

If you care about political power, representation, or public policy, then you care about redistricting.

KNOW YOUR LINES

Redistricting and why it matters

Members of Congress, state legislators, and many city council and school board members are elected by people grouped into districts. At least once per decade—usually after the Census—those districts are redrawn.

In the 1960s, the largest state district in California had 422 times more people than the smallest state district. That was before the Supreme Court ruled that political districts must have roughly equal populations.

Today, there are about

700,000

people in each Congressional District.

Why? People move. Families grow. The lines are adjusted to ensure that each district has about the same number of people and, as a result, that each person has an equal say in the government, as required by the Constitution.

But redistricting isn't simple. Even with equal populations, districts can be drawn to give some people more voting power than others.

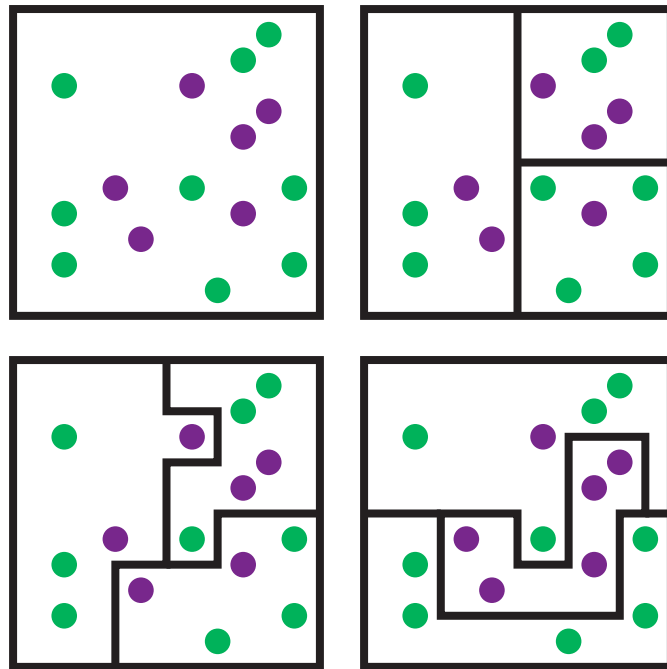
Redistricting can determine who wins an election. It also affects who controls school boards, city councils, state legislatures, Congress, and other governing bodies.

Ultimately, redistricting impacts which laws get passed and which don't. In other words, it affects all of us.

Koreatown

In 1992, several Los Angeles neighborhoods were severely damaged due to social unrest, including a one-square-mile area known as Koreatown. When Koreatown residents asked their elected officials for help with recovery efforts, each representative claimed that the area was part of another official's district. In fact, the district map fractured Koreatown into four City Council Districts and five State Assembly Districts, which made it easy for each representative to deflect responsibility for the community.

Voters are grouped into political districts, with each district electing a different representative. District lines can be drawn in an infinite number of ways, and how they're drawn can affect who gets elected.



Who draws the lines?



In 2000, 30 of California's 32 Democratic members of Congress each paid \$20,000 to the consultant in charge of creating California's redistricting plan to have him custom-design their districts to protect their seats. 'Twenty thousand is nothing to keep your seat... If my colleagues are smart, they'll pay their \$20,000 and the consultant will draw the district they can win in. Those who refused to pay? God help them,' explained one legislator.

Each state decides who draws the lines. In most states, the line drawers are politicians along with hired consultants. Incumbents—elected officials already in office—have an incentive to create districts that are likely to reelect them, sometimes preventing real communities from being represented.

Often, state legislators draw the map, which can be vetoed by the governor. Some states have special commissions that advise legislators on drawing the map, or that serve as backup mapmakers if the legislature deadlocks. A few states have independent commissions so that politicians and public officials can't draw their own districts.

Some states try to prevent a single political party from controlling the process. Some don't, and this can give the party in power a big advantage. In other states, politicians from both parties simply work together to swap voters and draw districts that keep their reelection 'safe.'

No other democratic nation allows self-interested legislators to draw the lines of the districts in which they run for office.

Good?

A 'good' redistricting process helps communities secure meaningful representation.

