Ohio on Track to Lose Two Congressional Seats

The United States was the first country to call for a census of the population in its Constitution. According to Article I, Section II of the U.S. Constitution, an apportionment of representatives for each state is conducted every ten years. The House of Representatives was designed with population change in mind – the number of seats allocated to each state depends on the size of the state’s population in comparison to the population of other states. This is why an accurate Census count is so important. The Census has been conducted every ten years since 1790, and the numbers that come from the Census are used to determine how many of the 435 seats in the House of Representatives are allocated to each state. Each state, regardless of its population, automatically receives one House seat. Beginning with the 51st seat, priority values are used to distribute the remaining seats to the states based on population. This is done by dividing the state’s population by the geometric mean of the previous and next seats attributed to that state.

The total counted population in each state at the time of the Census is divided by the number of seats in the House of Representatives apportioned to that state to determine the number of people that should live inside of each Congressional district. For instance, the population of Ohio at the time of the 2000 Census was 11,353,140, when 18 House seats were attributed to Ohio. Dividing the state population by 18 yields a number of 630,730 – each district in the state must be redrawn to contain this number of constituents. It is up to the redistricting process within each state to ensure that each district is redrawn in this manner.

In this Ohio Population News, we use data from the U.S. Census Bureau to project how the 2010 Census will affect congressional apportionment for Ohio. The data are attained from Census population projections and population estimates. The most recent population estimates are from 2009, and the most recent population projections are for 2010.

Population Growth Rates in Ohio – Ohio experienced a 22.1% growth in its population between 1950 and 1960. The rate declined to 0.5% between 1980 and 1990. Though the rate of population growth increased to 4.67% between 1990 and 2000, it was not enough to keep Ohio from losing a seat in Congress for the next decade. Ohio was the 44th ranked state in population growth during that period.

Population Estimates and Projections - We used Census population estimates and projections to predict Ohio’s number of House representatives after the 2010 Census. The Census Bureau releases population projections after each Census based on assumptions about births, deaths, and international and internal migration. In contrast to population projections, which are used for estimating future populations, the population estimates program conducted by the Census is aimed at assessing the size of present and past populations.
Census Controversy

The process of redistricting has been subject to controversy in American history. In some cases, when a political party has enough sway over the redistricting process, it will attempt to re-draw districts in a manner that will benefit them politically. This process, called “gerrymandering,” has been common in American politics since Massachusetts governor Elbridge Gerry used Census data in 1812 to benefit his political party through redistricting.

**Suggested Citation:**