

Redistricting Overview

Updated February 2021



What is Redistricting and why is it done?

Redistricting is the process used by governments to redraw political district boundaries. Redistricting applies to all levels of government where district elections are held, including U.S. House of Representatives, state legislatures, city councils, school boards, county boards, and more.

Redistricting enacts the principle of “one person, one vote”, which ensures that each of our voices can be represented equally, by creating districts that have the same number of people. Census data that is collected every ten years is used to draw new maps to account for the ways populations have moved across the states and districts.

Why is it important?

How district lines are drawn influences who runs and who is elected. Elected representatives make decisions that are important to your lives, from securing safe schools to adopting immigration policies. Who lives in a district can influence whether elected officials feel obligated to respond to a community’s needs. The district boundaries are in place for the next 10 years, and their policy impacts can last well beyond that.

Why should I be involved?

Historically, redistricting has been used to exclude communities from political power. By fully participating and monitoring the upcoming redistricting process, underrepresented communities, such as African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans will have the opportunity to elect candidates of their choice and voice their needs and interests. District boundaries are generally drawn only once every 10 years, so this process has long-term effects on electoral politics.

Who is in charge of redistricting?

In most states, the state or local government is responsible for redistricting. Most state legislatures are responsible for drawing congressional districts and state legislative districts. Local governments are responsible for redistricting their own districts. Increasingly, states and local jurisdictions are using some form of commission to carry out redistricting responsibilities. In some places, the process is not always transparent, so it is important to become familiar and pay attention to which process your jurisdiction of interest uses. Contact your elected officials to get the most updated information.

When does redistricting take place?

The next Census happens in the year 2020. Redistricting typically takes place one year later. States and local area will have its own timelines for redrawing districts, based on when they get the census data in early 2021 and when the next set of elections are scheduled. Most redistricting processes will begin in 2021. Communities can begin getting organized by building coalitions, collecting community data and stories before the official process begins.