

CHAPTER ONE

Connecticut's Fourth Congressional District: Geography and Demographics

Situated in the southwestern corner of the “Nutmeg State” is Connecticut’s fourth congressional district. Prior to the landmark United States Supreme Court rulings concerning legislative reapportionment, the fourth district and Fairfield County were essentially one and the same. The fourth congressional district has historically consisted of some of the wealthiest communities in the United States, as well as three urban communities in which a portion of the citizenry, many of whom are racial minorities, live below the poverty level. Communities along the “gold coast” such as Greenwich, Darien, and Westport are known for their exceptional wealth, while the cities of Bridgeport, Stamford, and Norwalk are very poor by comparison. Indeed, the sprawling city of Bridgeport is regarded as one of the poorest urban communities not only in the state of Connecticut, but also within the entire United States. The fourth district is by no means homogenous and one discovers communities and individuals that stand in great contrast to one another in terms of economic, social, and political demographics. *Connecticut Post* staff writer Genevieve Reilly perceptively captured the contrasting nature of the fourth district in these terms:

To say the district is a study in contrasts is an understatement. In Greenwich can be found multimillionaires and titans of industry. A Cape Cod-style house there is assessed at \$1.85

million and has four bedrooms. In Bridgeport can be found day laborers and families struggling to make it to their next paycheck. There, a Cape has two bedrooms and an assessed value of \$171,970.¹

Geography

The geographical shape of the district, because it was based on the boundaries of Fairfield County, remained static for several decades. Figures 1, 2, and 3 present maps of the district lines as they existed in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. As one can see, for thirty years there was virtually no change in the geographic shape of the fourth congressional district.

Beginning in the 1960s, the lines of legislative districts across the United States began to change dramatically due to a series of United States Supreme Court rulings regarding the controversial issue of legislative reapportionment.² The high court, under the leadership of Chief Justice Earl Warren, affirmed the constitutional

Figure 1
Congressional District Four, 1942



Figure 2
Congressional District Four, 1952

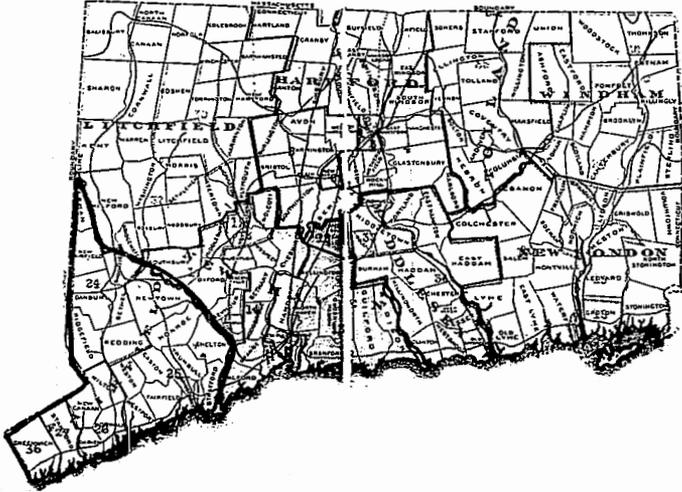
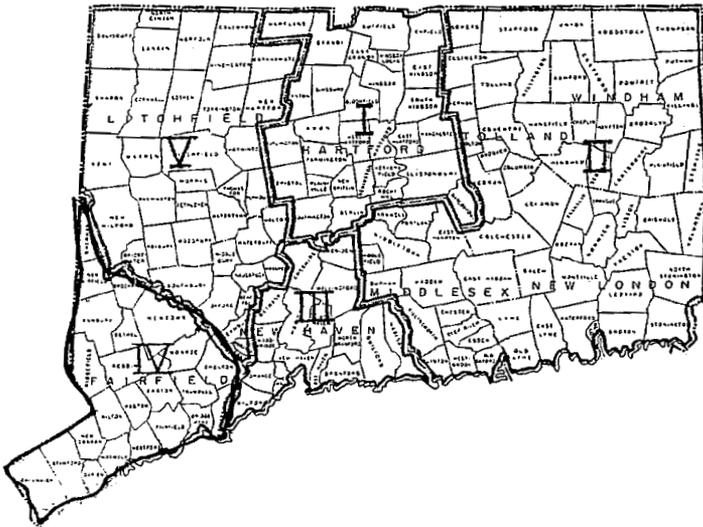


