

Redistricting Terms

Community of interest – a contiguous population which shares common social and economic interests that should be included within a single district for purposes of its effective and fair representation. (This definition is from Prop 20 that passed in Nov 2010 and applies to the California citizens redistricting commission).

Compactness – districts which are not spread out or too jagged.

Contiguity – all areas in the district are physically connected to each other.

Cracking – a method of diluting a minority community's voting power by splitting the minority community into two or more districts so that the minority community does not constitute a significant portion of any district. For example, cracking occurs when a racial minority population is big enough that it can make up 50% of one district but, instead, is divided into two or more districts so that the minority community makes up a small percentage in each district.

Minority vote dilution – diluting a racial minorities vote. The most common forms are (1) packing and (2) cracking.

Nesting – each upper house (such as the state senate) is made up of two lower house districts (such as the state assembly).

Packing – a method of diluting a community's voting power by concentrating a minority population into a suboptimal number of districts. For example, packing occurs when a racial minority population makes up 90% of the district instead of two districts where the minority population could make up 50% of each district.

Population equality – a requirement that political districts (such as assembly districts) have a “reasonably equal” number of residents. The standard for California legislative districts is that the total population deviation should not exceed 1%.

Voting Rights Act (VRA) – a federal civil rights law that prohibits discriminatory voting practices. The VRA contains various sections. Section 2 of the VRA protects against racial minority vote dilution where (1) a racial minority is big enough to make up a majority in one district, (2) the minority group is politically cohesive, and (3) the majority votes as a bloc to consistently defeat the minority group’s preferred candidate.

Proposition 11 requires the state of California redistricting commission to use the following criteria in order of priority (for the definitions, see the box on the right):

1. Population equality
2. Compliance with the federal Voting Rights Act
3. Contiguity
4. Geographic integrity of cities, counties, cities & counties, neighborhoods, and communities of interest
5. Compactness
6. Nesting
7. No consideration of incumbents’ or candidates’ residences