

New York Loses House Seat After Coming Up 89 People Short on Census

New population figures released on Monday confirmed that after the latest census, New York would lose a congressional seat, but only by the narrowest of margins.



By Shane Goldmacher

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New York's congressional delegation will shrink by one seat after the 2022 election, the Census Bureau announced on Monday, but the state came excruciatingly close to snapping an eight-decade streak of declining representation in Washington: It was 89 residents short, to be precise.

The figure, revealed during the Census Bureau's announcement of which states would gain and lose seats in the House of Representatives after the decennial population survey, meant that if New York had counted 89 more people last year than the 20,215,751 who were tallied, it would have held on to the House seat. Instead, it went to Minnesota, which came close to losing a seat.

It was the narrowest margin by which a state lost a seat in the modern era, according to census data. The next closest call was in 1970, when Oregon fell short by 231 residents.

And it means that New York's congressional delegation will continue a steady decline in size that began in the 1940s, when the state boasted 45 members of the House. Now it will have only 26.

The tight margin led to some immediate recrimination about how New York had prepared for the count, which took place as the coronavirus surged in the state. Some progressive lawmakers and officials in New York City cast particular blame on Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo.

“The state was simply M.I.A.,” said Julie Menin, who served as the census director for New York City. “The governor and the state simply did not want to prioritize the census.”

Ms. Menin said she believed that the personal animus between Mr. Cuomo and Mayor Bill de Blasio was a driving factor in the state’s approach to the census, adding that she was “100 percent” sure that an additional 89 people would have been counted had there been greater state involvement. “It’s unconscionable,” she said.

Peter Ajemian, a spokesman for Mr. Cuomo, said the state had devoted \$30 million to the count. “New York did better than the experts predicted, and our population count went up,” he said. “It’s unbelievable that some politicians are willing to forget how many obstacles the Trump administration put in place — during a pandemic no less — in order to score cheap political points.”

Demographers and political analysts had expected New York to lose one or two seats, so the idea that the state had fallen just shy of losing none at all was at once a welcome result and a frustrating one.

“New York was able to stave off the worst outcome — losing two congressional seats and billions in federal revenue because of a census undercount of New Yorkers,” said Murad Awawdeh, executive director of the New York Immigration Coalition.

Even as New York’s overall footprint in Congress shrinks, Democratic leaders nationally believe redistricting in the state could potentially offset the Republican gains expected from partisan remapping efforts elsewhere in the country. The Republican Party has full power to draw favorable district lines in several large states, including Florida, Georgia and Texas.

California will remain the state with the largest congressional delegation, with 52 districts, losing one seat. Texas will pick up two seats for a total of 38. Florida and New York had been tied with 27 seats each, but Florida will gain a seat as New York sheds one, part of a broader trend of population shifts to the South and West in recent decades.

“We were the Empire State of the country, and that is clearly not the case right now,” said Nick Langworthy, the chairman of the New York Republican Party, blaming the tax policies of Democrats who dominate the state’s government for the relative population decline. “To have one less member of Congress, to have one less electoral vote, that makes our voice that much smaller.”

Census officials said that New York had a “negative net domestic migration,” but that its population grew overall because of immigration.

The announcement raised other questions about just how close New York came to retaining the House seat. The census was supposed to be a snapshot of the United States’ population on a specific date: April 1, 2020. That happened to be right as the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic swept through New York. On March 31 alone, a New York Times database showed, there were 417 deaths in the state.

New York’s redistricting process — the once-a-decade redrawing of state legislative and congressional seats that takes place after the census — will formally begin with an independent commission, which has an equal number of Democrats and Republicans.

But many expect that commission to deadlock, and if it does, power to make the maps would eventually revert to the state Legislature in Albany, which is controlled by Democrats.

“The reapportionment process is always difficult and fraught with complications,” said State Senator Michael Gianaris, a Queens Democrat who is one of the leaders of the New York State Legislative Task Force on Reapportionment and Redistricting, which would make the maps if the independent commission failed to come to an agreement.

A decade ago, Republicans controlled the New York State Senate and had a hand in drawing state legislative maps; the final congressional map was drawn by a judge after state lawmakers were unable to come to an agreement.

Mr. Gianaris said the results from the 2010 redistricting process were “grossly unfair and resulted in some of the most gerrymandered maps in the country.”

“Mere fairness will likely bring about a better result for Democrats,” Mr. Gianaris said.

New York is represented in the House by 19 Democrats and eight Republicans. The redrawn districts shown on some hypothetical maps by election forecasters could reduce the state’s Republican representation to as few as three seats.

Even with a loss of one seat, New York is expected to retain one of the most powerful state delegations in Congress.

Senator Chuck Schumer of New York is the Senate majority leader. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who represents parts of the Bronx and Queens, is perhaps the most prominent progressive leader in America. And Representative Hakeem Jeffries of Brooklyn is viewed as one of the top contenders to succeed Speaker Nancy Pelosi as the next Democratic leader of the House.

The chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, Representative Sean Patrick Maloney, is also from New York, and Mr. Maloney is expected to take a particular interest in how the state redraws its lines as he attempts to hold a historically narrow House majority. Democrats hold just a six-seat edge over Republicans.

As for where New York will reduce its representation, “the assumption is the loss will be upstate somewhere,” said Jack McEneny, a former state assemblyman who oversaw the most recent redistricting efforts.

There are several places upstate where Democrats could seek to eliminate a Republican-held seat.

Representative Tom Reed, a Republican who represents the Southern Tier, including Jamestown and Corning, recently announced that he would not seek re-election in 2022 after he was accused of groping a former lobbyist. His district could be combined with that of neighboring Representative Chris Jacobs, who represents the region outside Buffalo and who only took office last year.

Democrats could also combine the seats held by Representative Elise Stefanik, who represents much of the Adirondacks and is a top Republican fund-raiser now considering a run for governor, and Representative Claudia Tenney, who was narrowly re-elected to Congress last year after losing her seat in 2018. Ms. Tenney's Central New York district reaches from the Pennsylvania border to Lake Ontario.

A top Democratic target is Representative John Katko, a Republican who represents Syracuse and who managed to hold onto his seat even though Democrats have carried the district in recent presidential elections. Democratic mapmakers would almost surely tip the district to be more favorable to the party.

Another first-term Republican, Representative Nicole Malliotakis, represents Staten Island and a slice of the more conservative parts of South Brooklyn. But Democrats could add more overwhelmingly Democratic parts of Brooklyn to her seat, making it more competitive.

The district of Representative Lee Zeldin, a Republican who represents eastern Long Island, could be similarly redrawn to be more Democratic. Mr. Zeldin is raising money to run for governor in 2022.

"They're going to try to gut these districts across the state," said Mr. Langworthy, the G.O.P. chairman, who predicted that Republicans would wind up spending heavily on legal fees battling Democratic plans in the courts. "Mapmakers can be very vicious."

Annie Correal contributed reporting.

A correction was made on April 28, 2021: An earlier version of this article misspelled the surname of a former state assemblyman. He is Jack McEneny, not

McEnany.

When we learn of a mistake, we acknowledge it with a correction. If you spot an error, please let us know at nytnews@nytimes.com. [Learn more](#)

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