Figure 3
Congressional District Four, 1962



requirement that state and federal legislative districts should contain roughly the same number of inhabitants. According to the Supreme Court, congressional districts must be standardized in terms of population across the United States, while state house and state senatorial districts should be standardized within the borders of each state. It was the Court's position that only with population standardization could the constitutional principle of "one-person one-vote" be realized. As a result of the Court's landmark rulings, state legislatures, following the federal decennial census and the population formula developed by the federal government, were now required to redraw congressional districts to accommodate the one-person one-vote principle. Thus, Connecticut's congressional district four would now have approximately the same number of residents as every congressional district in Connecticut. Moreover, congressional district four in Connecticut would also have roughly the same number of residents as every congressional district across the land.

As a result of the high court's rulings, population, not county or town boundaries, was now the primary concern of state lawmakers assigned to the difficult task of drawing the contours of legislative districts. Congressional district four would no longer mirror the geographical boundaries of Fairfield County. Although the fourth district continued to consist of many communities within Fairfield County, a number of suburban communities in the northern portion of the county would now be included within Connecticut's fifth congressional district, with a few towns absorbed into the newly created sixth congressional district. As a result, the fourth congressional district was contracted dramatically with respect to geographical size. Although the fourth district was still referred to as the "Fairfield County District," the fact of the matter was that due to legislative reapportionment rulings congressional district four would now consist of a portion of Fairfield County communities, but not the entire county. Congressional district four and Fairfield County were no longer synonymous with one another. Figures 4, 5, 6, and 7 reveal the evolving and changing shape of Connecticut's fourth congressional district over the span of four decades.

