

Glossary of Redistricting Terms

Apportionment or Reapportionment

Following each decennial census, seats in the United States House of Representatives are apportioned to each state based on population figures derived from the census. Apportionment is the process of determining how many Congressional Districts to allocate to each state, and is different from ‘redistricting,’ which involves redrawing district lines within a state.

At-large

An election in which candidates run in all parts of a jurisdiction rather than from districts or wards within the jurisdiction. All members of EVIT’s Board of Governors are elected from specific districts within EVIT’s boundary. There are no at-large election contests.

Census Block

The smallest level of census geography used by the Census Bureau to collect and report census data. Census Blocks are labeled with a four digit number such as 2025 or 1006A.

Census Block Group

A group of Census Blocks all having the same first block digit. Block 2025 is in Block Group 2. There are 1,023 whole or partial Block Groups within EVIT’s jurisdiction. The latest available population data for this redistricting process is at the Block Group level.

Census data

Information and statistics on the population of the United States gathered by the Census Bureau and released to the public.

Census Tract

A level of census geography larger than a census block or census block group that often corresponds to neighborhood boundaries. There are 385 whole or partial Census Tracts within EVIT’s boundary – too few for our purpose in redistricting.

Community of interest

An area that is defined by residents’ shared demographics or by common threads of social, economic, or political interests such that the area may benefit from common representation. The unified and elementary school districts served by EVIT can be considered communities of interest, as can individual school attendance areas. Other communities of interest include neighborhood watch areas and election wards or districts in some cities.

Compactness

A term used to describe a district’s geographic shape. Compactness often focuses on the regularity or jaggedness of a district boundary and on the extent to which the district’s geographic territory is dispersed from its center.

Contiguity

A term used to describe a district in which all parts of the district are connected to each other. One should be able to walk to every point in a district without having to leave the district.

Cracking or fracturing

A form of vote dilution that occurs when a geographically compact, politically cohesive group is divided into two or more districts. The term is often used to describe when compact minority communities that could elect their preferred candidate if placed in one district are divided into two or more districts in which they no longer have as much electoral influence. Under certain circumstances, this type of vote dilution may violate the Voting Rights Act.

Dilution or vote dilution

Occurs when the voting strength of a politically cohesive group is weakened or diluted by an election system or redistricting plan.

Gerrymander

The drawing of political boundaries with the purpose of giving one group, party, or candidate an advantage over another.

Ideal population

The number of persons to be included in each district to obtain equal population. The ideal population for each district is obtained by taking the total population of the jurisdiction and dividing it by the number of districts. The latest available Census data for EVIT shows a total population of 1,818,416 persons. That total, divided equally among EVIT's nine districts, yields an ideal population of 202,046 persons per district.

Influence district/Minority opportunity district

A district in which a minority group constitutes a less-than-controlling voting group but nevertheless constitutes a sizeable minority in the district sufficient to influence the outcome of the election, often through alliances with non-minority residents.

Majority-minority district, (sometimes called minority-majority district)

A district that contains a majority (50% plus 1 or more) of minority residents. Note: A majority-minority district can contain more than one minority group. Thus, a district that is 45% Hispanic and 6% African American is a majority-minority district, but it is not a majority Hispanic district. Sometimes this is used to refer to a district's total population and sometimes it refers to the voting-age population.

One person, one vote

A constitutional requirement that each district be substantially equal in total population based on the most recent federal census.

Packing

A form of vote dilution that occurs when a politically cohesive group is placed into districts in proportions higher than necessary to elect their preferred candidates. This term is often used to describe consolidating minority communities in a few districts that prevents them from influencing elections in a greater number of districts. Under some circumstances, this form of vote dilution may violate the Voting Rights Act.

Plurality

A proportion of a population that is the largest group, but not a majority.

Political subdivision

A division of a state, such as a county, city, or town. Generally, any taxing authority such as a school district or a fire-prevention district is considered a political subdivision. A political subdivision is usually governed by an elected governing board or council.

Precinct

A geographic area created to group voters for assignment to a designated polling place. Precinct boundaries and polling places may change over the course of a decade. Counties in Arizona redraw precincts after each decennial redistricting to conform to new legislative and congressional district lines.

Preclearance (no longer required)

Obtaining approval from either the United States Department of Justice or a federal district court in the District of Columbia for voting changes, including redistricting plans. All jurisdictions within the following states were subject to preclearance: Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Arizona, and Alaska. Portions of other states were also covered. In 2013, the U. S. Supreme Court invalidated the section of the Voting Rights Act that specifies which jurisdictions require preclearance. Therefore, no jurisdictions are currently subject to preclearance requirements. Other sections of the Voting Rights Act remain in effect.

Protection of incumbents

Some jurisdictions express a preference for continuity of representation and protect their incumbents when redistricting. This may include, for example, preserving the core of existing districts and avoiding placing two incumbents in the same district when redrawing boundaries. Other jurisdictions say that an incumbent's address should not be considered by plan drafters or policy makers responsible for adopting redistricting plans. The Supreme Court has recognized that preserving cores of existing districts and protecting incumbents are legitimate redistricting considerations. EVIT's Governing Board has expressed a preference for continuity of representation.

Redistricting

The process of drawing new electoral boundaries (district lines) within a state or local jurisdiction, generally after a federal census.

Section 2 (of the Voting Rights Act)

A section of the Voting Rights Act that applies nationwide and prohibits voting procedures (including redistricting plans) that discriminate against racial and language minorities. For a redistricting plan, threshold requirements for court consideration of a vote dilution claim under Section 2 are: (1) the minority group is sufficiently large and geographically compact to constitute a majority in a single-member district; (2) the minority group is politically cohesive; and (3) absent special circumstances, racially polarized voting usually defeats the minority voters' preferred candidate.

Traditional redistricting principles

Factors that traditionally guide a redistricting process. Examples of traditional redistricting principles include: compactness, contiguity, respect for political subdivisions, respect for communities of interest, and observance of geographic features. Often a jurisdiction formally adopts the redistricting criteria it intends to consider.