Many states consider 'communities of interest' when drawing their districts. That's just a term for groups of people who share common social, cultural, racial, economic, geographic, or other concerns. These groups are likely to have similar legislative concerns as well, and that means they can benefit from common representation in the government. This goes much deeper than Republican or Democrat. A district of farmers, say, and a district of city dwellers will probably elect representatives that reflect differing histories, priorities, and aspirations.

Other redistricting goals—like keeping a district compact or within county borders—are usually proxies for keeping communities intact. A good redistricting process will be open and transparent, allowing communities to ask questions and give input. This participation is important, since communities are the basic units of well-designed districts.

Bad?



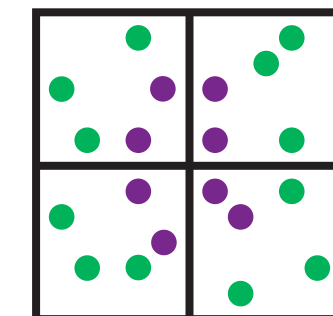
In 1812, Elbridge Gerry, the governor of Massachusetts, signed a redistricting plan that would ensure his party's domination of the Massachusetts state senate. An artist added wings, claws, and a salamander head to the outline of a particularly notable district; the press named the beast the 'Gerry-mander.'

A 'bad' redistricting process takes place behind closed doors, often at the expense of communities.

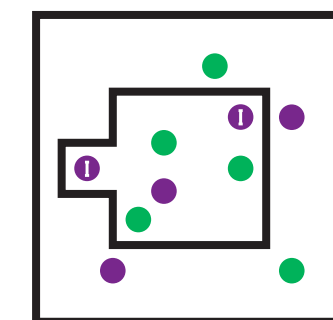
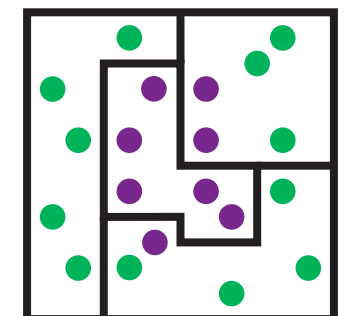
Community borders are sometimes ignored to create districts that increase the odds that specific politicians or parties will win or lose, or that all incumbents will enjoy 'safe' districts.

This is commonly referred to as 'gerrymandering,' and it comes in a few different forms, including these:

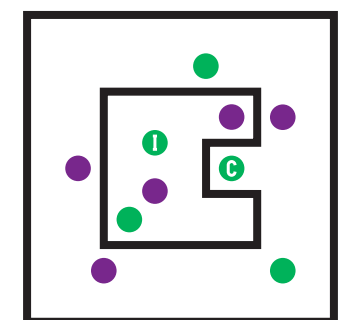
Cracking Communities so they can't elect their own representative.



Packing Partisans into one district so the other party wins adjacent districts.



Eliminating Incumbents by drawing two into one district. Only one can win!



Eliminating Challengers by drawing them out of the district.

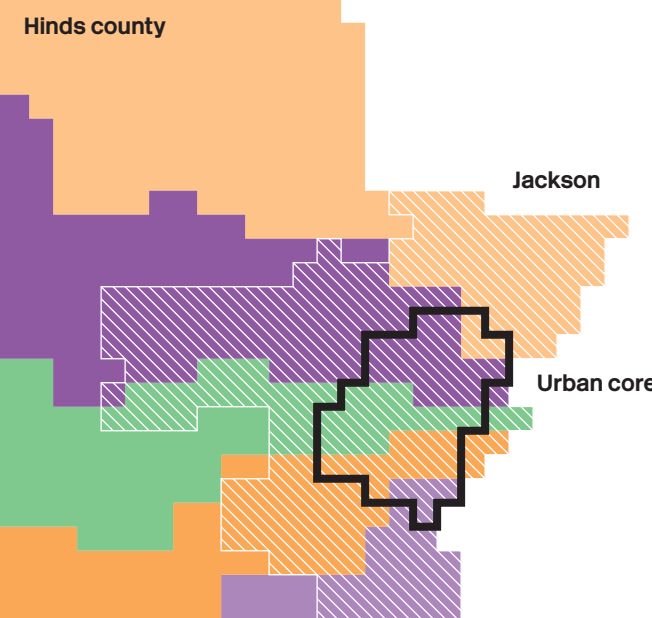
Shape alone doesn't tell you much

People sometimes associate gerrymandering with odd-shaped and uncompetitive districts. But sometimes there are good reasons that districts are oddly shaped. Communities (including minority communities protected by the Voting Rights Act), geography, and municipal boundaries don't always form neat shapes. And sometimes there are so many members of one political party in an area that no combination of districts could create strong competition between parties. (Plus, redistricting is only one factor among many that determine political competition.)

