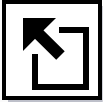


NEWS > POLITICS > ELECTION

Latest census numbers extend Pennsylvania's losing streak in Congress

Once again, the Keystone state is set to lose a U.S. House seat.



READING EAGLE — COREY MCCARTY



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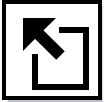
In every decade since the 1930 census, Pennsylvania has lost seats in Congress.

The new apportionment numbers that the U.S. Census Bureau released Monday show that the Keystone State is about to lose another.

But don't panic.

"It's probably not going to be a major change," Dr. Tim Blessing, a political science professor at Alvernia University, said in an interview Wednesday. "You're talking about one seat."

The state will have 17 seats instead of 18 when new congressional districts are drawn for the 2022 midterm elections. Historically, Pennsylvania has lost at least one seat after every census.



Given how Pennsylvania is growing — most of the population increases over the past decade have been in the southeastern corner, according to year-by-year population estimates — Blessing expects the new apportionment won't affect the political parties much.

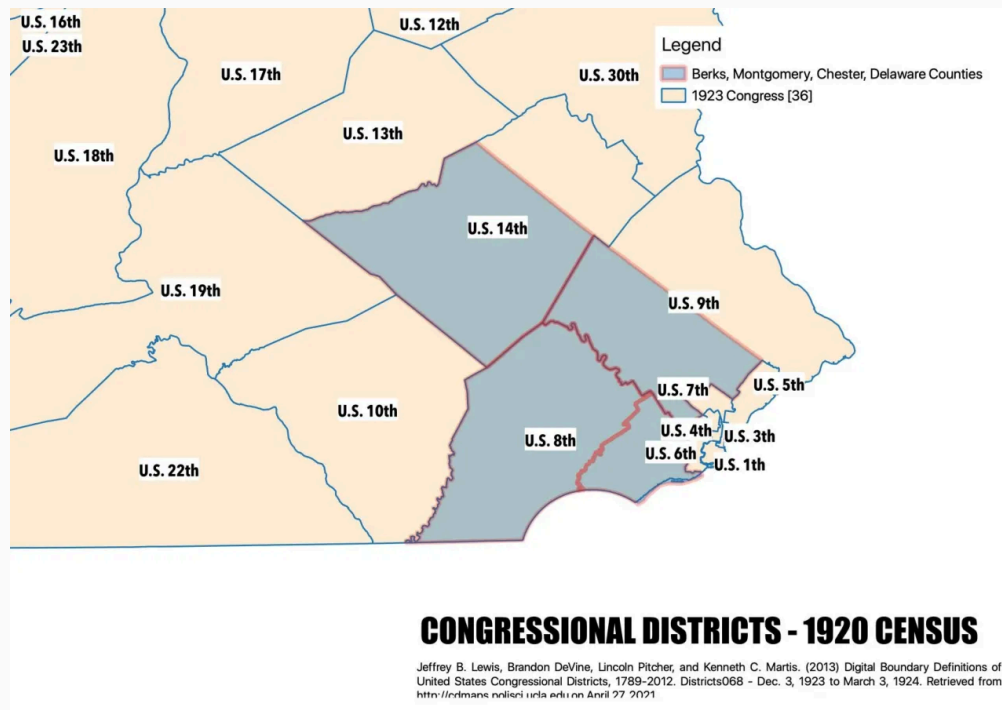
Democrats benefit from population growth in the Philadelphia suburbs, but the suburban counties around Pittsburgh are growing more heavily Republican, he said.

"Because of the population growth in Democratic areas, the Democrats should do no worse than break even in redistricting," Blessing said.

Pennsylvania's congressional district boundaries are drawn by the state Legislature and the bill has to be signed into law by the governor.

Republicans control the state Legislature, but Gov. Tom Wolf is a Democrat. Blessing takes that as a sign that the end result should be fairly balanced. If not, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court might intervene, he said.

History of losing seats



The last time Pennsylvania's congressional delegation was unchanged was 1923, when the state had 36 U.S. House members — unchanged from 1910, and double what it is today.

It was unchanged because Congress failed to reapportion seats after the 1920 census.

But starting with the 1930 Census, Pennsylvania started losing seats: two in the 1931 Congress, one in 1943 and so on, through 2020. No other state has had as long a string of losing seats.

In 1920, each House representative had about 242,000 constituents in Pennsylvania. Today, the state's districts have about 700,000 on average — a number that will go up to 765,400 when the state loses a seat.

In 1929, Congress capped the size of the House at 435 members. So as the

Pennsylvania's population exploded by 21% from 1900 to 1910, and the state was rewarded with four congressional seats. But since then, growth has been modest. From 1930 to 2010, the states that gained congressional seats all had double-digit percentage growth in population.

