

Campus and Student Guide to Redistricting



Created for faculty, staff and students

What Is Redistricting?

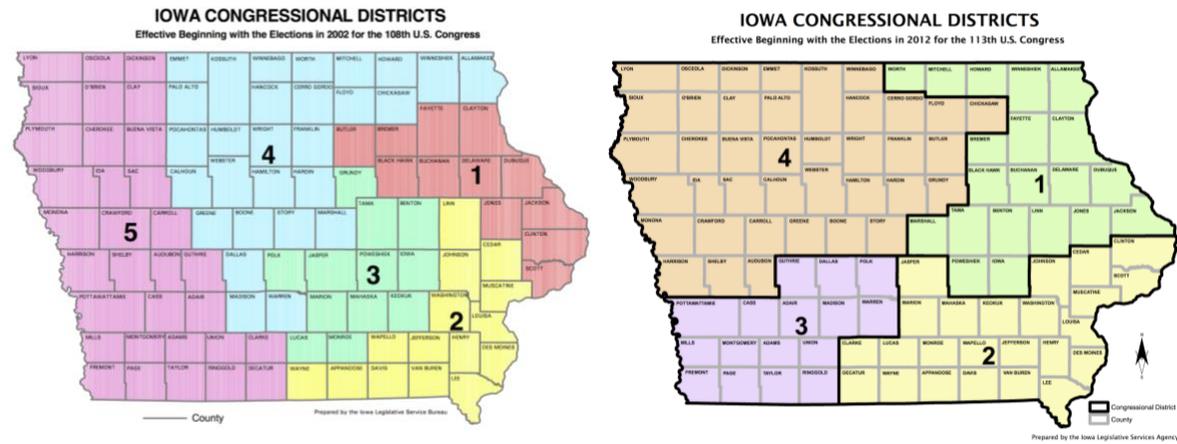
Every ten years, state governments redraw congressional and state legislative boundaries, while local governments redraw local legislative district boundaries. They do this to reflect population changes as measured by the most recent U.S. census. The census took place in 2020, so in 2021, state and local governments are redrawing these boundaries once again. Here's a concise [look at redistricting](#) and [a more detailed explanation](#). The legislative districts established now will be used for federal, state and local elections for the next decade, until they are revised based on the 2030 census.

Each state handles its own redistricting, dividing the people of their state into geographic districts of roughly the same number of individuals. In many states, the state legislature is responsible for establishing the new district boundaries, sometimes with the governor having veto or approval power. Twenty-one states currently use some form of nonpartisan or bipartisan [independent commissions](#) designed to increase the transparency and fairness of the redistricting process. Here is a look at [varying policies and procedures for redistricting](#).

Below is an example of how districts can change from one redistricting cycle to the next. On the **left** is a picture of Iowa's U.S. congressional districts in 2001. On the **right** is a picture of Iowa's U.S. congressional districts in 2011. After the 2010 census, [Iowa lost one U.S. congressional seat](#). As a result, the congressional lines across the entirety of the state had to shift to account for not only population changes, but also a decrease in districts.



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Why Is Redistricting Important?

Because populations of states change, states may get more or fewer congressional representatives every ten years. Reapportionment is the process by which the U.S. Congress determines how many U.S. House of Representatives seats each state receives based on population changes recorded in the census. After finding out how many representatives it will have, states can then begin the redistricting process.

Electoral district lines establish the geographic group of residents who elect each state's representatives. Having districts drawn fairly ensures that everyone's vote has equal weight and equal power to determine their elected representatives. Many states have adopted principles to guide fair redistricting, including making districts compact, contiguous and within county, city or town borders; preserving communities of interest and prior districts; and not using partisan data in drawing new boundaries.

Redistricting can be a highly contentious process, since the way each district is drawn may help determine who wins a particular race. In 38 states, the same party controls the governorship and both houses of the legislature, in what is called a trifecta. (In 2021, there are [23 Republican trifectas](#) and [15 Democratic trifectas](#).) With a trifecta, a state party has the ability to redraw the districts however it likes, with little or no input from



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the opposition, depending on the state's redistricting process.

What Are Communities of Interest in Redistricting?

The term "communities of interest" refers to groups of individuals with common interests, including shared racial, economic, geographic or cultural concerns. For example, students at an urban college could be one community of interest based on their shared concerns, while a group of ranchers in a rural community could be another community of interest. Keeping these communities within the same district can enhance their ability to elect representatives who share their concerns, while dividing communities of interest between multiple districts has the potential to undermine their electoral power. For this reason, it is critical to consider and get input from communities of interest as lines are redrawn during redistricting.

What Is Gerrymandering?

While [redistricting criteria](#) are constructed to maintain nonpartisanship, the process has historically devolved into strategic partisan divides, more commonly referred to as gerrymandering. Gerrymandering is the process by which politicians, from both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party, ensure a built-in advantage for their party by manipulating the boundaries of a voting district to create a result that helps them or hurts the group who is against them. There are two common practices used in gerrymandering: "packing" and "cracking." Packing occurs when voters of one type are crowded into one district so that their influence is heavily concentrated in one district, as opposed to being spread across multiple districts. Cracking occurs when voters of one type are fractured out into multiple districts so that they are unable to form large enough voting blocs within their district to have meaningful influence.

