Members Brief

An informational brief prepared by the LSC staff for members and staff of the Ohio General Assembly

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Redistricting in Ohio

Periodically, Ohio must adopt new district maps for the purpose of electing members of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Ohio Senate, and the Ohio House of Representatives. This brief provides an overview of Ohio's redistricting processes, explains some essential district-drawing concepts, and summarizes several landmark U.S. Supreme Court rulings concerning redistricting.

Contents

Redistricting basics 1
Redistricting processes at a glance 2
District-drawing concepts 4
Selected U.S. Supreme Court cases 7
Current district maps 8

Redistricting basics

Ohio elects its members of the U.S. House of Representatives, its state senators, and its state representatives from districts with roughly equal populations, giving each person's vote the same amount of influence. Every ten years, Ohio must redraw those districts to maintain population equality and, in some cases, to change the number of congressional districts to match the new number of representatives to which Ohio is entitled. In some situations, described below, Ohio also must adopt new district maps partway through a decade.

Ohio's Population Density by County, 2020 U.S. Census

The U.S. Census Bureau releases new population data for redistricting purposes by April 1 of each year ending in 1, and the Ohio Constitution provides deadlines in the fall of that year to adopt new district maps. The new maps must be in place in time to nominate congressional and General Assembly candidates in the primary election held the next year.

Redistricting processes at a glance

The state uses two separate processes for General Assembly and congressional redistricting. The voters approved a constitutional amendment implementing a new General Assembly redistricting process in November 2015, and a separate constitutional amendment prescribing a new congressional redistricting process in May 2018. The following table compares several major aspects of the processes.[1]

Topic	General Assembly Districts	Congressional Districts
Who draws the districts	Ohio Redistricting Commission	General Assembly
Required bipartisan vote	Four of seven members of the Commission, including at least two members who represent each of the two largest political parties represented in the General Assembly	⅗ of the members of each chamber of the General Assembly, including at least ½ of the members of each of the two largest political parties represented in the chamber
Deadline to adopt a plan	September 1 of a year ending in 1	September 30 of a year ending in 1
Impasse procedure	▪ The deadline is extended to September 15. ▪ If the Commission adopts the plan only by a simple majority vote, the plan must be replaced after four years.	▪ The Ohio Redistricting Commission must adopt a plan by a bipartisan vote by October 31. ▪ If the Commission fails to do so, the General Assembly must adopt a plan by November 30. If the General Assembly adopts the plan only by a simple majority vote, it must follow additional district standards, described below, and the plan must be replaced after four years.
Population equality between districts	▪ District populations must be substantially equal. ▪ No district may contain a population of less than 95% or more than 105% of the ideal district population.	Not specified (see "**Selected U.S. Supreme Court cases**," below)

[1] For detailed explanations of the General Assembly and congressional redistricting procedures, please see LSC's final analysis of H.J.R. 12 of the 130th General Assembly (PDF) and final analysis of S.J.R. 5 of the 132nd General Assembly (PDF).

