



# Illinois redistricting a mixed bag for community

RAKESH SHARMA

Every ten years, Illinois redraws its electoral maps. And every ten years, one party wins the right to redraw the maps. This time was no different, as Democrats sliced and diced districts to neutralize Republican gains in last November's elections.

For Indian Americans, the redistricting exercise has been a mixed bag.

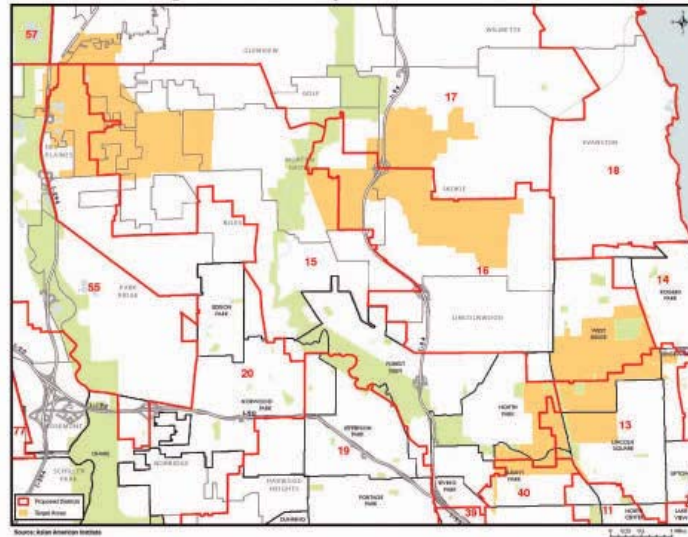
Former Illinois deputy treasurer Raja Krishnamoorthi's bid to become the state's first Indian-American and Asian-American Congressman received a boost with the current eighth district carved into three districts: 10th, 14th, and 16th. The demographics of the split are stacked in the Democrat's favor. According to 2010 census data, 11 of the 18 cities with the largest Indian-American population in Illinois are located in the new eighth district. For example, Hoffman Estates and Schaumburg village, two prominent cities in the district, contain 22.1 percent and 19.8 percent Asian Americans, of which Indian Americans are the highest majority in Illinois, respectively. The area is home to a well-educated, upwardly mobile Indian crowd that works in high-tech firms like Motorola.

The split also fragments incumbent Republican US Representative Joe Walsh's support base and potentially squares him off against colleague Randy Hultgren, parts of whose district now overlaps Walsh's district, in the Republican primaries.

"It (*the district*) has a large concentration of South Asian votes and that's a potential base for someone of my profile to do well," Krishnamoorthi told *India Abroad*.

Not all Indian Americans are happy with the new maps. Ami Gandhi, legal director, Asian American Institute, said the legislative redistricting fragments the Asian-American population in Chicago's northern suburbs. She pointed to areas around the South Asian hub of Devon Avenue where voters have to seek redressal from multiple state legislators for their issues. This, she said, could result

AAI Target Areas & Proposed IL House Boundaries



in legislators passing the buck on issues important to Asian Americans. "Because they serve multiple communities, legislators might be inclined to shift responsibilities," Gandhi said.

Her institute used socio-economic data, such as income levels and access to cultural and linguistic agencies, to testify and produce proposed maps for the Illinois Senate Redistricting Committee. The institute's proposed maps concentrate areas with substantial Asian-American population into fewer or single districts. The result, said Gandhi, will be an improved redressal of ethnic issues and better social services for Asian Americans.

The initiative might also lead to more South Asian politicians, felt Jafer Hasnain, board member, Asian American

Institute. Hasnain said good redistricting can bring ethnic communities together and might encourage ethnic candidates to run for political office. "After all, *they (voters)* will see a bunch of faces that are similar to them," he said.

The AAI's moves to unify Asian Americans in Chicago's northern suburbs is rooted in the Illinois Voting Rights Act. The act, signed into law earlier this year, protects the political influence of minority groups during legislative redistricting. Thanks to that, prominent Asian-American leaders successfully pushed state authorities to unite Chinatown, which was earlier divided into three state Senate districts, four state House districts, and three Congressional districts.

"I don't see why something similar should not be possible for South Asians," said Hasnain.

That possibility may take some time.

Daniel Biss, Democratic state representative for the 17th district that contains a significant Asian-American (and Indian-American) population, said redistricting is a complex process.

"There are so many different competing interests that it is difficult to accommodate all of them," he said. He admitted that some progress was made during this cycle. "The densest concentrations of South Asians were made more cohesive with the redistricting and there is a greater chance of people from a specific ethnicity to get elected," he said.

Redistricting along ethnic lines may not be enough to guarantee Krishnamoorthi victory in the rough and tumble of Chicago politics.

"The Indian-American community by itself will not be enough to get Raja re-elected," said Hasnain. "Instead, he will have to reach out to the wider Asian-American community."

Perhaps realizing that, Krishnamoorthi underlined his ethnic credentials with a common appeal. "What unifies our district is a desire to get the economy moving," he said.

## TIA — This is America!

ASEEM CHHABRA

Poor little girl! Her parents sent her to New York University, by all accounts a good school. But her one arrogant, thoughtless, silly piece of behavior resulted in that degree and anything else she has achieved in her young life being thrown out of the window of the Metro North train she was recently riding, somewhere in the middle of Connecticut.

If you don't know yet, the girl in question is a young woman, presumably of South Asian origin, who was riding a Metro North train and reportedly talking very loudly on the phone, when a train conductor, an African-American woman, asked her to lower her voice and not to swear.

The girl in question took great offense to being singled out in the train full of commuters, and launched a tirade. A fellow

commuter captured her anger on a cell phone video, which was first posted on YouTube. It went viral.

"Excuse me?" the girl in question is heard saying on the video. 'Do you know what schools I've been to and how well educated I am?' As the argument escalated, the conductor kept her cool; not the girl in question; she added: 'Do you think I'm a little hoodlum? I'm not a crazy person. I am a very well educated person.'

At this point, the girl in question is seen getting up and leaving her seat.

Poor little girl has since become the laughing stock of the Internet (it really is a small wide world, dontcha agree?), especially after the train's driver asked the passengers to behave, adding 'especially those people who went to Harvard or Yale or are from Westport.'

The original video has since been removed from YouTube; yet there are

hundreds of other Web sites carrying it; and the commentators below are all ridiculing girl in question's arrogant behavior.

And here is the biggest shocker; some people even dug up her personal and professional history. I am not sure how, but they found out her name though she was not identified by name anywhere in the original video. Some people posted the link to her LinkedIn profile, which notes all her education and her work history, including that she once briefly worked as a congressional intern in Washington, DC.

I do not want to condone the girl in question's behavior. And I do not think her arrogance had anything to do with her ethnicity. In all of the attacks against her, not one person has raised the issue of her origin, though I do find it interesting that her arrogance was projected at an African-American female.

Despite her stupidity, I feel very sorry

for the girl in question who is probably 27 years old (she graduated from high school in 2002). I cannot even begin to imagine what she must be going through; I wonder how her employers have reacted, and what her parents said to her. It could impact her future career, which, again, is very unfortunate. Most of us have at some point done and said stupid things that we have later regretted. Most of us were not videotaped and ridiculed. The girl became a victim of today's world of citizen journalists.

I'd like to look at the bright side. Someday she can appear on the next show Oprah Winfrey will host and talk about her ordeal. She can write an inspirational book about how this one incident changed her forever. She can get a big book deal and even a Hollywood contract out of it. With due apologies to Leonardo DiCaprio in *Blood Diamond*, TIA — This is America!