Figure 4
Congressional District Four, 1972

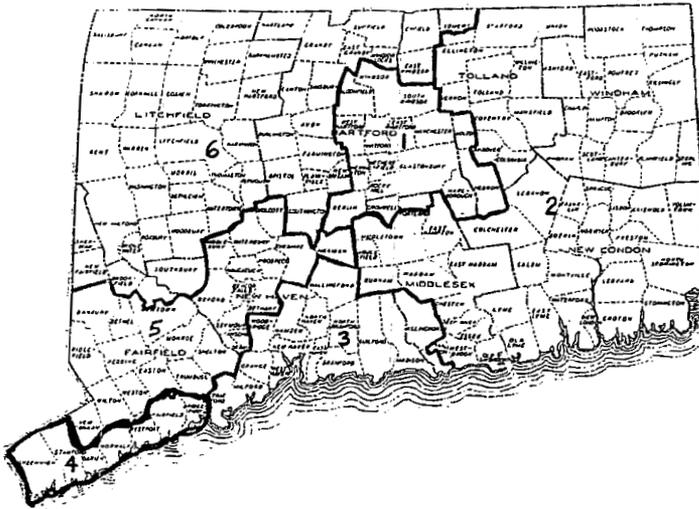


Figure 5
Congressional District Four, 1982

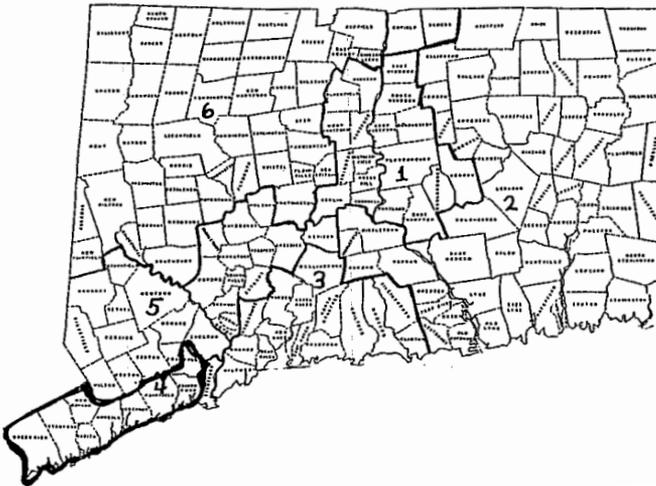


Figure 6
Congressional District Four, 1992

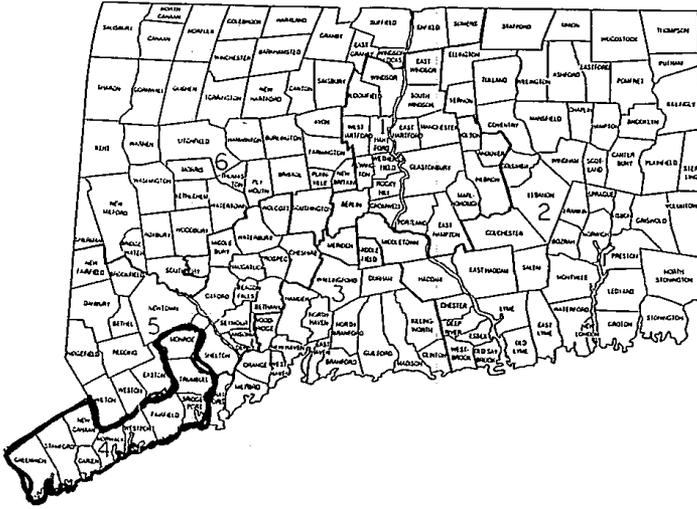
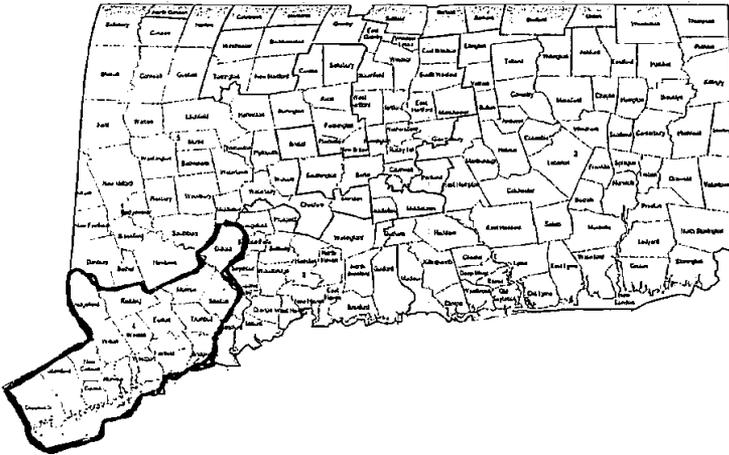


Figure 7
Congressional District Four, 2002



Demographics

Population

The demographic characteristics of congressional district four have demonstrated both continuity and change over the past seventy years. As table 1 shows, the district has grown by more than 280,000 residents from 1940 to the present. Needless to say, the task of representing the fourth district has become more challenging in light of population trends. The district's members of Congress undoubtedly have come to rely more on the assistance of additional district staff workers to meet constituent needs as a result of this development. Skilled and motivated constituent staff assistance will be imperative in the years ahead.

Table 1
Population Trends in Congressional District Four: 1940-2010

Year	Population Total
1940	418,384
1950	504,342
1960	653,589
1970	508,520
1980	532,520
1990	547,764
2000	681,176
2010	706,740

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Gender

Although population has grown within the fourth district, the district's characteristics with regard to gender have remained largely unchanged over an eighty-year period, with females consistently comprising a majority of the district. The gender gap has never been vast, although from 1970-90 females outnumbered males by

approximately 5 percentage points. In recent years the gap has narrowed, with females outnumbering males by slightly less than 3 percentage points.

Table 2
Gender Characteristics in Congressional District Four: 1940-2010
(in percent)

	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Male	49.5	48.8	48.7	47.7	47.4	47.7	49.1	48.7
Female	50.5	51.2	51.3	52.3	52.6	52.3	51.9	51.3

Source: 1940-2000 data obtained from U.S. Census Bureau; 2010 data obtained from 2005-09 American Community Survey.

Race

Congressional district four has historically been a white district. The suburban communities throughout the district are home to mostly white residents. Non-white residents, particularly Blacks/African-Americans, and Hispanics/Latinos, tend to reside in the urban areas of Bridgeport, Stamford, and Norwalk. Although the fourth district has remained predominantly white for the past seventy years, it is evident that the racial composition of the district has changed rather considerably, as shown in table 3.

Table 3
Racial Characteristics of Congressional District Four: 1940-2010
(in percent)

	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
White	97.6	96.7	94.7	89.5	84.7	80.0	77.5	76.9
Non-White	2.4	3.3	5.3	10.5	15.3	20.0	22.5	23.1

Source: 1940-2000 data obtained from U.S. Census Bureau; 2010 data obtained from 2005-09 American Community Survey.