In fact, focusing on neat shapes or political competition can create the same problems as gerrymandering—sometimes intentionally. For example,

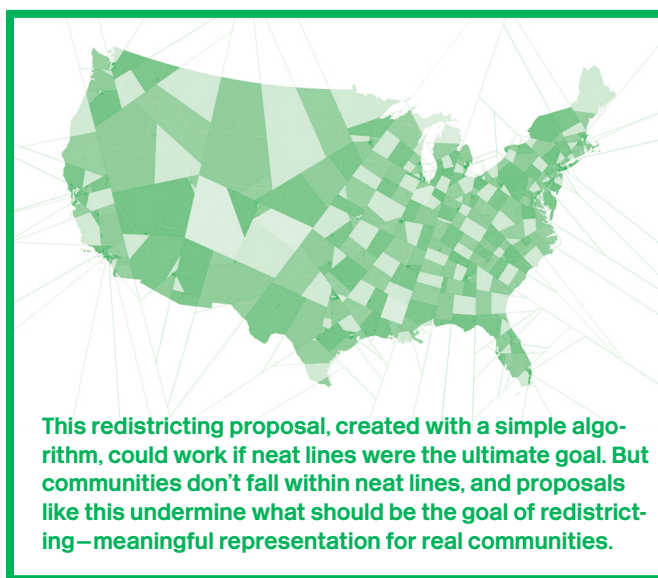
In Mississippi in 1969, districts for the Hinds County Board of Supervisors were drawn to make road and bridge mileage equal in each district. Ostensibly a way to make the redistricting

less subjective, the resulting plan splintered the African-American community in the state capitol, Jackson. A federal court ordered the lines redrawn.



The Voting Rights Act (VRA) is designed to eliminate discrimination against minority voters in the political process. Two provisions of the VRA are important in redistricting: Section Two prohibits line drawers from diluting minority voting power by 'packing' minority communities into a small number of districts or by 'cracking'

them into a large number of districts. Section Five requires certain states and localities with a history of discriminatory voting practices to get 'preclearance' from the Department of Justice or a federal court for any proposed changes to district lines. If officials violate these sections, advocates can and should take legal action!



slicing the country into a neat grid would inevitably split communities and group voters in ways that benefit one party or another. There might be greater competition in a district with an even mix of farmers and city dwellers—but that still might not lead to meaningful representation for those communities.

Let's look beyond the symptoms of gerrymandering. Use the next section as a guide for reviewing your state's districts and redistricting process. Learn about the concrete steps people around the country are taking to make redistricting better.

NOW, you can work to create better districts

Get involved! Hold the line drawers accountable by paying attention and speaking up. If you do, they will be more likely to address community interests and less able to manipulate the process to their own advantage. This is true no matter what redistricting process your state uses. Here are a few ways to get involved.

Become an expert!

First, learn how redistricting works in your state. You know a lot just by reading this far! But you should find out a few more details: What criteria do the line drawers need to follow when shaping districts? What are the opportunities for public participation? Use the resources in this poster to get started!

Educate the media!

The media reports on the political impact of redistricting, but few reporters and editors understand the details. You and your allies can become the experts the media will rely on to understand the process.

Attend hearings!

Several states require the line drawers to hold public meetings. If they don't, you can pressure the people in charge to make sure they do. Get as many people as you can to come ask questions and give input at the meetings, both before and after draft maps are proposed.

Join forces!

There are groups across the country already working on redistricting. Find out which are working on it in your area. If no one is, start your own group!

Draw your own maps!

You can help by drawing maps of your community and others you think should be kept together. The more specific the proposals, the better. Present the maps at hearings and send them to legislators with petitions or letters of support.

Raise the alarm!

