

# Keeping Up with the Congressmen: Evaluating Constituents' Awareness of Redistricting\*

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*Objective.* We seek to understand how voters respond to being drawn into a new congressional district: specifically, the new Seventh District of South Carolina created in 2012. *Methods.* We employ data from a survey of voters in the new district, and employ descriptive statistics and logistic regression models to identify whether voters are aware of the new district, whether they expect better representation as a result, and to explain their likely vote choice. *Results.* We find limited awareness of the new district among voters, despite a competitive election campaign, but nonetheless a broad public understanding that redistricting may lead to more local influence in Congress. *Conclusions.* Our results suggest that redistricting efforts that ensure the maintenance of communities of interest to preserve voter-representative links, even if that means deviation from a strict “one person, one vote” standard, may be superior from a representational standpoint.

The effects of congressional redistricting on voters can vary dramatically in magnitude. In many cases, in states with fairly stable population trends across the state, we would expect redistricting plans to have few substantive effects on representation. In other cases, either due to political manipulation of the redistricting process or unequal population growth, the effects may be quite profound. However, most existing political science research focuses on the effects of redistricting on the *outcomes* of elections, particularly in terms of the partisan and racial identity of the candidates who are elected and the effects of redistricting on the incumbency advantage (see, e.g., Overby and Cosgrove, 1996; Desposato and Petrocik, 2003; Grose, 2005; Juenke and Preuhs, 2012).

Instead, here we focus on its effects on constituents within the district, a relatively underexplored topic. Specifically, we consider the effects of redistricting on constituents' perceptions of their representation, with particular attention to the question of whether or not individuals are aware of redistricting's effects on them. We find, in general, that voters in the new district were only weakly—if at all—aware of either redistricting or its consequences for local representation, although the district's voters generally seem to believe the redistricting plan in question would help (or at least not harm) their representation in Congress. Finally we consider the consequences of these findings for future redistricting research.

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## Evidence of Redistricting and its Consequences

The effects of redistricting on congressional representation have long been a subject of study for political scientists. Most of this research, however, has focused on the elite-level consequences of redistricting, considering questions of how redistricting affects who is elected. For example, studies have considered the effects of redistricting on incumbents' reelection prospects (Desposato and Petrocik, 2003; Hood and McKee, 2008), partisan balance (Hood and McKee, 2009), the quality of voters' representation (Yoshinaka and Murphy, 2011), and the policy representation of minority groups in Congress (Grose, 2005; Juenke and Preuhs, 2012), as well as contributing to the long-running debate over the merits of race-conscious redistricting as a vehicle for descriptive and substantive representation of minority interests, particularly among African Americans in the South (Overby and Cosgrove, 1996; Cameron, Epstein, and O'Halloran, 1996; Canon, 1999; Lublin, 1999a, 1999b; Epstein and O'Halloran, 1999).

The consequences of redistricting on voters, however, are largely unexplored, with some recent limited exceptions that examine voters' recognition of incumbent members of Congress after redistricting. McKee (2008), at the national level, examined the effects of redistricting on voter recognition and recall of their local House member in the 1992 and 2002 American National Election Studies (ANES), finding lower recollection and knowledge of the incumbent member's identity for voters who had been drawn into an existing incumbent's district than for voters who had previously been in that incumbent's district, and similar (although less pronounced) effects for challengers' identities. Hayes and McKee (2009) elaborate on this evidence using both individual data from the 1992 ANES, supplemented by an aggregate-level analysis of voter roll-off in House races in Texas at the voting-precinct level; their findings indicate that voters are less likely to participate in House contests if they have been shifted into a new district. Hood and McKee (2010) find similar evidence of a lack of recognition of the incumbent's identity among the voters added to an existing district in a study of voters in Georgia's Eighth Congressional District after a legislature-initiated mid-decade redistricting that shifted Macon-based Democratic incumbent Jim Marshall into a more heavily Republican district, leading to an erosion of the incumbency advantage. In a similar vein, Winburn and Wagner (2010) find that voters who are located in an outcropping of a district that splits a traditional community of interest are less likely to know the identity of the candidates seeking office in their district, although they do not find statistically significant effects on participation as a result.

In this article, instead, we consider the effects of redistricting on constituents in an open-seat election, specifically the newly recreated Seventh District of South Carolina. This particular redistricting gives us the opportunity to consider how voters are affected when they have a new district focused on their regional community of interest, rather than being divided among several districts as had been the case prior to the 2010 Census.

