



RACE PROJECT KC

Understanding Redistricting and Why It Matters

Written by a Johnson County Local Librarian

Some recent headlines from local news sources:

- [Kansas Legislature closer to special session for partisan remapping of U.S. House districts](#) (Kansas Reflector)
- [Missouri governor signs new congressional redistricting map into law](#) (The Beacon)
- [Kansas Republicans start redistricting process aimed at unseating Rep. Sharice Davids](#) (Johnson County Post)
- [Clever condemns GOP redistricting: 'Trying to redraw the nation's conscience'](#) (The Kansas City Star)
- [Should Kansas gerrymander its congressional maps? Governor candidates are divided](#) (The Kansas City Star)
- [Missouri just gerrymandered Kansas City. Let us know what questions you have](#) (The Kansas City Star)

In August, [Texas redrew its congressional maps](#) in a redistricting effort to change election results. California is [sending a similar proposal](#) to voters this election cycle, largely in response to Texas. Such redistricting has become a large scale, national trend as political parties vie for power, and charges of gerrymandering are widespread.

In theory, political maps are drawn to create districts that give each voter roughly equal representation to every other; each district should generally represent the same number of voters in a neutral cross-section of the population. As people move and the population changes over time, district boundaries shift to reflect these changes.

Redistricting normally occurs once every ten years, based on the decennial census data.

Here is a portion of the most recent [redistricting report from USAFacts](#), in response to the 2020 census:

There are rules for the redistricting process. Even if no seats change during reapportionment, every state with more than one seat will go through the redistricting, or a redrawing, of its congressional districts.

Every state must adhere to the Voting Rights Act for redistricting, ensuring each district has approximately the same population. The shapes of these districts are redrawn using population data provided by the Census Bureau that includes summary information of racial and ethnic breakdowns and the number of people living in group quarters like prisons.

While this piece primarily addresses congressional redistricting, the same data is used to redraw state legislative districts.

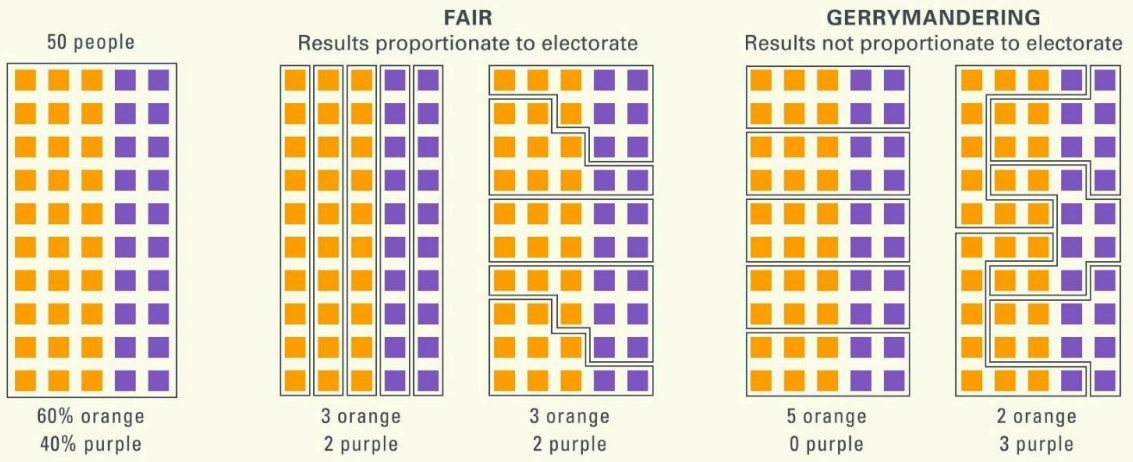
Many states have constitutional or legal guidelines for what they must consider in drawing congressional districts.