If, in the end, the redistricting process still breaks up communities, you may be able to take legal action. These lawsuits are complicated, but there are experts and nonprofit groups that can help—especially if a minority community has been deprived of its political voice.

WHAT CAN I DO?

LATER, you can work to create a better redistricting process

Make the data public!

Political and demographic data should be available to the public throughout the redistricting process. This helps communities participate, and keeps redistricting bodies accountable to the public.

Require public hearings!

Public hearings—before and after the maps are drawn—give the public a chance to ask questions and make suggestions. Requiring the line drawers to explain their decisions also makes it harder for them to hide the ball.

Demand diversity!

A redistricting body with representatives from different communities and interests in the state can help ensure that the final district maps reflect the state's diversity. That means more communities have the chance for meaningful political representation.

Promote independence!

A well-designed independent commission, with representation from different parties and communities, may help ensure that incumbent legislators don't serve only their own interests.

Make it the right size!

A redistricting body of between 7 and 15 is usually large enough to represent a state's constituencies without getting unwieldy.

Maintain balance!

A redistricting body with a balanced number of members from each political party can help prevent redistricting plans that heavily favor one party.

On April 1 2010: It's Census day! Hundreds of millions of people return forms by mail and more than 3.8 million Census workers go

door-to-door to count those who don't return mail forms.

In February of 2011, the Census Bureau starts sending data to states.

Between 2011 and 2012, states & local governments redistrict. Each state has a different deadline (usually the end of the legislative session).

Most states finish by 2012 (ME and MT finish in 2013). If legislatures or the commissions don't draw in time, the courts step in.

During 2011 and 2012, states hold their primary elections. Redistricting has to be complete before the filing deadline!

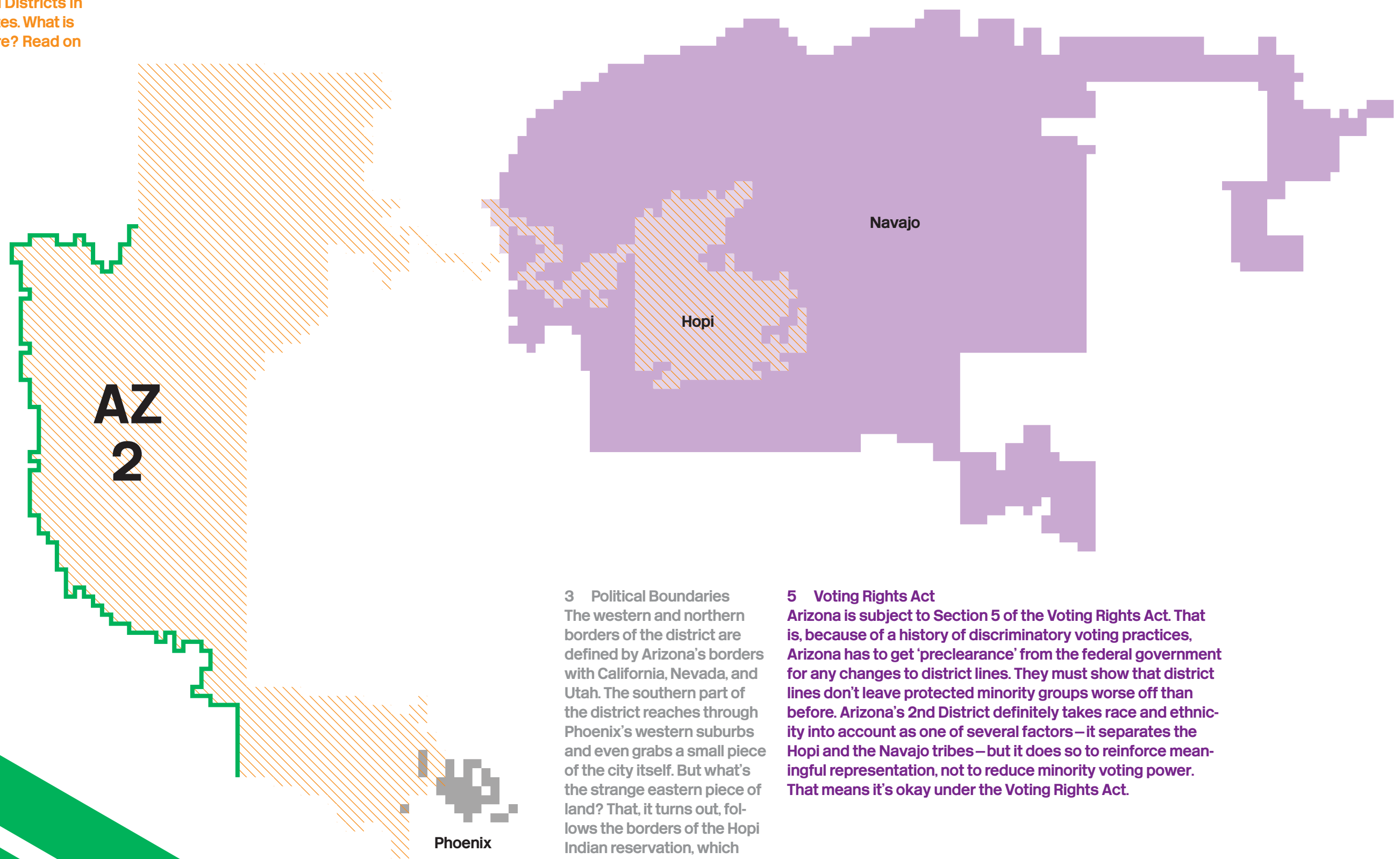
2011 through 2013 is the window for long-term change to the process. During this time be sure to take part in organized redistricting efforts;