### The New Seventh District of South Carolina

One of the most striking features of U.S. demographics since World War II is the relatively rapid pace of population growth in, and migration to, the American South, in a reversal of the trends that held for much of the 19th and early 20th centuries. South Carolina is no exception: due to its rapid population growth over the past decade, it was one of the eight states to gain additional representation in Congress as a result of the 2010 Census (Burnett, 2011). The addition of a new district created a rare opportunity for the

legislature to create an open seat that would favor certain candidates over others. While the South Carolina legislature and various political figures and interest groups considered a number of possible approaches to redistricting, including either the potential creation of a second majority-minority district (in addition to the existing Sixth District represented by longtime incumbent James "Jim" Clyburn) or centering a new district on Hilton Head Island in Beaufort County on the southern coast of the state, ultimately the legislature adopted a congressional redistricting plan with the new Seventh District centered in the northeastern region of the state bordering North Carolina, known locally as the "Pee Dee" region after the major river that flows through that area.<sup>1</sup>

The Pee Dee region's population is mostly concentrated in the coastal areas, most notably in Horry County, the home of Myrtle Beach, Conway (the county seat), and numerous unincorporated communities that form the "Grand Strand" along with less populous Georgetown County to the southwest. The other counties in the new district include Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Marion, and Marlboro Counties, along with most of Florence County. In recent decades, this region of the state was divided between congressional districts centered on urban areas in other regions of the state, including Charleston, Columbia (Richland County), and the Charlotte suburbs of Fort Mill and Rock Hill (located in York County), potentially diluting the common community of interest in the region.

This lack of local representation would no longer be the case; the 2010 redistricting plan virtually ensured the election of a representative who called the Pee Dee region home. The open-seat contest attracted a wide field of candidates in the Democratic and Republican primaries, as is typically the case (Gaddie and Bullock, 2000). After the first primary round, college professor and businesswoman Gloria Bromell Tinubu, a relative unknown in the state despite her past political activity in Georgia, and attorney Preston Brittain found themselves in a runoff election after leading a Democratic primary field of five candidates, while Republicans André Bauer (a former lieutenant governor, from Charleston) and Tom Rice (then the chairman of the Horry County Council) won the right to a runoff primary after leading a field of nine contenders.<sup>2</sup> Rice prevailed in the Republican runoff over Bauer, while Bromell Tinubu defeated Brittain despite the latter's endorsements by leading South Carolina Democrats. In the November 2012 general election, Rice ultimately prevailed over Bromell Tinubu, garnering 55.6 percent of the vote (South Carolina State Election Commission, 2012).<sup>3</sup>

While the redistricting process was, of course, a prominent part of the state legislature's business during its 2011 session, and thus we would expect political elites and highly engaged citizens to be aware of the redistricting, it is not obvious that the general public in the newly formed district would necessarily become aware of the effects of the plan. Due to the two-step flow of political information (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1944; Katz and Lazarsfeld, [1955] 2006; Katz, 1957), we might expect this information to "trickle down" to the mass public over time, particularly as the result of the aggressive campaign to fill the seat in 2012. We would also expect citizens with greater political awareness and engagement in general to be more likely to be aware of the impact of redistricting on the region.

<sup>1</sup>For more background on the 2010 redistricting cycle in South Carolina, see Lawrence and Huffman (2013).

<sup>2</sup>Only three of the other 12 potential primary races in the state were even contested in 2012.

<sup>3</sup>South Carolina's small Working Families Party also nominated Democratic nominee Bromell Tinubu in the general election; the state is one of the few that continues to permit electoral fusion. None of the state's minor parties nominated Rice.

TABLE 1  
Awareness of Being Placed in New District, All Respondents

	Count (Weighted)	Percentage
Aware and KNEW lived in	398	38.9%
Aware, NOT SURE if lived in	187	18.2%
Aware, did NOT think lived in	86	8.4%
Not aware	338	33.0%
Refused	16	1.6%

## Data and Methods

To consider the extent to which the public was aware of the new district and how that awareness might affect voting behavior, we examined data collected as part of the October 2012 Winthrop Poll conducted by the Social and Behavioral Sciences Laboratory at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina. This particular poll was a telephone survey of 981 registered voters residing in the new Seventh District of South Carolina; respondents were randomly selected from lists of registered voters from the counties in the district, supplemented by random-digit-dialing landline and wireless samples screened for registered voters. The survey was conducted from September 23, 2012 to September 30, 2012.<sup>4</sup>

To consider the research questions at hand, we mostly rely on descriptive data analysis of the survey responses, supplemented by binary logistic regression models estimated in R version 2.15, supplemented by the memisc package (R Development Core Team, 2014; Elff, 2014). We incorporate respondent weights based on respondents' genders, ages, and racial self-identification to ensure reported statistics are representative of the demographic profile of the adult registered voter population of the district.