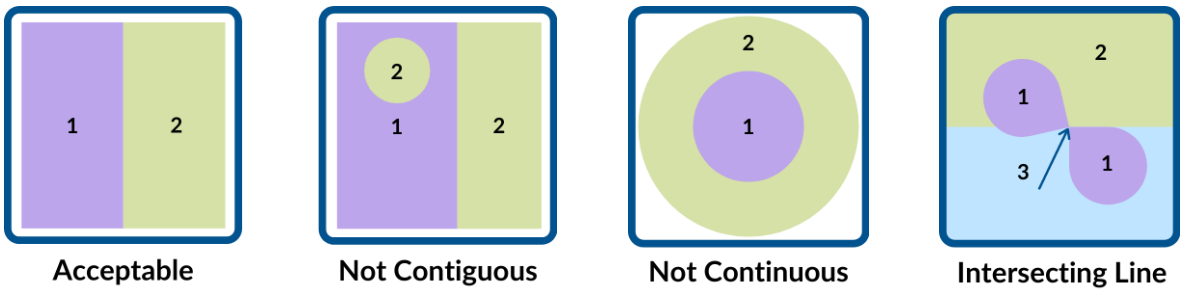
Topic	General Assembly Districts	Congressional Districts
District standards considered	Mandatory standards: ▪ Contiguity ▪ Boundary must be a single nonintersecting continuous line ▪ Keep counties, municipal corporations, and townships whole, based on a specified procedure ▪ Each Senate district must consist of three contiguous House districts Standards the Commission must attempt to follow: ▪ No plan shall be drawn primarily to favor or disfavor a political party. ▪ The statewide proportion of districts whose voters, based on statewide state and federal partisan general election results during the last ten years, favor each political party must correspond closely to the statewide preferences of the voters of Ohio. ▪ Districts must be compact.	General standards: ▪ Contiguity ▪ Boundary must be a single nonintersecting continuous line ▪ Compactness ▪ Keep counties, municipal corporations, and townships whole, based on a specified procedure Standards the General Assembly must follow if it does not pass the plan by the required bipartisan vote: ▪ The plan must not unduly favor or disfavor a political party or its incumbents. ▪ The plan must not unduly split governmental units, giving preference to keeping whole, in the order named, counties, then townships and municipal corporations. ▪ The General Assembly must attempt, but is not required, to draw districts that are compact.
Legal challenges	▪ States that the Ohio Supreme Court has exclusive, original jurisdiction in any challenge. ▪ Requires the Ohio Redistricting Commission to amend the plan or adopt a new plan, as applicable, if a plan, district, or group of districts is ruled unconstitutional. ▪ Prohibits a court from ordering the implementation of a plan not approved by the Commission. ▪ Prohibits a court from ordering the Commission to adopt a particular plan or to draw a particular district. ▪ Prescribes the available remedies in the event that the Court determines	▪ States that the Ohio Supreme Court has exclusive, original jurisdiction in any challenge. ▪ Requires that, if a plan, district, or group of districts is ruled unconstitutional, the General Assembly must adopt a new plan within 30 days after the appeal deadline expires or after the order is issued, if it is not appealable. ▪ Requires the Ohio Redistricting Commission to adopt a plan not later than 30 days after the General Assembly's deadline, if the General Assembly misses the deadline.

Topic	General Assembly Districts	Congressional Districts
	that a General Assembly district plan adopted by the Commission does not comply with the constitutional district standards.	▪ Requires the new plan to remedy any legal defects, but to include no other changes.

District-drawing concepts

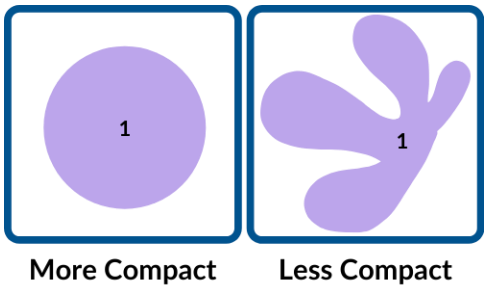
Contiguity and continuous boundary lines

Every congressional and General Assembly district in Ohio must be contiguous, meaning that it is a single, unbroken shape, with no "islands" of territory that do not touch the rest of the district. Each district's boundary also must be a single nonintersecting continuous line. This standard prevents, for example, the creation of "donut" districts, with one district entirely surrounding another, or a district joined at a single point by an intersecting line.[2]



Compactness

A district is considered compact if it has a minimal distance between all parts of its territory. Multiple methods exist to measure a district's compactness, such as calculating the total length of its perimeter (a shorter perimeter meaning a more compact district), or calculating the average distance between locations on the outer edges of the district and the center of the district (a shorter average distance meaning a more compact district).

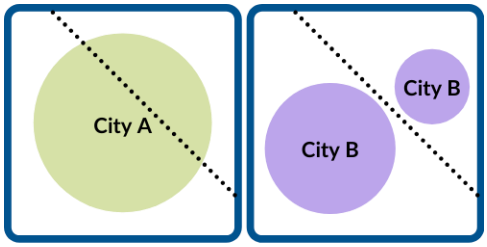


Under the Ohio Constitution, the Ohio Redistricting Commission must attempt to draw compact General Assembly districts, but it is not explicitly required to do so. On the other hand, congressional districts must be compact, except that under the modified district standards that apply if the General Assembly fails to pass a district plan by the required bipartisan vote, the legislature must attempt to draw compact districts, but is not required to.[3]

[2] Ohio Constitution, Article XI, Section 3(B)(3) and art. XIX, sec. 2(B)(3).