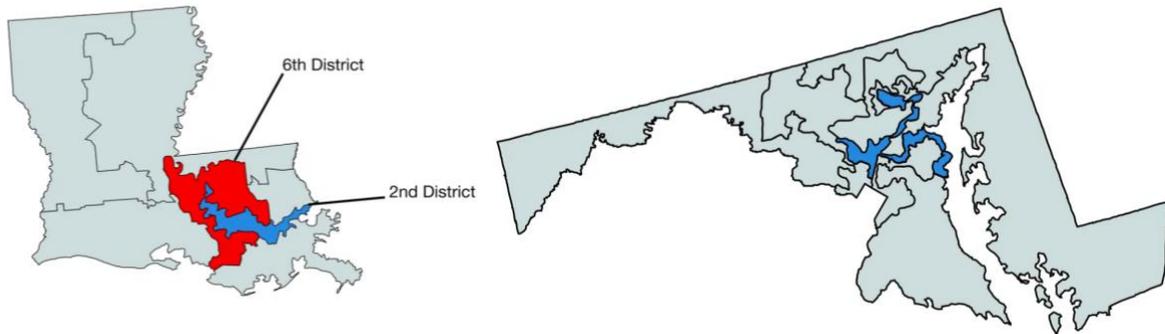
Often, a gerrymandered district may be recognizable by its convoluted shape. On the **left**, [Republicans packed majority-Black households](#) into Louisiana's 2nd Congressional District to maintain a partisan advantage in Louisiana's 6th District. On the **right** is Maryland's 3rd Congressional District, which ranks as one of the [least compact and most gerrymandered districts in the country](#). Unlike Louisiana's 6th District, Maryland's 3rd was constructed to maintain a Democratic-controlled partisan advantage. Politicians



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weaponize census data to create the friendliest voter environment for their party. Historically, this has [disadvantaged communities of color](#) and [college students](#).

How Can I Get Involved in Redistricting?



1. Get educated.

With the redistricting process just getting underway, now is a good time to familiarize yourself with the rules and process. [Ballotpedia](#) and [All About Redistricting](#) are good sources of information on how your state conducts redistricting. [GerryMander](#) is a quick fun game that demonstrates the consequences of how district boundaries are drawn. You can see redistricting data at [OpenPrecincts](#). [FairVote](#) provides a good overview of redistricting reforms, from the use of independent commissions to adopting standards promoting competitive and representative districts.

2. Create your own district maps.

There are many websites that let people create their own district maps to share with legislators. [District Builder](#) is a free, login-required, open-source tool from the Public Mapping Project to give citizens the ability to create their own district maps. [Representable](#) is a similar, login-required platform, which focuses on mapping communities of interest. [Districtr](#) is another free, no-login-required web tool that has a focus on empowering communities. Once a map is created, it can be shared with state legislators or a redistricting commission.



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3. Attend live or virtual meetings.

Search “redistricting” on your state government website to find specifics on local meetings and opportunities for participation and input – this would be a great place to bring up your experience drawing maps in programs like Districtr. The National Conference of State Legislatures outlines approaches [to public input and redistricting](#), including allowing the public to submit maps, public comment and testimony, public hearings and citizen-initiated review. Students can attend live or virtual meetings, provide input and draft their own maps. Click on the [Princeton Gerrymandering Project map](#) to find an overview of the redistricting process in each state, along with contact information for state organizations working on redistricting.

4. Host or participate in a conversation on redistricting.

Living Room Conversations offers a free guide for a conversation on [The Census, Redistricting and Gerrymandering](#). See our resource [Campus Civic Discussions: A Nonpartisan Guide](#) for more ideas and guidance on campus civic dialogue both inside and outside the classroom. Discussion, research and engagement with redistricting also aligns well with coursework, as outlined in our [Redistricting in the Classroom](#) resource. You might also consider hosting a watch party for students to join redistricting meetings or organize a student group to engage in public feedback sessions together.

5. Advocate

Students and campus communities are “communities of interest” that should be considered in redistricting, ideally kept together in a single district rather than arbitrarily split down the middle into multiple districts. In order to take them into account, decision-makers need to be aware of those communities of interest. What other communities of interest do you belong to? Are the communities in your state being fairly represented? Help bring attention to your communities of interest by reaching out to federal, state and local representatives, writing a letter to the editor about redistricting, attending a public meeting, or joining a nonpartisan redistricting



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organization like [Redistricting Data Hub](#) or the [League of Women Voters](#).

Student media, campus websites, blogs, newsletter articles and campus social media are also great ways to make your voice heard in this process. Now is the time to join the redistricting conversation!

About Us

Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP) is a national nonpartisan project that helps administrators, faculty, staff and student leaders at America's institutions of higher education engage students in federal, state and local elections. CEEP views voting as a means to promote a more equitable and inclusive democracy and to address past and present disenfranchisement. To learn more, visit campuselect.org or contact us at info@campuselect.org.