The rules are intended to make the process neutral and fair. However, elected legislators that represent particular parties and agendas are the ones who draw the maps, and partisan politics always play a role. The process of creating maps that unfairly represent one party over another is called gerrymandering. Consider this map [from Britannica](#):

GERRYMANDERING

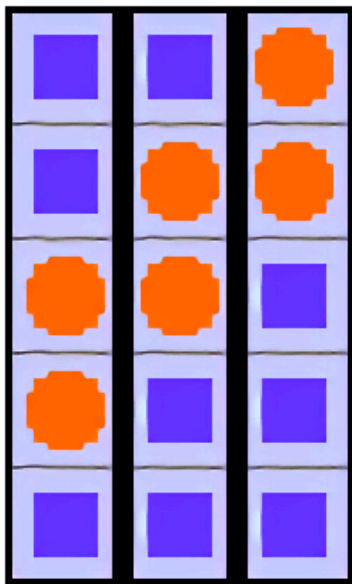
How differently drawn district maps produce different electoral results

FOUR WAYS TO DIVIDE 50 PEOPLE INTO 5 DISTRICTS:

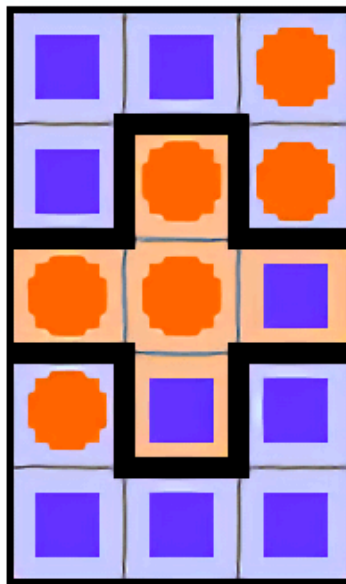


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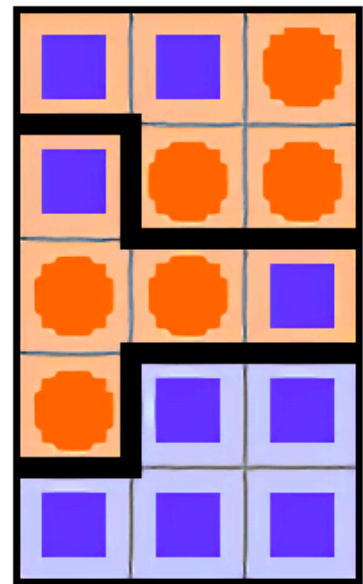
And this similar one [from Wikipedia](#); the population consists of 9 purple and 6 orange; in (a), all three districts have a purple majority and no elected official is likely to represent orange interests; in (b), two districts favor purple and one favors orange, which represents the overall population; in (c), one district represents purple and two districts represent orange, giving the minority population a majority of the votes:



(a)



(b)



(c)

The redistricting currently taking place in states throughout the country is unusual in that it is occurring mid-decade, not in response to new census data, and it is more openly partisan than normal. The push is coming from the national political parties, each hoping to create as much gerrymandering as can survive legal challenges in courts in order to entrench their power.

Minority groups, particularly racial minorities, often suffer at the hands of gerrymandering. From [a report from the Michigan Journal of Public Affairs](#):

Boundaries on a map can disadvantage people of color by splitting them up, condensing them into a small number of districts, or placing them within districts with higher proportions of the majority. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 prevented this practice until various Supreme Court cases made it easier for states to pass discriminatory voting laws and maps without federal approval.

And from [Democracy Docket](#):

A racial vote dilution claim is brought against a map when a state's minority voters cannot elect the candidate(s) of their choice, often because the map drawers "packed" the voters into one district and "cracked" them among other districts in order to weaken (or dilute) their collective voting power across a state. This means that a vote in one district has less of an impact on the outcome of an election than a vote in another district because of the way districts are drawn — a tactic that can and has been weaponized to minimize the voting strength of minority voters.

Political redistricting has historically—and remains so in the changes currently taking place across the country—a racially-charged process. It is a realm where different interests vie for power, and equity for racial groups is always on the line. Race Project KC encourages your engagement in this political process as it occurs in your district driven by your elected representatives.