[3] Ohio Const., art. XI, sec. 6 and art. XIX, secs. 1(F)(3)(c) and 2(B)(2).

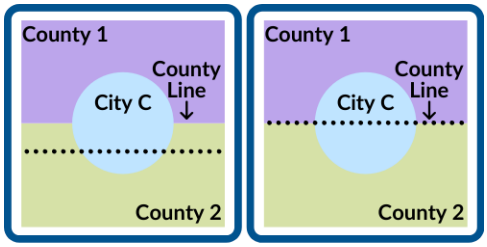
Keeping political subdivisions whole



City A - Split City B - Not Split

Ohio's congressional and General Assembly redistricting processes both place a priority on keeping counties, cities, villages, and townships together within one district. Splitting a political subdivision is necessary when, for example, its population exceeds the ideal district population. But, the Ohio Constitution includes procedures to minimize any unnecessary splitting.

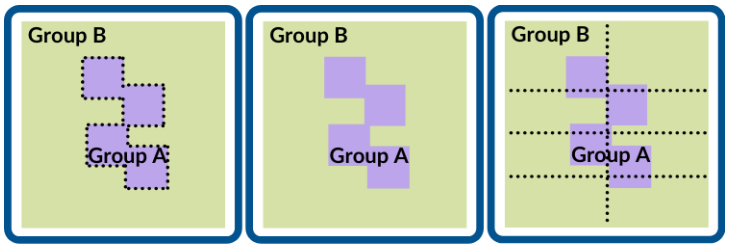
Under both redistricting processes, a political subdivision is considered to be split if any contiguous portion of its territory is not contained entirely within one district. If a political subdivision has an island of territory that does not touch the rest of the subdivision, putting the island in a different district is not considered splitting the political subdivision (see above). Further, if a city, village, or township has territory in more than one county, drawing the district line along the county line is not considered splitting the city, village, or township.[4]



City C - Split City C - Not Split

Packing and cracking

Two district-drawing practices, commonly called packing and cracking, can give one group less influence than another. At one extreme, when a group is "packed" into a single district, it makes up a supermajority within the district, but is less able to influence the outcome of elections outside that district. Conversely, when a group is "cracked" among many districts, it makes up only a minority of the vote in each district, and is less able to influence the outcome of elections in any district. In some redistricting cases, packing and cracking have given rise to claims of unlawful gerrymandering (see "**Selected U.S. Supreme Court cases**," below).



Packed Cracked

Political considerations

The Ohio Constitution includes two separate standards for the inclusion of political considerations in the drawing of district maps. For a General Assembly district plan, the Ohio Redistricting Commission must attempt to adopt a plan (1) that is not drawn primarily to favor or disfavor a political party, and (2) in which the statewide proportion of districts whose voters, based on statewide state and federal partisan general election results during the last ten years, favor each political party corresponds closely to the statewide preferences of the voters of Ohio.

[4] Ohio Const., art. XI, sec. 3(D) and art. XIX, sec. 2(C).

For a congressional district map, the Ohio Constitution specifies that if, under the impasse procedure, the General Assembly passes a redistricting plan by a simple majority vote instead of by the required bipartisan vote, the plan must not unduly favor or disfavor a political party or its incumbents.[5]

Racial and language minority considerations

The U.S. Supreme Court has held that race-based redistricting is permissible only when it is necessary to achieve a compelling governmental interest. The only compelling interest currently recognized by the Court in this context is a state's interest in remedying specific, identified past instances of illegal discrimination, such as a previous district map having violated the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA).

