

**Redistricting Commission
Packet
February 22, 2011**

The ReDistricting Game – USC Annenberg Center

Glossary

Compactness

Refers to extent to which a district's geography is dispersed around its center. Districts should not be too diffuse (i.e., extend too far from the center of the district).

Contiguity

A requirement mandating that a district be in one piece (e.g. a district cannot have an "island" floating in another district).

Community of Interest

A term sometimes used to describe a grouping of people, such as in a specific region or neighborhood, that have common political, social, or economic interests.

Gerrymander(ing)

Gerrymandering refers to the intentional manipulation of district boundaries for individual or partisan gain. The term was coined in reference to a plan signed by Elbridge Gerry (1744-1814), the governor of Massachusetts from 1810 to 1812. A partisan gerrymander occurs when a majority party draws district lines in a manner that intentionally prevents the election and reelection of candidates from the other party, thereby giving a disproportionate advantage to one political party at the expense of the other. A bipartisan gerrymander occurs when the two major parties mutually agree to preserve or increase the safety of their

representatives' seats by creating safe-districts packed with commanding majorities of a single party.

Minority Vote Dilution

The creation of districts that either (1) divide members of a racial or ethnic minority group among several districts, artificially reducing the group's opportunity to influence elections (see "Fragmentation") or (2) place high percentages of members of a racial or ethnic minority group in one or more districts so that minority voting strength is artificially limited to those districts and is minimized in neighboring districts (see "Packing").

One person, one vote

The principle that each person's vote should count the same as every other person's vote; it is achieved by the allocation of the same or substantially the same population to each district of a particular type, such as a congressional district. The courts derive the one-person, one-vote standard primarily from the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. For congressional districts, the one-person, one-vote requirement also derives from Section 2, Article I, and from Section 2 of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Majority-minority district: A district containing a majority (50% plus 1) of minority population.

Racially Polarized Voting

The term used to describe circumstances in which the voting preferences of a racial or ethnic group consistently vary from those of other racial or ethnic groups, particularly when the different voting preferences are based on the race of the candidate. Also referred to as "racial bloc voting" or RBV.

Redistricting

Redistricting is the redrawing or adjusting of electoral district boundaries every ten years to account for population shifts and growth during the previous decade.

Retrogression

The term used to describe a reduction in the voting strength of a racial or ethnic group resulting from a redistricting plan or other change in election procedures. Retrogression is the primary test used for evaluating a change in election procedures for preclearance under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act.

Single-Member District

A District that elects only one representative.

Traditional Districting Principles

A term often used to refer to criteria, such as compactness and contiguity, that have historically been considered in drawing legislative or other districts.

Undercount

The error in census data that results from the failure to count some persons or housing units in the decennial census. Historically, certain groups, such as members of racial or ethnic minorities, have been disproportionately undercounted by the federal census.

Voting Age Population (VAP)

The number of persons in a geographic unit who are at least 18 years of age. Because some population groups, such as racial or ethnic minorities, tend to be younger on average than the population as a whole, the voting age populations are frequently compared in evaluating the potential voting strength of those groups.

Voting Rights Act

The Voting Rights Act was passed by Congress in 1965. It protects every American against racial discrimination in voting and is not limited to discrimination that literally excludes minority voters from the polls. It stands for the principle that everyone's vote is equal, and that neither race nor language should shut any of us out of the political process.

[Also listed was the Tanner Bill/Proposal, but I omitted it as not germane.]

Glossary

Confused by the difference between redistribution and reapportionment? Wondering what a gerrymander looks like? This is your key to the language and concepts behind redistricting.

Census

The United States Census is a population enumeration conducted every 10 years, the results of which are used to allocate Congressional seats, electoral votes and government program funding. As part of the Census, detailed demographic information is collected and aggregated to a number of geographical levels. This data is used during the redistricting process, both by partisan interests and by redistricting authorities and the courts. The next census day is April 1, 2010. The Census Bureau must deliver population data to the President for apportionment by December 2010 and must deliver redistricting data to the states by March 2011.



