

PEOPLE'S MAPS COMMISSION GLOSSARY

Apportionment: The determination of the number of representatives assigned to each state. For the U.S. House of Representatives, this is recalculated every ten years after the new Census population data is released, so that states have roughly the same share of 435 House members as they do of the U.S. population. For example, Wisconsin had 5,686,986 residents in the 2010 census, or about 1.85% of the 50-state population. That would translate to 8.03 seats, and since you can't have a fractional member of Congress, this is how Wisconsin came to be apportioned 8 representatives in the last cycle.

Census: A complete count or enumeration of the United States population on April 1 of a census year; the federal census is mandated by the U.S. Constitution in Article 1, section 2 for the purpose of Congressional apportionment. The decennial census population data is usually released in the Spring of the following year, but this year it will be delayed to Fall 2021. The Census bureau also releases many other data products, such as the American Community Survey, which includes population estimates for the years between decennial data releases.

Communities of interest: Communities of Interest are geographic areas or neighborhoods contained within a contiguous area on a map where residents share common interests and bonds that deserve consideration by elected representatives. A Community of Interest (COI) may include people with common economic, ethnic, cultural or other bonds such as unique environmental, transportation, or educational concerns. While COI represent common interests that are often linked to public policy issues, COI do not promote a particular political party, candidate or jurisdiction. Plans that keep appropriately sized COI intact are preferred. COI regions will be shown to help make decisions about higher-ranked priorities.

Compact: Since the early days of the United States, people have complained about bizarrely shaped districts as an indication that the boundaries are being manipulated to secure an advantage for one group over another. The word "compact" refers to districts that are regularly shaped as opposed to being erratic or elongated. There are numerous different formulas that are sometimes used to assess this, but often it's simply a matter of deciding that the districts look reasonable.

Contiguous: A district is said to be contiguous when it is one connected piece, so that it's possible to get from every point in the district to every other point without leaving the district. Sometimes districts will need to cross water, for instance to include islands.

Equal population: The "one person, one vote" idea—each district should have very close to the same number of residents as every other district. Before the courts got involved, it was quite common for some districts to have ten times the population of others, which meant that some voters had much more electoral influence than others. Today, congressional districts are usually balanced to within 1% deviation, and legislative districts to within 10%.

Gerrymander: A term of art to describe a plan or a district intentionally drawn to advantage one group or party over another. In the past, people associated gerrymandering with crazy shapes, but today it is understood that shapes don't tell the whole story.

Nesting: In some states, the rules tell us that smaller districts should fit neatly inside larger ones. In Wisconsin, the 99 Assembly districts must nest three-to-one inside the 33 Senate districts.

Packing and cracking: These terms apply when a group is over-concentrated in some districts (packing), which leads to reduced influence in other districts (cracking). Together, these describe how the electoral strength of a group can be diluted by a districting plan.

Partisan gerrymandering: Drawing districts intentionally to favor one political party over another.

Proportionality: Many members of the public expect that when a party or group has a certain share of the vote, it should roughly have a corresponding share of the representation. This idea of fairness is called “proportionality,” and we can look for a districting plan that tends to have this property in recent elections. This is very different from abandoning districts and switching to a proportional system of election such as those used in many other countries.

Racial gerrymandering: Drawing districts intentionally to dilute the electoral strength of a racial group.

Redistricting: The process of drawing or revising boundaries for electoral districts. This happens at many levels, from congressional districts to state legislative districts to local districts in counties and cities.

Respect for political subdivisions: In this term of art, “political subdivisions” refers to municipalities, counties, and the like. A districting plan is said to respect political boundaries when it divides those units as little as possible. In Wisconsin, these principally include counties and towns, cities and villages, and wards (voting precincts) within cities, towns, and villages.

Responsiveness: This is the idea that when the voters’ preferences change, the electoral results should reflect the shift in opinion. It is the opposite of *entrenchment*, where officials arrange to have easy reelection that resists changes in voting patterns. This is closely related to the idea that elections should be competitive, but it is different from directly designing districts to be close to 50-50.

Voting Rights Act: In 1965, Congress overwhelmingly passed the Voting Rights Act, which safeguards the ability of minority groups to elect candidates of their choice. This crucial federal law still applies today, and has been used to address vote suppression as well as unfair districts.

¹All definitions should be attributed to MGGG Redistricting Lab, Moon Duchin