Synopsis of the Case
Charles Baker was a Republican who lived in Shelby County, Tennessee, and had served as the mayor of Millington, Tennessee, near Memphis. The Tennessee State Constitution required that legislative districts for the Tennessee General Assembly be redrawn every ten years according to the federal census to provide for districts of substantially equal population (as was to be done for congressional districts). Baker's complaint was that Tennessee had not redistricted since 1901, in response to the 1900 census. It is now 1959.

By the time of Baker's lawsuit, the population had shifted such that his district in Shelby County had about ten times as many residents as some of the rural districts. The votes of rural citizens were overrepresented compared to those of urban citizens. Baker's argument was that this discrepancy was causing him to fail to receive the "equal protection of the laws" required by the 14th Amendment.

Joe Carr was sued in his position as Secretary of State for Tennessee. Carr was not the person who set the district lines — the state legislature had done that — but was sued ex officio as the person who was ultimately responsible for the conduct of elections in the state and for the publication of district maps. The state of Tennessee argued that the composition of legislative districts was essentially a political question, not a judicial one.

Judgement:
In a 6-2 decision, the Court held that the redistricting of state legislative districts is not a political question, and thus is justiciable by the federal courts (thereby allowing federal courts to intervene).

Court Judicial Interpretation
- The decision of Baker v. Carr was one of the most wrenching in the Court's history. The case had to be put over for re-argument because in conference no clear majority emerged for either side of the case. (Justice Whittaker was so torn over the case that he eventually had to recuse himself for health reasons.)
- The Court split 6 to 2 in ruling that Baker's case was justiciable, producing, in addition to the majority opinion, three concurring opinions and two dissenting opinions.
- Court said that Tennessee refusal to follow the expressed law of remapping the districts was in direct violation of the 14th Amendment's equal protection clause.
- Brennan reformulated the political question doctrine, identifying six factors to help in determining which questions were "political" in nature. Cases that are political in nature are marked by:
  1. "Textually demonstrable constitutional commitment of the issue to a coordinate political department;" as an example of this, Brennan cited issues of foreign affairs and executive war powers, arguing that cases involving such matters would be "political questions"
  2. "A lack of judicially discoverable and manageable standards for resolving it"
  3. "The impossibility of deciding without an initial policy determination of a kind clearly for nonjudicial discretion"
  4. "The impossibility of a court's undertaking independent resolution without expressing lack of the respect due coordinate branches of government"
  5. "An unusual need for unquestioning adherence to a political decision already made"
  6. "The potentiality of embarrassment from multifarious pronouncements by various departments on one question."
- Having declared redistricting issues justiciable in Baker, the court laid out a new test for evaluating such claims. The Court formulated the "one person, one vote" standard under American jurisprudence for legislative redistricting, holding that each individual had to be weighted equally in legislative apportionment. (it was hinted at in Beker, but nor formally enunciated until Reynolds v Sims in 1964). This affected numerous state legislatures that had not redistricted congressional districts for decades, despite major population shifts. It also ultimately affected the composition of state legislative districts as well, which in Alabama and numerous other states had overrepresented rural districts and underrepresented urban districts with much greater populations.
- The large majority in this case can in many ways be attributed to Justice Brennan, who convinced Potter Stewart that the case was a narrow ruling dealing only with the right to challenge the statute. Brennan also talked down Justices Black and Douglas from their usual absolutist positions to achieve a compromise.
Key Quotes for the Dissenting Opinions
➢ Justice Frankfurter, joined by Justice Harlan, dissented vigorously and at length, arguing that the Court had cast aside history and judicial restraint, and violated the separation of powers between legislatures and Courts.

Related Cases
Reynolds v Sims (1964). The Court struck down state senate inequality, basing their decision on the principle of "one person, one vote." Baker v Carr gave the Court jurisdiction over the questions in Reynolds, and the Justices build on the ‘one man, one vote’ concept introduced in Baker. Other cases similarly affected were Wesberry v Sanders (1964), Gray v Sanders (1963) and Avery v Midland County (1968)