Community of Interest

Although the preservation of "communities of interest" is required by many districting laws, the meaning of the term varies from place to place, if it is defined at all. The term can be taken to mean anything from ethnic groups to those with shared economic interests to users of common infrastructure to those in the same media market. The Brennan Center for Justice provides a [helpful summary](#) of some of these uses.

Contiguity

Like compactness, contiguity is considered one of the "traditional" redistricting principles. Most redistricting statutes mandate that districts be contiguous-- that is, they are a single, unbroken shape. Two areas touching at their corners are typically not considered contiguous. An obvious exception would be the inclusion of islands in a coastal district.

Compactness

One of the "traditional" redistricting principles, low compactness is



considered to be a sign of potential gerrymandering by courts, state law and the academic literature. More often than not, though, compactness is ill-defined by the "I know it when I see it" standard. Geographers, mathematicians and political scientists have devised countless measures of compactness, each representing a different conception, and some of these have found their way into law. For a more in-depth discussion of the role of compactness in the redistricting process, read Azavea's [white paper](#), "Redrawing the Map on Redistricting 2010: The National Study."

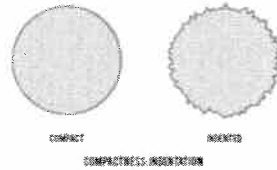


Dispersion
Dispersion-based measures of compactness, such

COMPACT DISPERSED
COMPACTNESS, DISPERSION

enlarge

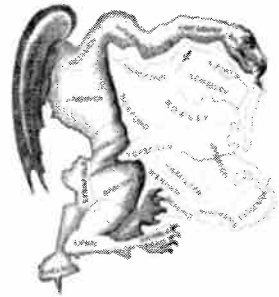
as the Reock and convex hull measures used on this site, evaluate the extent to which a shape's area is spread out from a central point. A circle is very compact, while a barbell is less compact.



enlarge

Indentation
Perimeter-area based measures of compactness, like the Polsby-Popper and Schwartzberg measures used on this site, primarily evaluate the indentation of

district boundaries. Shapes with a smooth perimeter are more compact, while those with a contorted, squiggly perimeter are less compact.



enlarge/credit

Gerrymandering

Gerrymandering is the process by which district boundaries are drawn to confer an electoral advantage on one group over another. The term is a portmanteau word formed from the surname of Massachusetts Governor Elbridge Gerry and the salamander shape of the district he approved, which appeared in an 1812 cartoon. Gerrymandering can take on many forms.

- **Political**

A political gerrymander is typically conducted by the majority party to strengthen or maintain their electoral advantage. In a 5-4 decision in *Vieth v. Jubelirer* the Supreme Court rejected a challenge to politically gerrymandered districts due to a lack of justiciable standards, meaning that political gerrymandering can be conducted legally.

- **Sweetheart**

A sweetheart or incumbent gerrymander results from an agreement by both major political parties to draw district boundaries to create safe districts for incumbents. See Fig. 2 in "Packing and Cracking" illustration.

- **Racial**

The term racial gerrymandering initially designated the post-Reconstruction practice which, like poll taxes and literacy tests, was designed to disenfranchise African-Americans. Legislative

district boundaries were drawn with the aim of diluting the electoral power of newly registered voters from ethnic minority groups.

Following the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, this practice was prohibited; indeed, in many circumstances, the statute in fact requires the creation of majority-minority districts. The practice of drawing districts that would afford racial and ethnic minorities the opportunity for elected representation has come to be known as affirmative gerrymandering or—in a somewhat ironic reversal—racial gerrymandering.

Beyond the requirements of the Voting Rights Act, there are legal limits on drawing districts based on race, particularly for smaller populations. A number of recent Supreme Court rulings—such as Miller v. Johnson, Bush v. Vera and Shaw v. Reno—indicate that in cases where race is the sole or predominant factor, or where the shape of a district cannot be explained on grounds other than race, district boundaries must be held to a strict standard of scrutiny. Absent a compelling government reason for the district's shape, it will be viewed as violating the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution.

