

# Redistricting: Key Terms

**Census** – The counting and survey of every person in a population. In the U.S., a census is taken every ten years. The census is required by the Constitution for reapportionment and is used in the redistricting process.

**Census Bureau** – The federal government agency that administers the census.

**Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP)** – Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP) is the total population age 18 and over and a citizen. **(Related to VAP)**

**Coalition District** – A district where the combined racial minorities make up a majority of the population and where the voters from these different racial groups vote together to elect the minority-preferred candidate. Coalition districts are not legally required by the Voting Rights Act. **(Also called Minority Coalition District)**

**Community of Interest** – A neighborhood, community, or group of people who have common policy concerns and would benefit from being maintained in a single district.

**Compactness** – Compactness refers to the shape of the district. It describes boundaries that are drawn closely and neatly packed together unless there are good reasons such as VRA compliance or following oddly shaped boundaries, like city boundaries or rivers.

**Contiguity** – A characteristic describing a boundary's single and uninterrupted shape (i.e. all areas in the district are physically connected to each other).

**Cracking** – A splitting of a racial minority community into two or more districts so that the minority community is not a significant portion of any district. For example, cracking occurs when a minority population is big enough that it can make up 50% of one district but, instead, is divided into two or more districts so that the minority community makes up a small percentage in each district.

**Crossover or Opportunity District** – A district where some majority voters “cross over” to vote with racial minorities to elect the minority-preferred candidate. Crossover or opportunity districts are not legally required by the Voting Rights Act.

**Deviation and Deviation Range** – A district's **Deviation** is the difference of a district's population from the Ideal Population. The redistricting plan's **Deviation Range** is the plan's largest deviation to the plan's smallest deviation.

**Ideal Population** – The total population goal for districts in a redistricting plan. It is computed by taking the total population of the jurisdiction and dividing it by the total number of districts in the redistricting plan.

**Incumbency (criteria)** – Making sure the current elected official's house remains in a district.

**Influence District** – A district where a racial or ethnic minority group does not make up a majority of voters but does have enough members of the minority group to influence substantially an election or the decisions of an elected representative.

**Gerrymandering** – Drawing of district lines to give one group an unfair advantage over another group. Gerrymandering is *not* the same as redistricting, but gerrymandering can occur during redistricting. Drawing majority-minority districts to comply with the Voting Rights Act is *not* gerrymandering.

**GIS (Geographic Information System)** – Computer software used to create redistricting maps.

**Majority-Minority District** – A district where one racial minority equals 50% or more of the citizen voting-age population. In combination with a few other factors, a majority-minority district may be required by the VRA. **(See Rules of Redistricting: The Voting Rights Act)**

**Minority vote dilution** – Drawing districts which result in minority voters having less of a chance of electing their candidate(s) of choice. This is often done by “**packing**” or “**cracking**.”

**Nesting** – A redistricting rule where each upper house (such as the state senate) district is made up of two lower house districts (such as the state assembly).

**One Person, One Vote** – The Equal Population rule. A phrase that describes the constitutional requirement that each district be substantially equal in total population. Typically, this means that every district in a redistricting plan should contain the same number of people, regardless of age or citizenship.

**Packing** – An overconcentration of a minority population into a suboptimal number of districts. For example, packing occurs when a minority population makes up 90% of the district instead of two districts where the minority population makes up 50% of each district.

**Reapportionment** – The redistribution of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives based on changes in a state’s population. This occurs so that a state’s representation in Congress is proportional to its population. Reapportionment is not redistricting, although some states use the terms interchangeably.

**Redistricting** – The process used by governments to redraw political district boundaries and applies to all levels of government where district elections are held. Maps are redrawn every ten years after the Census to create districts with substantially equal populations to, at minimum, account for population shifts. There are many types of **Redistricting Processes (see Strategies for Different Redistricting Processes)**

**Totality of circumstances** – A consideration of all the circumstances to decide a case, rather than any one factor or rule.

**Unity Map** – A proposed map drawn by a coalition of multiple community groups that demonstrates their multiple communities of interest can be simultaneously respected.

**Voting Age Population (VAP)** – The total population ages 18 and over. **(Related to CVAP)**

**Voting Rights Act (VRA)** – The federal legislation passed in 1965 to ensure state and local governments do not pass laws or policies that deny American citizens the equal right to vote based on race. Section 2 of the VRA protects voters from discrimination based on race, color, or membership in a language minority group in all election procedures.