

Redistricting FAQ

What is redistricting?

California's population continues to change in size, and our mobility means our population shifts. Accordingly, every ten years, following the federal census, the districts from which we elect our representatives must be adjusted so they are equal in population. This process is known as "redistricting." The next time redistricting will happen is in 2011.

Who draws the lines?

An independent Citizens Redistricting Commission will draw the maps for Congress, the state Senate and Assembly and the Board of Equalization. This commission consists of five Democrats, five Republicans and four members who don't belong to either party. In order to help the commissioners make their decisions, the commission will hold public meetings across California and listen to testimony from residents about their communities and neighborhoods.

What are the rules for creating new districts?

The commission must use the following criteria, in this order of priority, to draw the new maps:

- Population equality
- Compliance with the federal Voting Rights Act (VRA)
- Contiguity
- Geographic integrity of any city, county, city and county, local neighborhood, or local community of interest
- Compactness
- Nesting
- No consideration of incumbents' or candidates' residences
- No favoring or discrimination against political parties, incumbents, or candidates

Could you explain what these criteria mean?

- Population equality: a requirement that political districts have a "reasonably equal" number of residents. The standard for a Congressional district is almost exactly equal. The Supreme Court has allowed more flexibility for state legislative districts. A standard for California legislative districts has been that the total population deviation should not exceed 1%.
- Compliance with the federal Voting Rights Act: a civil rights law that prohibits discriminatory voting practices. Section 2 of the VRA protects against diluting a racial minority's vote where (1)

the racial minority is big enough to make up a majority in one district, (2) the minority group is politically cohesive, and (3) the majority votes as a bloc to consistently defeat the minority group's preferred candidate.

- Contiguity: all areas in the district are physically connected to each other.
- Geographic integrity of any city, county, city and county, local neighborhood or local community of interest: to the extent possible, these entities shouldn't be divided and put into different districts.
- Community of interest: a community of interest is a community with shared characteristics, interests, or needs.
- Compactness: where practicable, districts should not be not too elongated or spread out or too jagged. California's rule takes into account where people are clustered.
- Nesting: where practicable, each state Senate district will encompass two state Assembly districts; each Board of Equalization district will encompass ten state Senate districts.
- No consideration of incumbent or candidate residences: districts can't be drawn to favor or disfavor a current officeholder or a candidate for an office.

How will all this happen?

The commission will hold public hearings around the state to hear testimony from people about district lines and their communities. Using U.S. census data for California, testimony from the public and the above criteria for drawing districts, the commission will create statewide plans for the various offices. These maps will be published and the public will have a chance to comment in public hearings or in written testimony sent to the commission. After the comment period closes the commissioners will make any adjustments they think are necessary and then draw the final maps.

How long will this take?

The commission begins work on January 12, 2011. The final maps must be submitted to the Secretary of State by August 15, 2011.

Why should I care about any of this?

Every ten years district lines are redrawn to assure that all districts have nearly equal population. Populations change over a decade. If districts are redrawn to keep communities intact, people are better able to elect representatives who will further their interests.

It's important that elected officials listen to the public, and not just to special interests. When we have districts that keep communities together, they can speak to their representatives with strength and power. When they are divided, elected officials are more likely to ignore their needs. So being a part of the process to draw fair districts is crucial for your community.

How can I get involved?

- Attend a public hearing and talk about your community, or submit a letter to the commission online at <http://www.wedrawthelines.ca.gov/>
- Visit one of [six regional redistricting assistance centers](#) to learn how to describe and draw maps of your communities and how to speak to the commission.
- Find a wealth of information at [the Statewide Database](#), the redistricting database for the state of California <http://swdb.berkeley.edu/index.html>

- Connect with the [League of Women Voters of California](http://www.cavotes.org/issues/redistricting-implementation) for information and help in finding resources. <http://www.cavotes.org/issues/redistricting-implementation>
- Follow the work of the commission live or by delayed broadcast at <http://www.wedrawthelines.ca.gov/>