This is likely to remain a contentious issue, particularly as the demographic composition of the country continues to shift and multiple ethnic minority groups share physical space and merit elected representation.

- **Prison**

The one person, one vote principle is distorted by the inclusion of large prison populations in the calculations of district population, despite the fact that inmates are rarely constituents of the areas where they are incarcerated. In districts that include large, disenfranchised prison populations, the ballots of the remaining voters hold a disproportionate amount of weight.



Nesting

Nesting is a redistricting policy by which the geographical boundaries of two or

more state lower legislative chamber districts are completely contained within the boundaries of a state upper legislative chamber district. This can be achieved either by first designating senate district boundaries and then splitting these into house districts, or by drawing house district boundaries and then consolidating these to form senate districts. Nesting is mandated in full or in part in 12 states.

Packing & Cracking



Packing and cracking are common methods of gerrymandering, used to minimize the impact of a voting

bloc. Packing concentrates members of a group in a single district, thereby allowing the other party to win the remainder of the districts. Cracking splits a bloc among multiple districts, so as to dilute their impact and to prevent them from constituting a majority. These methods are frequently used in conjunction with each other.

Reapportionment

Reapportionment (referred to as redistribution outside the US) is the process of allocating seats in a legislative body to geographical areas. Reapportionment is particularly important in the case of the U.S. Congress, where the number of seats in the House of Representatives is fixed at 435 and the number of seats allocated to each state is reevaluated following each decennial Census. When the number of seats assigned to a state changes, the state must redistrict.

Redistricting

Redistricting is typically conducted to ensure that district populations are equal in size, thus supporting the principle of "one person, one vote". For this reason, redistricting typically occurs after a population census, so that district boundaries reflect the most recent, accurate information about population distribution that is available.

Voting age population

When evaluating districting plans, analysts may elect to use the voting age population rather than the total population as the basis of comparison to ensure that the principle of one person, one vote is upheld.

Voting Rights Act

The National Voting Rights Act of 1965 was a landmark piece of civil rights legislation that outlawed discriminatory voting practices-- racial gerrymandering among them-- that had been used to disenfranchise African Americans. Crucially, Section 5 of the act requires that jurisdictions with a history of discriminatory practices secure federal preclearance for proposed changes to electoral practices, including the introduction of new district plans. Section 2 prohibits any voting practice or procedure that has a discriminatory result, but in 2009 the Supreme Court ruled that this does not constitute a requirement that authorities draw district lines favorable to minorities when they constitute less than half the population.

www.prcdc.org

Population Resource Center: Making the Census Count

Census Terminology [Selected]

Census Block

Census blocks are the smallest geographic area for which the Census Bureau collects and tabulates decennial census data. These units are formed by streets, streams and other bodies of water, other visible physical and cultural features and the legal boundaries shown on Census Bureau maps. There are over 8 million blocks in the United States.

Census Tract

A neighborhood with roughly 1,700 housing units and 4,000 people delineated for the purpose of presenting census data. Tracts are designed to have homogenous population characteristics, economic status, and living conditions. There will be more than 63,000 census tracts in 2010.

Race And Ethnicity

The Census Bureau collects and publishes racial statistics as outlined in *Standards for Maintaining, Collecting and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity* (formerly known as Statistical Policy Directive No. 15) issued by the Office of Management and Budget. This directive provides standards on ethnic and racial categories for statistical reporting to be used by all Federal agencies. Race data are required by federal programs that promote equal employment opportunity and are needed to assess racial disparities in health and environmental risks, among other uses. According to the directive, the basic racial categories are: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Black or African-American, and White. Ethnicity is determined by whether or not a person is of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.

Redistricting

The revision of political boundaries – most commonly congressional districts, but also state legislative districts and municipal election wards and districts – based on the results of a new decennial census.

Voting Rights Act

The Voting Rights Act was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1965. Under the Voting Rights Act, the Census Bureau is required to provide race and ethnic data to the states for small geographic areas to be used for the redistricting process and to identify minority language groups that require voting materials in their own language.