identify sympathetic legislators; participate in public hearings.

In 2011 to 2014, the litigation to correct redistricting gone wrong begins. Remember: if you see something, say something!

1 Compactness
Arizona's 2nd District is one of the most oddly shaped Congressional Districts in the United States. What is happening here? Read on to find out.

2 Geography
The only obvious geographical feature in Arizona's 2nd is the Colorado River. The river forms much of the district's western borders and connects the two big chunks of land in the district. The thin, river section is largely unpopulated but was included to satisfy a state requirement that a district be 'contiguous'—that is, a district must be one connected piece of land. Most states have a contiguity requirement like this one.



3 Political Boundaries
The western and northern borders of the district are defined by Arizona's borders with California, Nevada, and Utah. The southern part of the district reaches through Phoenix's western suburbs and even grabs a small piece of the city itself. But what's the strange eastern piece of land? That, it turns out, follows the borders of the Hopi Indian reservation, which is completely surrounded by the Navajo Indian reservation. A-ha!

5 Voting Rights Act
Arizona is subject to Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. That is, because of a history of discriminatory voting practices, Arizona has to get 'preclearance' from the federal government for any changes to district lines. They must show that district lines don't leave protected minority groups worse off than before. Arizona's 2nd District definitely takes race and ethnicity into account as one of several factors—it separates the Hopi and the Navajo tribes—but it does so to reinforce meaningful representation, not to reduce minority voting power. That means it's okay under the Voting Rights Act.

4 Communities of Interest
Arizona's 2nd District preserves discrete communities of interest in Arizona's sparsely populated North. The Hopi reservation is completely surrounded by the Navajo reservation. Because of a historic land dispute between the tribes, it would be difficult for a single representative to represent both tribes. Therefore the line drawers were careful to place the Hopi and Navajo reservations in different districts. It's a funny shape, but good policy.

6 Flexibility
Most of the people in this large district live in a small southern section—the Phoenix suburbs. Without them, it would be hard for the district to find enough people to form a full Congressional District.

Know Your Lines

Communities of Interest

Good redistricting helps communities of people with shared social, cultural, racial, economic, or geographic characteristics secure meaningful representation at the local, state, and federal levels. Identifying communities and keeping them whole are among the most important goals for the redistricting process. Bad redistricting disregards community boundaries to create districts that increase the odds that particular politicians or parties will win or lose.

Geography

Mountains, rivers, islands, lakes, deserts, and other physical and geographic features can shape community boundaries. Good districts take these aspects of geography into account, even if it gives them funny shapes. Ignore geography completely, and you run the risk of ignoring community boundaries.

Political Boundaries

The boundaries of cities and counties may serve as proxies for groups of people who share a common interest. When legislators are from Chicago, Des Moines, Oklahoma City, or Berkeley, we have an idea right or wrong, about the people they represent and the policies they favor. But, like compactness and geography, city and county boundaries are most useful when they are proxies for communities, which don't always follow political boundaries. Sometimes it's important to take a closer look.

