

## Editorial: Stand up for ‘one person, one vote’

By The Bee Editorial Board

For a half century, “one person, one vote” has been the law of the land, a bedrock principle of our democracy.

Now, the same conservative majority on the U.S. Supreme Court that gutted the 1965 Voting Rights Act two years ago is taking up a case that could rip equal representation to shreds as well.

To the surprise of many legal experts, the high court agreed last week to hear arguments this fall on whether election districts should continue to be drawn by using overall population, or whether only citizens eligible to vote should be counted.

Justices need to remember: We elect people to represent everyone who resides in their district, no matter their age or ethnic background, station in life, political views — or whether he or she is a citizen.

We have to remember how unfair political representation was before the landmark 1964 ruling in which the Supreme Court adopted “one person, one vote.” At the time, many state legislatures favored less populated rural areas. In California, there was one state senator for 6 million residents of Los Angeles County and one senator for 14,000 people in the smallest rural county.

The potential impact of changing “one person, one vote” is staggering, especially in California, Texas and other states with large numbers of noncitizens.

At the least, a ruling that districts must have an equal number of eligible voters could drastically change California’s political map for local and legislative seats, particularly in parts of the Central Valley and Southern California. Districts with large numbers of noncitizens — legal and illegal immigrants — could be combined.

Political analysts say that could decrease the number of districts likely to elect Latinos. It would also shift power to wealthier suburbs, where fewer immigrants can afford to live, and to Northern California, where there are fewer noncitizens.

If the high court decides to extend a ruling to congressional districts, California could lose clout in Washington, D.C. If noncitizens are taken out of the equation for reapportionment following the 2020 census, the size of California’s delegation would not match its population. Political consultant Paul Mitchell estimates that California could lose six of its 53 House seats. Across the nation, rural Republicans could gain power at the expense of urban Democrats.

Conservative activists in Texas seeking the change argue that the right to an equal vote is being violated because some districts have far more citizens of voting age than others.

After the 2010 census, GOP-controlled legislatures in several states, including Texas, gerrymandered congressional districts to favor Republicans. Leading up to the 2012 election, Republican governors and lawmakers in several states, again including Texas, pushed through voter ID laws, purged voter lists and restricted voting hours — all to suppress turnout among Democratic-leaning minorities.

The U.S. Supreme Court wouldn’t really take part in a highly partisan strategy. Would it?