This glossary was prepared by Edward J. Spar, Executive Director of the Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics in the summer of 2008. *Making the Census Count* is funded by a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Sources include: Bureau of the Census, "Report to Congress: The Plan for Census 2010," Bureau of the Census, "Glossary of Decennial Census Terms and Acronyms", Bureau of the Census, "Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2008," Bureau of the Census, "Subjects Planned for Census 2010," Federal Legislative and Program Uses, Office of Management and Budget, "Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity," and National Research Council, "The 2000 Census Counting Under Adversity."

Glossary of Terms

Apportionment

Following each census, the 435 seats in the United States House of Representatives are apportioned to each state based on state population. The larger the state population, the more congressional representatives the state will be apportioned. Apportionment, unlike redistricting, does not involve map drawing.

At-large election system

An at-large election system is one in which all voters can vote for all candidates running for open seats in the jurisdiction. In an at-large election system candidates run in an entire jurisdiction rather than from districts or wards within the area. For example, a city with three open city council positions where all candidates for the three seats run against each other and the top three receiving the most votes citywide are elected is an at-large election system. In at-large election systems, 50% of the voters control 100% of the seats. At-large election systems can have discriminatory effects on minorities where minority and majority voters consistently prefer different candidates and the majority will regularly defeat the choices of minority voters because of their numerical superiority.

Census block

The smallest level of census geography used by the Census Bureau to collect census data. Census blocks are formed by streets, roads, bodies of water, other physical features and legal boundaries shown on Census Bureau maps. Redistricting is based on census block level data.

Census tract

A level of census geography larger than a census block or census block group that usually corresponds to neighborhood boundaries and is composed of census blocks.

Community of interest

A community of interest is a neighborhood or community that would benefit from being maintained in a single district because of shared interests, views or characteristics.

Compactness

A term used to describe the appearance of a district. Compactness refers to the overall shape of the district.

Contiguous

A term used to describe the appearance of a district. A geographically contiguous district is one in which all parts of the district are attached to each other.

Cracking

A form of dilution occurring when districts are drawn so as to divide a geographically compact minority community into two or more districts. If the minority community is politically cohesive and could elect a preferred candidate if placed in one district but, due to cracking, the minority population is divided into two or more districts where it no longer has any electoral control or influence, the voting strength of the minority population is diluted.

Crossover Districts

A crossover district is one in which minorities do not form a numerical majority but still reliably control the outcome of the election with some non-minority voters crossing over to vote with the minority group.

BROWSE THIS SECTION

[State Information](#)

[Glossary of Terms](#)

[Section 5 Jurisdictions](#)

GOVERNMENT RESOURCES

General resources on redistricting can be found at the following sites which describe post census redistricting:

[Census Bureau Redistricting WebSite](#)

[Congressional Research Service Reports \(Courtesy-University of North Texas Library\)](#)

[National Conference of State Legislatures \(Non-governmental\)](#)

[State Information](#)

Deviation

The deviation is any amount of population that is less than or greater than the ideal population of a district. The law allows for some deviation in state and local redistricting plans. However, Congressional districts must not deviate too far from the ideal population. See below for definition of "ideal population."

Gerrymandering

The drawing of electoral districts to give one group or party an unfair advantage over another.

Gingles Factors

The Gingles factors are three preconditions set forth by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Thornburg v. Gingles*, 478 U.S. 30 (1986), that a minority group must prove to establish a violation of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. These preconditions are the following: 1) a minority group must be sufficiently large and geographically compact to comprise a majority of the district; 2) the minority group must be politically cohesive (it must demonstrate a pattern of voting for the same candidates); and, 3) white voters vote sufficiently as a bloc usually to defeat the minority group's preferred candidate.

Ideal population

The ideal population is the number of persons required for each district to have equal population. The ideal population for each district is obtained by taking the total population of the jurisdiction and dividing it by the total number of districts in the jurisdiction. For example, if a county's population is 10,000 and there are five electoral districts, the ideal population for each district is 2,000.