Compactness

Compact districts look nice because they have fairly regular shapes. People in compact districts live relatively close to each other, and that might mean they share characteristics and have common concerns. It also makes it easier for representatives and candidates to visit all parts of the district. But regular shapes can cut through communities or spread them out. Watch for features like mountains and rivers that separate communities or spread them out. Make sure you consider compactness alongside the other factors listed here.

Voting Rights Act

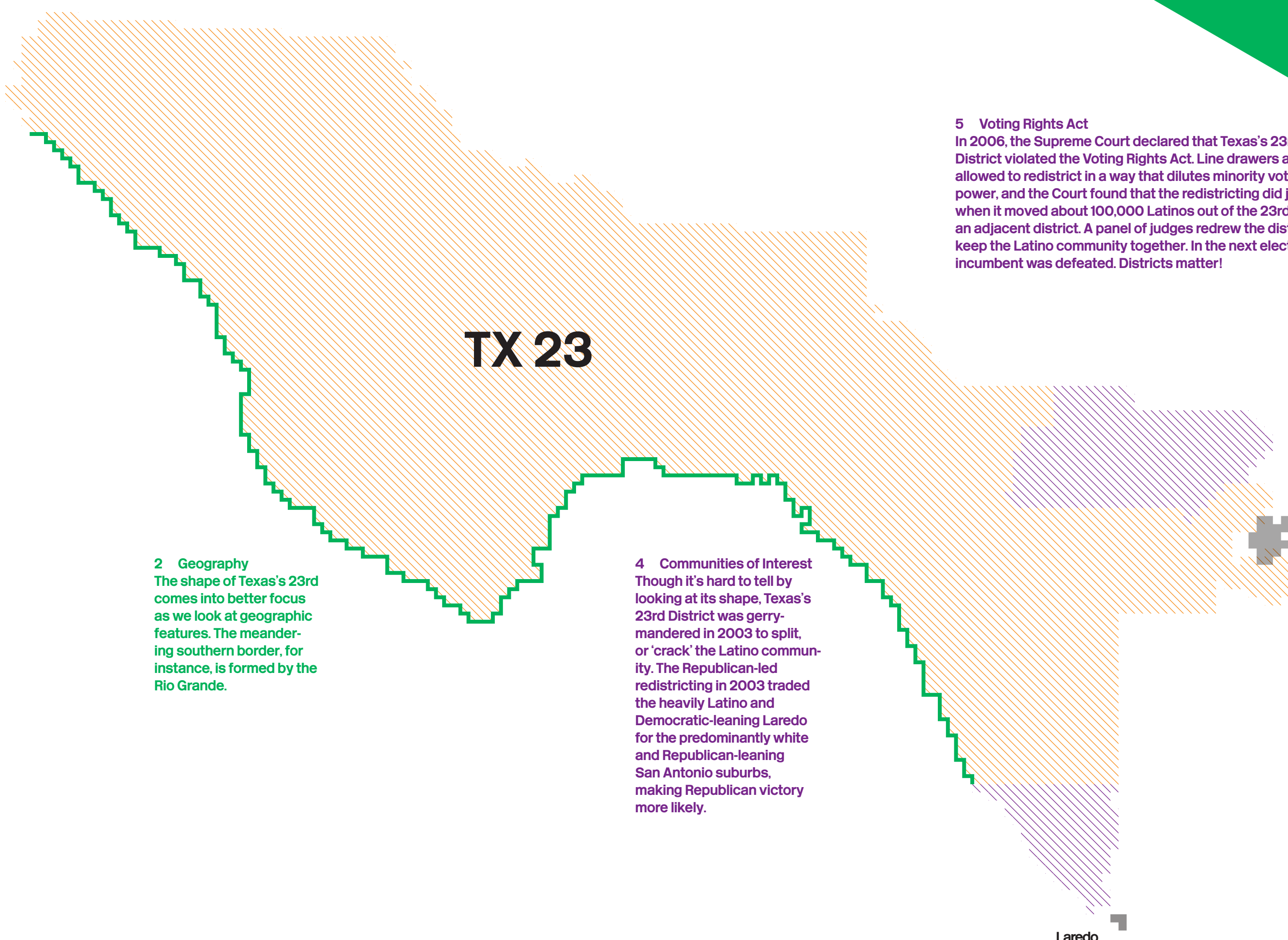
The Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965 to make sure minority communities have an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice. It also protects minority communities from vote dilution and other forms of gerrymandering. When redistricting dilutes minority voting power, the Voting Rights Act may allow people to challenge the districting plan in court.