In 1940, non-white residents comprised less than 3 percent of the district. Currently, non-white residents, which includes primarily Hispanics/Latinos and Blacks/African-Americans, account for more than one-fifth of the district's residents. Persons of color are also heavily concentrated within the district's urban communities, which is consistent with housing patterns throughout the state. In Bridgeport, Blacks/African-Americans account for 35 percent of the city's population, while Hispanics/Latinos comprise 38 percent of community residents. In Norwalk, Blacks/African-Americans account for 14 percent of the population, while persons of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity comprise 24 percent. Stamford's Black/African-American population, as well as the city's Hispanic/Latino population, also account for, respectively, 14 percent and 24 percent, which is identical to that of Norwalk's minority population. As the racial composition of the fourth district continues to change, so too do the policy issues which confront those who represent the district in Congress. The increasing heterogeneity of the district will in various ways affect the district's congressional politics as well. A legitimate question is whether or not the growing heterogeneity of the district and the increasing salience of issues germane to minority interests will potentially divide white and minority voters. Social issues for many voters have become increasingly relevant with respect to electoral behavior.

Age

The age of residents within a congressional district has important implications for congressional elections. The age of a district's residents is often reflected in the policy platforms of those who seek a seat in Congress. The age of a congressional district's residents also correlates with voter turnout and the age of voters is reflected in the choice of candidates. When the age of the fourth district's residents is examined according to seven age categories, it is evident that the district has remained fairly stable in this respect. There are

more senior citizen residents now than in the past, but the increase has not been dramatic. Other age categories have fluctuated, particularly the 15-24 and 25-34 age groups, but not to the point where one can state with certitude that the fourth congressional district has undergone a sea change with regard to the age of residents (see table 4). The age of the district's residents for the past seventy years has been fairly well-distributed into categories that can generally be described as children, adolescents, young adults, middle-aged, and older residents. In other words, there is a very broad distribution of age groups throughout this congressional district. Although senior citizens routinely record the highest level of voter turnout, the wide distribution of age groups tends to suggest that one age group alone does not dominate the district's politics.³

Table 4
Age Characteristics of Congressional District Four: 1940-2010
(in percent)

	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Under 15	20.9	23.6	29.0	26.8	20.1	18.5	22.0	21.5
15-24	17.8	12.5	11.0	15.7	17.2	13.3	10.0	12.6
25-34	16.9	16.9	12.6	11.6	14.3	18.0	3.0	10.8
35-44	14.7	15.9	15.6	12.1	12.0	15.0	18.0	15.5
45-54	13.7	12.5	13.0	13.5	12.3	12.0	14.0	15.8
55-64	8.6	10.2	9.0	10.2	11.8	10.0	9.0	10.8
65 & older	7.1	8.5	9.4	9.9	12.2	14.0	13.0	12.9

Source: 1940-2000 data obtained from U.S. Census Bureau; 2010 data obtained from 2005-09 American Community Survey.

Educational Levels

Like the age variable, the educational level of a congressional district can also have profound consequences for the district's

politics. Voter turnout and political orientations are often reflected in the educational level of a district's residents.⁴ The data in table 5 reveal in no uncertain terms that the residents of the fourth congressional district have become much more educated over an eighty-year period. This is not surprising, as educational levels have risen in general across the nation.

Table 5
Educational Levels in Congressional District Four: 1940-2010
(in percent)

	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
High School								
Less than 1 yr.	60.4	42.9	34.3	24.7	16.7	9.0	6.2	5.2
1-3 yrs.	12.9	15.8	18.3	16.8	12.3	12.0	5.5	6.2
4 yrs.	14.7	22.3	25.1	29.1	30.2	25.0	25.5	22.7
College								
1-3 yrs.	4.5	6.8	9.7	11.0	15.1	20.0	20.2	14.2
4 or more yrs.	5.6	8.4	11.6	17.4	25.7	34.0	42.1	45.6

Source: 1940-2000 data obtained from U.S. Census Bureau; 2010 data obtained from 2005-09 American Community Survey.

With respect to the fourth congressional district specifically, only 5.6 percent of the district's residents had completed four or more years of college in 1940. Attending college during this time period was confined to the privileged class of American citizens. By 2010, the number of residents with four or more years of college had dramatically risen to 45.6 percent. The 2005-09 American Community Survey discovered that more than 80 percent of fourth district residents now have a high school diploma or more, while more than 45 percent have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. The residents of Connecticut's fourth congressional district are highly educated.