## Findings

### *Awareness of the New Seventh District and its Area*

In general, awareness of the new district among voters, even a few weeks before the general election in the midst of a competitive, open-seat election contest, appears to have been quite low. In Table 1, we find that approximately 65 percent of the respondents were aware of the redistricting process itself, although only around 39 percent of respondents report knowing they were in the new district prior to the interview.

To see if there were systematic differences in awareness of being placed in the new district, we constructed two binary logistic regression (logit) models of whether or not respondents knew they were in the new district. We examined whether respondents' objective political knowledge, awareness of political events, formal education, age, gender, income, and race affected knowledge of the new district, along with incorporating the interviewer's evaluation of the respondent's level of political knowledge; for details on the measures, see the online

<sup>4</sup>Further details on the methodology of the study can be found at (<http://www.winthrop.edu/uploadedFiles/wupoll/Oct2012WinthropPollMethodology.pdf>) and in the online appendix to this article.

TABLE 2  
Logit Models of Awareness of the New District

	Knew Was in District	Knew District Existed
(Intercept)	-4.843*** (0.559)	-3.382*** (0.523)
Knowledge items	0.357*** (0.103)	0.314* (0.133)
Education	0.137* (0.065)	0.252*** (0.070)
Political awareness	0.268* (0.121)	0.420*** (0.108)
Age	0.016** (0.006)	0.008 (0.006)
Female (1/0)	-0.197 (0.169)	0.015 (0.179)
Black (1/0)	0.136 (0.205)	-0.319 (0.196)
Interviewer evaluation of knowledge	0.421*** (0.079)	0.388*** (0.083)
Income	0.141*** (0.039)	0.108** (0.042)
Aldrich-Nelson $R^2$	0.182	0.193
Likelihood ratio	171.807***	183.896***
Log-likelihood	-485.630	-438.858
N	771	771
ePCP	61.5%	66.7%
ePRE	20.9%	22.5%

NOTES: Entries are probability-weighted binary logit estimates with standard errors in parentheses. All significance tests are two-tailed.

†  $p \leq 0.10$ ; \*  $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.001$ .

appendix.<sup>5</sup> In the first model, respondents were coded as knowing that they were in the new district only if they expressed certainty that they had been placed there; in the second model, we examined whether respondents knew whether a district had been created at all (regardless of whether or not they believed they were in it). The results of these models are presented in Table 2.

As we can see from the table, respondents with greater political knowledge and awareness were more likely to know they were in the new district, as were respondents with higher formal education, respondents with greater incomes, and respondents evaluated by the interviewer as having greater political knowledge. Older respondents, all things being equal, appear more likely to have been aware of being in the new district but age does not seem to have an independent effect on awareness of the new district itself. Race and gender did not appear to have statistically significant effects.

We also considered whether or not respondents were aware of the geographical configuration of the new district. The survey included three questions asking respondents whether or not particular counties were included in the new district: Georgetown County, York County, and Sumter County. Of these counties, only Georgetown County is actually

<sup>5</sup>We include two measures of political knowledge because the objective knowledge items alone did not produce as much variation across respondents as we might have liked; the modal and median respondents were unable to answer any of the four items we used correctly. The two measures are correlated using Kendall's tau at 0.281 ( $p < 0.001$ ).

TABLE 3

Is the Specified County in the New District? (Correct Answer Indicated)

	Georgetown (Yes)	York (No)	Sumter (No)
Yes	35.8%	21.5%	12.6%
No	12.2%	25.2%	29.4%
Not sure/don't know	51.7%	53.1%	57.7%
Refused	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%

TABLE 4

Will Your Interests Now Be Better Represented in Congress?

	Count (Weighted)	Percentage
Better	320	31.2%
Worse	41	4.0%
No difference	508	49.6%
Not sure	151	14.7%
Refused to answer	6	0.6%

part of the new Seventh District. The responses to these questions are in Table 3. While pluralities of respondents who did venture a response did offer the correct answer in all three cases, these were outnumbered by the respondents who indicated they did not know or were unsure whether these counties were in the new district.

Respondents living in Georgetown County did perform significantly better on the question about their county than those living in other districts; nearly 68 percent of respondents in that county did say Georgetown County was in the new district, as opposed to 31.4 percent of those living outside the county. However, this result is not particularly impressive since, in the course of the interview, a respondent in Georgetown County would have presumably surmised being in the new district, given that the respondent had already been asked if he or she was aware of living in it.