If a state has been found to have violated the VRA, the state may address the issue by intentionally drawing one or more majority-minority districts, in which a sufficient population of a minority group exists to allow the group to elect its candidate of choice. In the absence of such a compelling interest, a state is prohibited from engaging in race-based redistricting. To date, no court has found a VRA violation in Ohio's congressional or General Assembly districts.[6]

The Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment and the VRA prohibit any district plan from denying or abridging citizens' right to vote on account of race, color, or status as a member of a language minority group. Minority vote dilution cases brought under the VRA typically challenge a district map or electoral system on the basis that it cracks a minority population among multiple districts, as described above, or alternatively, that it uses multi-member districts or at-large elections to prevent a minority group from defeating the majority's preferred candidates. A district map violates the VRA if all of the following are true:

1. The minority group is sufficiently numerous and compact to form a majority in a district that is drawn without using race as a districting criterion and that meets all of the state's legitimate districting criteria, including political objectives.
2. The minority group is politically cohesive, meaning its members tend to vote similarly, and this tendency cannot be explained by partisan affiliation.
3. The majority votes sufficiently as a bloc to enable it usually to defeat the minority's preferred candidate.
4. On the totality of the circumstances, the evidence shows that the district map intentionally results in unequal access to the electoral process.[7]

[5] Ohio Const., art. XI, sec. 6 and art. XIX, sec. 1(C)(3)(a) and (F)(3)(a).

[6] *Louisiana v. Callais,* 2026 U.S. LEXIS 1950, Case No. 24-109 (April 29, 2026). See also *Voinovich v. Quilter*, 507 U.S. 146 (1993); *Bush v. Vera*, 517 U.S. 952 (1996); *Shaw v. Hunt*, 517 U.S. 899 (1996); and *Alabama Legislative Black Caucus v. Alabama*, 135 S.Ct. 1257 (2015).

[7] 52 U.S.C. 10301; *Louisiana v. Callais,* Case No. 24-109 (April 29, 2026); *Thornburg v. Gingles*, 478 U.S. 30, 50 (1986); and *Village of Arlington Heights v. Metropolitan Housing Development Corp.*, 429 U.S. 252, 264 (1977).

Other common concepts

The Ohio Redistricting Commission and the General Assembly might consider other district-drawing concepts in creating district maps, so long as the constitutional requirements are met. For example, some states use criteria such as preserving communities of interest in a single district or maintaining previous district lines to the extent feasible.

Selected U.S. Supreme Court cases

The following cases represent a sample of the landmark U.S. Supreme Court rulings on congressional and state legislative redistricting. This list is intended to provide a basic foundation for understanding some of the legal discussions surrounding redistricting. However, the list is not exhaustive, and it does not include later rulings that have added nuance to these decisions.

Population equality

- *Wesberry v. Sanders*, 376 U.S. 1 (1964) – Held that the population of congressional districts in the same state must be as nearly equal as practicable.
- *Reynolds v. Sims*, 377 U.S. 533 (1964) – Specified that the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment requires states to draw legislative districts that are substantially equal in population.
- *Karcher v. Daggett*, 462 U.S. 725 (1983) – Held that congressional districts must be mathematically equal in population, except as necessary to achieve a legitimate state objective.

Racial and language minority considerations

- *Louisiana v. Callais,* 2026 U.S. LEXIS 1950, Case No. 24-109 (April 29, 2026) – Held that race-based redistricting is permissible only when it is necessary to remedy specific, identified past instances of illegal discrimination; provided an updated test for determining whether a district map dilutes minority voting rights in violation of the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA).

Partisan gerrymandering

- *Rucho v. Common Cause,* 139 S.Ct. 2484 (2019) – Found that partisan gerrymandering represents a political question on which the federal courts cannot rule because there is no credible way to define and measure fairness in the political context.

Legislative and judicial authority

- *Arizona State Legislature v. Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission*, 576 U.S. 787 (2015) – Held that under the Elections Clause of the U.S. Constitution, which requires each state's legislature to prescribe its manner of electing members of Congress, the people of a state may adopt a state constitutional amendment that delegates redistricting authority to an independent commission.

- *Moore v. Harper,* 143 S. Ct. 2065 (2023) – Ruled that under the Elections Clause of the U.S. Constitution, a state's redistricting plan and process are subject to the ordinary exercise of judicial review by the state's courts.

Current district maps

Congressional Districts
2026-2032

Ohio Senate Districts
2024-2032

Ohio House Districts
2024-2032

Ohio's current congressional and General Assembly district maps are shown above and are available in an interactive format on the Ohio Secretary of State's website. These maps are scheduled to be redrawn in 2031 based on updated population data from the 2030 U.S. Census, with elections held under the new maps in 2032.