Flexibility

Redistricting is a political process guided by worthy but competing principles. There has to be room for compromise among principles and among constituencies. There's no single best way to redistrict. Some people advocate for rigid algorithms that spit districting maps out of a computer. That might take politicians out of the process, but it also ignores communities and eliminates the give and take necessary to make good districts. The best way to ensure good districts is through an inclusive and transparent process that balances the criteria listed here.

<http://www.brennancenter.org/redistricting>

1 Compactness
Texas's 23rd Congressional District isn't a circle or square, but it appears to be reasonably compact. But what accounts for the tendrils in the easternmost part of the district and the cutaway in the south? Read on to find out.



2 Geography
The shape of Texas's 23rd comes into better focus as we look at geographic features. The meandering southern border, for instance, is formed by the Rio Grande.

4 Communities of Interest
Though it's hard to tell by looking at its shape, Texas's 23rd District was gerrymandered in 2003 to split, or 'crack' the Latino community. The Republican-led redistricting in 2003 traded the heavily Latino and Democratic-leaning Laredo for the predominantly white and Republican-leaning San Antonio suburbs, making Republican victory more likely.

5 Voting Rights Act
In 2006, the Supreme Court declared that Texas's 23rd District violated the Voting Rights Act. Line drawers aren't allowed to redistrict in a way that dilutes minority voting power, and the Court found that the redistricting did just that when it moved about 100,000 Latinos out of the 23rd into an adjacent district. A panel of judges redrew the district to keep the Latino community together. In the next election, the incumbent was defeated. Districts matter!

3 Political Boundaries
The southern border of Texas's 23rd is the southern border of the United States. Mexico is on the other side of the Rio Grande. The flat northern border of the district abuts New Mexico, and the jagged northwestern border follows county lines and generally keeps counties intact. The tendrils in the East capture San Antonio's western suburbs without reaching into the city.

6 Flexibility
This district is predominantly rural and one of the largest in land area in the United States. Because of its diverse array of communities and constituencies, it's also one of Texas's most competitive districts.

Making Policy Public is a program of the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP). CUP partners with policy advocates and graphic designers to produce foldout posters that explain complicated policy issues, like this one. makingpolicypublic.net

Redistricting affects who gets elected, who controls governing bodies, and which laws get passed.

We like to think that voters choose their representatives, but in redistricting, politicians often get to choose their voters.

Use this publication to learn more about redistricting. Then you can help ensure that your elected public servants actually serve their public.

Collaborators

CUP: Christine Gaspar and John Mangin; The Brennan Center: Erika Wood, Myrna Perez, Garima Malhotra, Justin Levitt, and Bonnie Ernst; We Have Photoshop: Michael Gallagher and Sebastian Campos

THE CENTER FOR URBAN PEDAGOGY (CUP)

CUP uses design, art, and visual culture to create projects that improve the quality of public participation in urban planning and community design. welcometocup.org



THE BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE

The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law is a non-partisan public policy and law institute that focuses on the fundamental issues of democracy and justice. Their work ranges from voting rights to campaign finance reform, from racial justice in criminal law to presidential power in the fight against terrorism. A singular institution—part think tank, part public interest law firm, part advocacy group—the Brennan Center combines scholarship, legislative and legal advocacy, and communications to win meaningful, measurable change in the public sector. www.brennancenter.org

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WE HAVE PHOTOSHOP

We Have Photoshop was born in New Haven, Connecticut in March 2007 and received an MFA from Yale School of Art a couple of months later. In the short time since its birth it has been involved with museums in midtown Manhattan; colleges in Brooklyn, Philadelphia, and Oslo; multiculturalists in northern Italy; architects and researchers in New Jersey; and artists in Chelsea and Brooklyn. wehavephotoshop.com



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