Median Family Income

One of the most important variables that has historically conditioned the political context of a congressional district is the median income of the district's residents. Income, like education, has direct bearing on the political behavior of citizens.⁵ Although political scientists suggest that cultural issues have eclipsed socio-economic status as determinants of the vote, the median family income of a congressional district is still related to a congressional district's politics.⁶ Generally speaking, Connecticut's fourth congressional district is clearly a wealthy district. As previously noted, the suburbs of the fourth congressional district are for the most part exceptionally rich and the standard of living is very high. As table 6 shows, from 1950 to the present, the median family income of the fourth congressional district has been above the median family income of the state and well above the median family income of the nation.

Table 6
Median Family Income in Connecticut's Fourth
Congressional District Compared to Median Family Income
of Connecticut and the United States: 1940-2010

	District 4	Connecticut	United States
1940	N/A	N/A	N/A
1950	\$3,664	\$3,609	\$3,083
1960	\$7,371	\$6,887	\$5,657
1970	\$15,973	\$11,811	\$9,590
1980	\$32,980	\$23,149	\$19,917
1990	\$56,320	\$49,199	\$35,225
2000	\$74,379	\$65,521	\$50,046
2010	\$104,097	\$83,797	\$62,363

Source: 1950-2000 data obtained from U.S. Census Bureau; 2010 data obtained from 2005-09 American Community Survey.

According to the most recent American Community Survey, in 2010 the fourth district's median family income was slightly more than \$20,000 above the state's median family income, and more than \$40,000 above the national median family income. Many fourth district residents are employed as white-collar executives in banking and financial services. The district also contains many self-employed professionals, such as attorneys and physicians. It is also in lower Fairfield County where one finds hedge-fund managers. Many men and women commute to work on a daily basis to New York City, which is why Fairfield County is so often described as a "bedroom community" for the "Big Apple." In some respects, many residents of the fourth district are likely to have closer allegiances to New York City, due to their occupations, than they do to their local communities and the state of Connecticut.

District Profile: Generalizations

Several generalizations emerge from our demographic review of the fourth congressional district:

Generalization 1:

It is evident that the fourth district consists of some of the richest communities in the United States, as well as some of the poorest. There are stark contrasts among the district's residents with respect to per capita income, home values, and the standard of living.

Generalization 2:

Legislative reapportionment has significantly altered the geographical dimensions of the fourth congressional district. It is evident that the district has become much smaller in land size. The fourth district is still largely contained within Fairfield County, but by no means can one describe this district as the "Fairfield County District," as it was once known.

Generalization 3:

The population in the fourth congressional district has steadily and quite dramatically increased over an eighty-year period. Representing constituents of the fourth district is likely more cumbersome for current office holders compared to years past. As noted, the role of district staff workers has undoubtedly become more pronounced as the district's population has increased. Fortunately, laws passed by Congress have provided members of Congress with more district and legislative staff assistance.

Generalization 4:

The ratio of women to men has not changed much within the district, although the district has changed rather dramatically with regard to racial composition. The fourth district is clearly more racially heterogeneous than it once was. It therefore follows that greater sensitivity to the plight of racial minorities and urban issues will be required on the part of those who seek congressional office. Any individual who runs for Congress within the fourth district, irrespective of the candidate's race, gender, or ethnicity, must be intimately aware of not only the concerns of white homeowners in the prosperous suburbs, but also the very unique and complex issues that confront the residents of Bridgeport, Stamford, and Norwalk.

Generalization 5

The fourth district is not characterized by a dominant age group. The age of the district's residents are distributed throughout various age brackets.

Generalization 6:

The educational level of the district's residents has steadily increased from 1940 to 2010, consistent with state and national trends.

Generalization 7:

The most notable, and perhaps the most distinguishing demographic characteristic of the fourth congressional district, is the district's median family income. It is this characteristic, more than any other demographic characteristic, which sets the fourth district apart from other congressional districts. Although the district includes three cities characterized by low median family incomes and low per capita income, the district nevertheless is wealthy. The wealth of the district becomes evident when compared against the median family incomes of both the state and the nation. The overall wealth of the district helps explain why the district for so many years, with only a few exceptions, has sent Republicans to Congress. The fiscal conservatism of the district has undoubtedly shaped the district's voting behavior in congressional elections. But this is not to suggest that the district's congressional politics is static. As the following chapter will demonstrate, the politics of the fourth district appears to be in transition.