### *Cui Bono?*

One of the presumptive goals of the new Seventh District was to ensure that the community of interest in the Pee Dee region was better represented in Congress. To consider whether this goal was met by the new district, we asked respondents whether or not they believed that their interests would be represented better than in the past; the responses to this question are presented in Table 4. While around 31 percent of respondents did say they believed that the new district would improve their representation, a greater percentage (nearly 50 percent) said they believed it would not make any difference.

We constructed a binary logistic regression model to try to determine what factors, if any, led to respondents believing the redistricting plan would be beneficial to their representation in Congress; this model is presented in Table 5. As we can see from the table, respondents with greater political knowledge and awareness believed the district would improve their representation, as did Republican identifiers. We also found that residents of the two coastal counties (Georgetown and Horry) believed that the new district would enhance their representation more than those in the inland counties of the district, although this

TABLE 5

Logit Model: Expect Better Representation in the New District?

(Intercept)	-2.358*** (0.521)
Knowledge items	0.363*** (0.096)
Education	-0.050 (0.064)
Political awareness	0.351** (0.121)
Age	-0.006 (0.005)
Female (1/0)	0.067 (0.164)
Black (1/0)	0.535* (0.236)
IVR eval of knowledge	0.099 (0.074)
Income	0.030 (0.039)
Coastal county (Georgetown/Horry)	0.313† (0.170)
Republican identifier/leaner	0.439* (0.203)
Aldrich-Nelson $R^2$	0.060
Likelihood ratio	47.837***
Log-likelihood	-511.229
$N$	750
ePCP	58.0%
ePRE	5.0%

NOTES: Entries are probability-weighted binary logit estimates with standard errors in parentheses. All significance tests are two-tailed.

†  $p \leq 0.10$ ; \*  $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.001$ .

finding is only significant at the 90 percent confidence level. The respondents' level of education, age, gender, or income did not have substantial effects on their expectation of better representation; nor did the interviewer's evaluation of the respondent's level of knowledge.

Somewhat surprisingly, black respondents were more likely than nonblacks to believe that they would have better representation in the new district as well. Historically, much of the Pee Dee region was marginalized as part of the "corridor of shame," and perhaps the lack of a district reflecting this community of interest increased the sense of alienation among local African-American voters. Although we lack the data to examine this relationship in more detail, it is notable that many of the black residents of the new Seventh District had previously been part of the majority-black Sixth District, represented by Jim Clyburn, one of the most senior members of the House of Representatives. Clyburn's constituency prior to 2012 sprawled across much of the south-central cotton belt of the state as well as incorporating black neighborhoods in Columbia and Charleston, potentially contributing to the political marginalization of the Pee Dee. It is also possible that black voters in the district believed that Bromell Tinubu had a fair chance of winning the election in November, despite the district's white majority, given that it was an open-seat contest in a minority-influence district.

TABLE 6  
What Part (If Any) of District Will Benefit More?

	Count (Weighted)	Percentage
None	474	47.1%
Horry County/Coast/Myrtle Beach	218	21.7%
Other	199	19.8%
Refused	116	11.5%

We also considered whether it was perceived that elected officials would pay disproportionate attention to only part of the district. Potentially these concerns may have been magnified by the field of candidates in the general election; both major-party runoff winners, Democrat Gloria Bromell Tinubu and Republican Tom Rice, were residents of and otherwise associated with Horry County, the most populous county in the district. Residents of cities and counties in the backcountry region of the district might well have been concerned that the interests of the coast might have received disproportionate influence.

Respondents were also asked to identify which, if any, portions of the district would be favored in the new district; these findings are presented in Table 6. While 47 percent of respondents did not believe any part of the district would benefit more than others, approximately 22 percent of respondents suggested that Horry County, its principal city Myrtle Beach, or the beach region would benefit more than the rest of the district.<sup>6</sup>

### *Voting in the New District*

The new district's population had a black voting-age population (BVAP) comprising approximately 27.6 percent of the district's total voting-age population (Lawrence and Huffmon, 2013). Accordingly, the district was a potential minority-influence district, although given the increasingly Republican leanings of white voters both across the South and within South Carolina more specifically, the chances of a Democrat (white or African American) being elected from the district were rather slim. However, longtime incumbent Democrat John Spratt, a white Democrat from the northern portion of the state whose district included parts of the new Seventh District and whose district had a similar BVAP, had been successful in holding his seat despite an increasingly Republican electorate until his defeat at the 2010 midterm elections.