But Pennsylvania has seen slow, if steady, growth during that time: a gain of 0.1% in 1990 to 10.5% in 1930 — the year it lost two seats.

What happens now

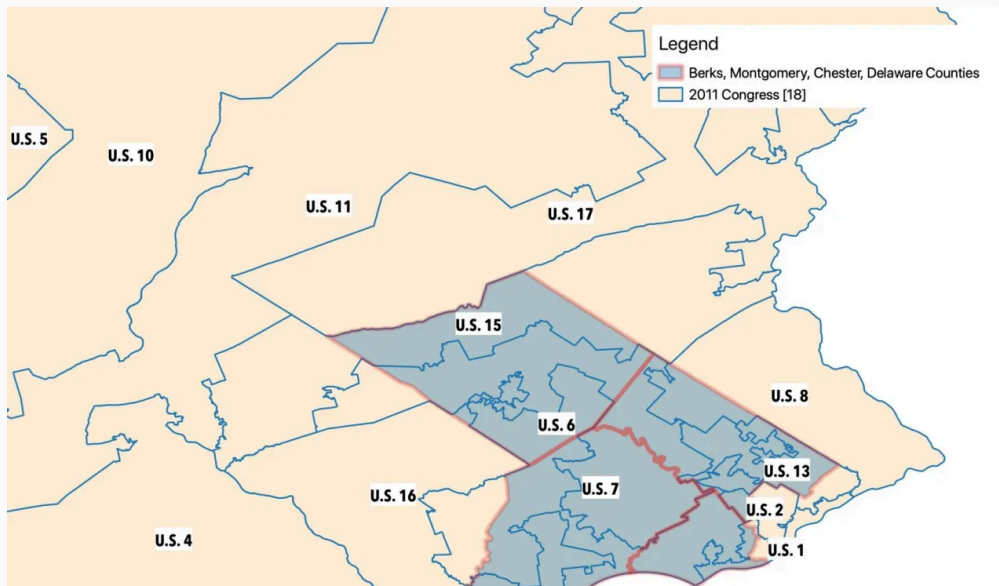
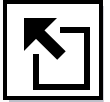
Where the new lines will be drawn is anyone's guess.

But the fact that Berks County's population is about 420,000, according to 2019 census estimates, means that it will almost certainly be added to districts including other counties, much as it has since 1962.

Berks was a self-contained district when lines were drawn in 1931, 1943 and 1951.

Since then, the county has joined its neighbors in various configurations.

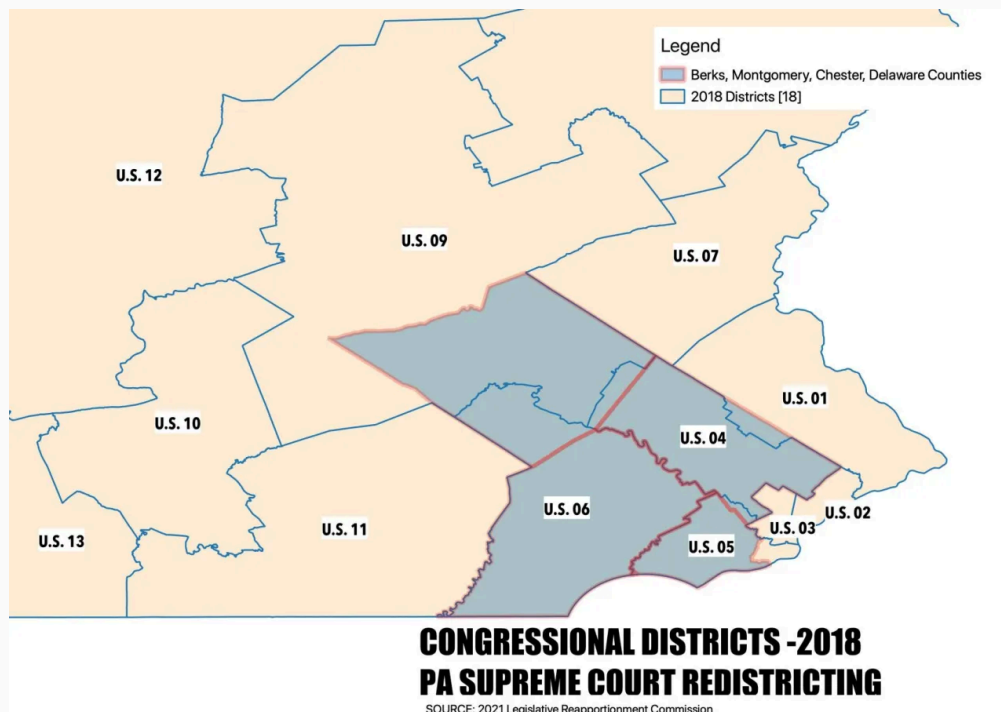
In 2002, the new congressional district boundaries split the city of Reading into two districts: The 6th, represented by Jim Gerlach (who is now the executive director of the Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce) and the 16th, represented by Joseph R. Pitts.



