

THE RULES

Equal population - *Districts within a polity should all have very close to the same population.* The standard way to count is to use the Decennial Census numbers, which is one of the reasons the Census is so important. This applies to all 50 states, and Congressional districts are usually balanced to one-person deviation across a state.

Contiguous - *Each district should be a single connected component.* You may be surprised to hear that only 30-some states require this property by law. This rule is mostly straightforward except when you're building from disconnected units, or if there are water crossings to consider.

Compact - *The districts should be reasonably shaped.* Whatever that means! Language varies on this one, but for the most part it's a matter of the eyeball test. At least 37 states reference this principle.



Voting Rights Act - *The districts must not undercut the opportunity for minority communities to elect candidates of choice.* This is a federal law on the books since 1965 and has a massive and complicated legal history and practice.

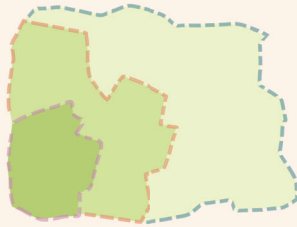
Communities of interest - *Groups with a significant shared interest should be kept together in order to boost their voice in government.* This one is especially squishy and can be defined in state statutes, case law, and post-facto by governments. For instance, courts have affirmed that socio-economic status, education level, religion, and health factors can define a community that would be relevant to redistricting.



Political boundaries - Counties, cities, and other relevant municipalities should not be split among multiple districts when there is a way to keep them whole.

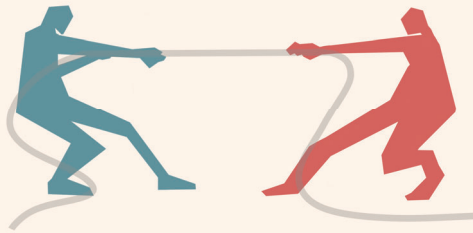
Units - Some states prescribe which building-block pieces plans should be assembled from. For instance, Louisiana makes it hard to change the precincts, and requires plans to be built from whole precincts. Iowa requires that counties be kept whole. Massachusetts keeps precincts whole in its legislative plans.

Nesting - Eight states currently require that the state House districts nest inside the state Senate districts two-to-one, and two additional states require three-to-one nesting.



Incumbency - In some states, there is a rule on the books that implies that *new maps should avoid pairing incumbents to run against each other*. (Pairing incumbents also goes by the colorful name "double-bunking"!) In other states, the rules forbid having the redistricters consider incumbency at all.

Partisan properties - A handful of states have rules indicating that there is a priority on the creation of *competitive* districts or districts that react *responsively* to changes in voter opinion, and numerous states have considered adopting language of that kind. Several other states forbid considering partisan data in the redistricting process.



Excerpted from *Political Geometry*, forthcoming.