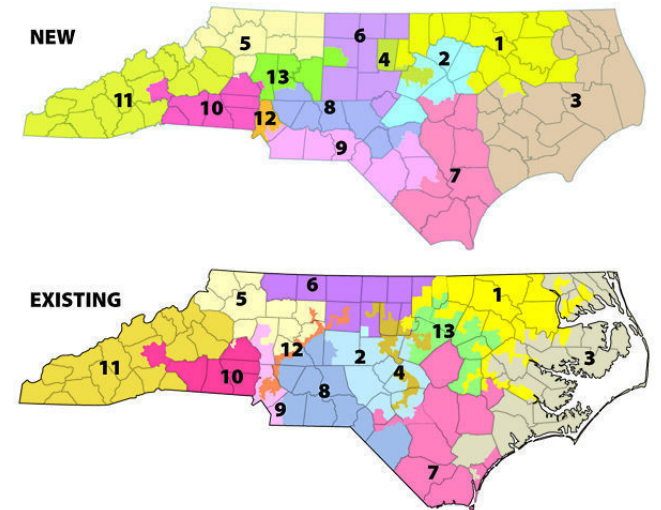
Legislators say they didn't consider race at all, using party registration and voting history as the guiding criteria. The plan isn't fair, as legislators always claimed, because it purposely reduces the chances that Republicans and Democrats can compete on a level playing field. It denies voters full and fair choices.

The changes have a big impact on Guilford County, which will be divided between the 6th and 13th districts. Democratic Rep. [Alma Adams](#) of Greensboro, who currently represents the 12th District, would be a fish out of water. The redrawn 12th District is entirely contained within Mecklenburg County. A representative doesn't have to live in her district, but voters prefer that she does.

Congressional seats don't belong to particular politicians. It might appear that the legislature was trying to unseat Adams, but she can run for Congress where she resides, move into another district or seek another office. Republican Rep. [George Holding](#) is also turned out of his 13th District.

He has similar options. Neither he nor Adams nor anyone else is entitled to win any office.

The Senate approved the new districts on a party-line vote Thursday; the House began its debate later. This plan may not pass court scrutiny, either. The standards for legal



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districts seem to be planted in shifting sand. Race can't be the primary factor for drawing districts, but the voting rights of minority voters also must be protected.

What is sure is that legislators create shaky ground when they try to predetermine election outcomes with political motives. Voters who pay attention know when they're being manipulated and resent it.

They're treated as partisan chess pieces moved around by powerful hands.

There's a better way to do this, and everyone knows what it is. Most members of the state House already have expressed support for an independent redistricting process. Republican senators refuse to consider it. They're wrong, and they are doing a disservice to our state.