Given the presence of an African-American Democrat (Bromell Tinubu) and a white Republican (Rice) on the general election ballot, we might reasonably expect both partisan and racial polarization in respondents' potential vote choices. According to the survey, 56.2 percent of registered voters who expressed a preference or voting intention planned to vote for, or leaned toward, Rice, while 43.8 percent expressed a preference for Bromell Tinubu.<sup>7</sup> Respondents' voting intention by race is presented in Table 7; not surprisingly, Bromell Tinubu received overwhelming support from African-American respondents,

<sup>6</sup>The "other" responses were also recorded by the interviewers; many of these responses referred to counties or regions that were not part of the district, including the most common response, "Columbia."

<sup>7</sup>According to the certified November 2012 election results from the South Carolina State Election Commission, Rice received 55.6 percent of the vote, while Bromell Tinubu received 44.4 percent of the vote (41.6 percent on the Democratic line, 2.8 percent on the Working Families line), excluding write-in votes (South Carolina State Election Commission, 2012). Thus, we can be reasonably confident the survey's findings reflect the behavior of the November electorate.

TABLE 7  
Expected Vote, Including Leaners, by Race

	Blacks	Nonblacks
Bromell Tinubu (D)	96.6%	21.0%
Rice (R)	3.4%	79.0%

TABLE 8  
Expected Vote, Including Leaners, by Party Identification

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Bromell Tinubu (D)	94.3%	21.0%	2.8%
Rice (R)	5.7%	79.0%	97.2%

while the vast majority of nonblack registered voters supported Rice. Given the BVAP of the district, even though the district was potentially a minority-influence district, Bromell Tinubu (or any other Democrat) would have needed much more than 21 percent of the nonblack vote to win the general election. Similar stark contrasts can be seen in Table 8, where we can see Democrats overwhelmingly supported Bromell Tinubu and Republicans showed similarly lopsided support for Rice.

**Conclusions**

In this article, we examined the effects on voters of a redistricting plan that created an open seat in a community of interest that had previously been divided between three congressional districts. We found that awareness of the redistricting itself was quite low, even in the midst of a competitive general election campaign. We also found that while a plurality of voters did not believe the new district would disproportionately favor the interests of certain parts of the district, and that overall voters believed that the effects of redistricting would not harm their representation in Congress (with a substantial minority believing that the plan would improve their representation), there was a notable minority of voters in the district who believed that the Myrtle Beach region would receive disproportionate attention from those elected. And, while the district was demographically a potential minority-influence district, we find even the presence of an African-American incumbent president at the top of the ballot—which presumably would have mobilized black voters to come to the polls—was insufficient to build a cross-racial coalition to elect an African-American woman Democrat from the district.

Overall, these findings further contribute to our understanding of the implications of redistricting in legislative elections. Consistent with the findings of Winburn and Wagner (2010) and Hayes and McKee (2009), the redistricting process appears to disrupt the representation of constituents by removing existing legislator-voter linkages, even though it does provide opportunities for previously neglected communities of interest to gain effective legislative representation over the longer term. The increasing frequency of court-ordered and legislature-initiated mid-decade redistricting over the past three decades, while often motivated by reasonable desires to improve the congruence of elected officials with statewide partisan support (e.g., to correct a partisan bias toward one major

party in a past redistricting plan) or to ensure minorities have reasonable opportunities to elect candidates of their choice to public office, as required by the Voting Rights Act and the 14th Amendment, may have contributed to further alienation between members of Congress and their constituents, undermining support for both individual members and the institution of Congress as a whole.

These findings suggest that perhaps a loosening of the existing “one person, one vote” standard in House redistricting (which already is not strictly applied in redistricting of state and local jurisdictions) may give states a greater opportunity to keep communities of interest intact as part of redistricting plans. Another potentially fruitful approach would perhaps be to depoliticize the redistricting process by placing redistricting in the hands of independent commissions, or through the introduction of electoral systems, such as the “mixed member proportional” or “alternate member” systems used in Germany, Mexico, New Zealand, and the Scottish and Welsh legislatures, which would potentially make large-scale gerrymandering ineffective (see, e.g., Nagel, 1994).

Finally, this article suggests the need for longer-term study of the process by which newly redistricted citizens become aware of their new political context; a single cross-sectional survey of a new district was insufficient to identify, for example, how citizens might be acclimatizing to their new districts over time. The increasing availability of reliable, Internet-based panels with sufficient respondents at the congressional-district level may be helpful in this regard, although there are substantial obstacles, particularly in the case of rural areas with relatively high poverty rates and large minority populations, such as the district examined here, whose residents are likely to be underrepresented in the panels of Internet-based survey houses such as GfK/Knowledge Networks and YouGov Polimetrix.

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