The 2010 census led to an even crazier redistricting map, splitting Berks into four districts, including one covering much of suburban Philadelphia that became infamously titled, “Goofy kicking Donald Duck.”

Eventually the state Supreme Court stepped in, threw out the existing map and ordered a new one.

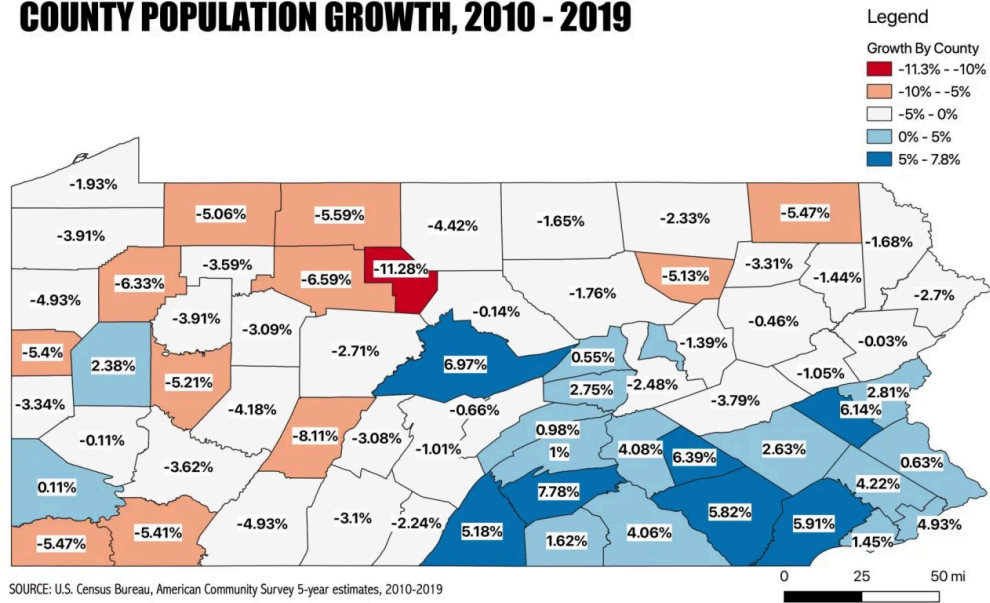
The current configuration puts Berks in three districts: The 4th includes Montgomery County and is represented by Madeline Dean, a Democrat; the 6th, which includes all of Reading, incorporates Chester County and is represented by Chrissy Houlahan, a Democrat; the 9th, which combines most of northern, western and eastern Berks with Carbon, Columbia, Montour and Schuylkill counties and parts of Luzerne and Northumberland counties and is represented by Dan Meuser, a Republican.



We're not alone. California, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Ohio and West Virginia are all set to lose a U.S. House seat as well. Five states stand to gain a seat: Colorado, Florida, Montana, North Carolina and Oregon. Texas will gain two more seats.

Pennsylvanians can take some consolation in the fact that it's only one seat: from 1950 through 2000, the state has lost at least two congressional seats

COUNTY POPULATION GROWTH, 2010 - 2019



But it's not because the population is falling.

Pennsylvania's population grew from 2010 to 2020 by more than a quarter-million, or 2.17%.

That's less than half the growth rate of California, whose population rose by more than 5% and still lost a congressional seat.

Those states that added seats just grew faster, with their populations rising at least 9% over the last decade. Texas, which will gain two new representatives, grew by more than 15%.

"Pennsylvania is continuing its slow growth," said Michael Golembiewski, a transportation planner with the Berks County Planning Commission. "The growth is positive, so that's a good thing."

Golembiewski has no doubt Berks will be split up when the new lines are drawn. He said that where those lines go will be up to three factors: math, cartography and politics.

"How will Berks be redivided? I won't even begin to guess," he said.

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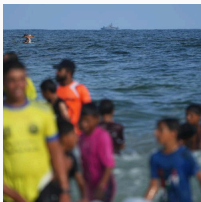
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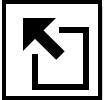
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Sunday, August 23



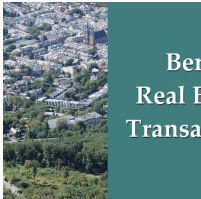
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Sunday, August 23



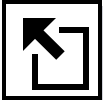
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