Influence district

An influence district is one that includes a large number of minority voters but fewer than would allow the minority voters to control the election results when voting as a bloc. Minority voters are sufficient in number in "influence districts" to influence the outcome of the election.

Minority-coalition district

A minority-coalition district is a type of majority-minority district in which two or more minority groups combine to form a majority in a district. In most jurisdictions, minority-coalition districts are protected under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act if the requirements set forth in *Thornburg v. Gingles* are satisfied.

Majority-minority district

A majority-minority district is one in which racial or ethnic minorities comprise a majority (50% plus 1 or more) of the population. A majority-minority district can contain more than one minority group. Thus, a district that is 40% Hispanic and 11% African American is a majority-minority district, but it is not a majority Hispanic district. This is also referred to as a minority coalition district. See definition of minority-coalition district.

Minority opportunity district

A minority opportunity district is one that provides minority voters with an equal opportunity to elect a candidate of their choice regardless of the racial composition of the district.

Minority vote dilution

Minority vote dilution occurs when minority voters are deprived of an equal opportunity to elect a candidate of choice. It is prohibited under the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Examples of minority vote dilution include cracking, packing and the discriminatory effects of at-large election systems.

Multimember district

A district that elects two or more members to office.

One-person, one-vote

A constitutional requirement that requires each district to be substantially equal in total population.

Packing

A form of vote dilution prohibited under the Voting Rights Act where a minority group is overconcentrated in a small number of districts. For example, packing can occur when the African American population is concentrated into one district where it makes up 90% of the district, instead of two districts where it could be 50% of each district.

PL 94-171

The federal law that requires the United States Census Bureau to provide states with data for use in redistricting and mandates that states define the census blocks to be used for collecting data.

Political subdivision

A division of a state, such as a county, city or town.

Precinct

An area created by election officials to group voters for assignment to a designated polling place so that an election can be conducted. Precinct boundaries may change several times over the course of a decade.

Preclearance

Preclearance applies to jurisdictions that are covered under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. Preclearance refers to the process of seeking review and approval from either the United States Department of Justice or the federal court in the District of Columbia for any voting changes to a Section 5 covered jurisdiction. Redistricting plans in Section 5 covered jurisdictions must also receive preclearance.

Racially polarized voting or racial bloc voting

Racially polarized voting is a pattern of voting along racial lines where voters of the same race support the same candidate who is different from the candidate supported by voters of a different race.

Reapportionment

Same as apportionment.

Redistricting

Redistricting refers to the process by which census data is used to redraw the lines and boundaries of electoral districts within a state to ensure that districts are substantially equal in population. This process affects districts at all levels of government – from local school boards, wards, and city councils to state legislatures and the U.S. House of Representatives.

Retrogression

A voting change to a Section 5 covered jurisdiction that puts minorities in a worse position under the new scheme than under the existing one.

Section 2 (of the Voting Rights Act)

A key provision of the Voting Rights Act that protects minority voters from practices and procedures that deprive them of an effective vote because of their race, color or membership in a particular language minority group.

Section 5 (of the Voting Rights Act)

A key provision of the Voting Rights Act that prohibits jurisdictions covered by Section 5 from adopting voting changes, including redistricting plans, that worsen the position of minority voters or changes adopted with a discriminatory purpose. See preclearance.

Single-shot voting

Single-shot voting can be described as follows: "Consider a town of 600 whites and 400 blacks with an at-large election to choose four council members. Each voter is able to cast four votes. Suppose there are eight white candidates, with the votes of the whites split among them approximately equally, and one black candidate, with all the blacks voting for him and no one else. The result is that each white candidate receives about 300 votes and the black candidate receives 400 votes. The black has probably won a seat. This technique is called single-shot voting." U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *The Voting Rights Act: Ten Years After*, pp. 206-207 (1975).

Traditional redistricting principles

Traditional redistricting criteria applied by a state such as compactness, contiguity, respect for political subdivisions, respect for communities of interest, and protection of incumbents.

Undercount

The number of Americans missed in the census.