



# LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

## Redistricting Glossary

**Apportionment:** The process for allocating representative seats within a geographic area or political jurisdiction according to changes in population. For example: Seats in the United States House of Representatives are distributed among the 50 states according to each new Census, with states that gain population receiving more seats and those that lose population getting fewer.

**Competitive district:** A district where candidates of more than one party have a realistic chance of winning election. Mathematically the formula used for competition is generally 50% +/- 3.5% meaning a range of 46.50% - 53.50%.

**Communities of interest:** Areas defined by shared socio-economic, ethnic, geographic, economic or other interests. The definition should not include any relationship between a community and a political party, incumbent or candidate.

**Compact:** The notion that a district should not have an odd shape, as is often the case with a gerrymandered district. There are a number of different ways for measuring compactness, including the dispersion model which measures the distance of the borders from a central point and the perimeter-area model which provides a ratio of the perimeter to the area for comparison among districts.

**Contiguous:** All parts of a district must be connected, usually by land, and connected by more than a single point.

**Cracking:** Spreading supporters of a particular party or members of a minority group across multiple electoral districts so as to prevent them from being able to elect their favored candidates.

**Gerrymandering:** Redrawing district lines in such a way as to create a particular result.

- *Incumbent protection gerrymandering:* Drawing safe district boundaries that include an incumbent's residence so as to assure his/her re-election.
- *Partisan gerrymandering:* Drawing voting districts that give unfair advantage to one political party, group or incumbent. In *Vieth v. Jublierer* (2004), the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that excessive partisanship in redistricting is unconstitutional but did not state a standard for determining what is excessive.
- *Bipartisan gerrymandering:* The drawing of safe districts by two political parties to mutually protect their political interests and their incumbent members.
- *Prison-based gerrymandering:* Including prison populations in the calculations of a district's population, despite the fact that inmates are rarely constituents of the areas where they are housed. Especially in rural districts that include large, disenfranchised prison populations, the ballots of the voters of those districts thus hold a disproportionate weight.

**Independent, or nonpartisan:** Because groups and communities use different terms to mean ‘independent’ and ‘nonpartisan’, we include a list of what may be considered synonyms for those words in this context. Leagues may want to use different terms depending on their communities, though we need to be aware of the importance of language. Words used in various states and by various groups to describe kinds of commissions:

- *Independent:* A process that is independent from the legislature and that operates outside of partisan control and interests.
- *Nonpartisan:* Like independent, a process that operates outside of partisan control and interests.
- *Party-neutral:* Like independent, a process that is independent from partisan control.
- *Partisan:* A process that is controlled by the major parties in the area being redistricted.
- *Bipartisan:* implies two, but many people also think it means ‘fair’.

**Minority-majority districts:** A legislative district where a racial, ethnic or language minority makes up the majority of the population.

**Multi-Member District (aka ‘at-large’ or multi-seat district):** A district where the voters elect candidates to fill two (2) or more seats in the same “district.”

**One person, one vote:** The standard set by the U.S. Supreme Court in Reynolds v. Sims (1964), which generally requires that each legislative district include an equal number people. Chief Justice Warren said “Legislators represent people, not trees or acres. Legislators are elected by voters, not farms or cities or economic interests.”

**Packing or stacking:** Drawing districts so a group—opposite political party, minority—is heavily in one district and thinly represented in other adjoining districts. This process allows the party in power to weaken the opposition by wasting their votes in the packed district.

**Proportional Representation** (PR): A voting system in which groups of voters with similar interests gain representation in “proportion” to their voting strength. There are many styles of PR.

**Reapportionment:** The reallocation of the number of representative seats within a set of geographic areas or political jurisdictions, based on changing populations.

**Redistricting:** The process of crafting new boundaries for representatives.

**Safe district:** A district drawn so that no other political party or other group is likely to have a chance of electing a representative for the district.

**Single Member District** (SMD): A district where there is only a single winner or a single open seat; also known as “winner-take-all.” It is the most common type of district used in the United States.

**Super District:** A term generally used to refer to a multi-member district (MMD) designed during a districting (or redistricting) process which consolidates the areas of several smaller

single member districts. Each super district must still adhere to constitutional requirements of equal apportionment and protect the equal rights of voters, including minority voters.

**Transparency:** Mechanisms by which the public can obtain information about government operations so that they can hold governments accountable.

(<http://www.brookings.edu/about/projects/transparency-accountability>.)

**Voting Rights Act (VRA):** The Voting Rights Act, also known as the VRA, was enacted by Congress in 1965 (42 U.S.C. 1973 to 1973bb-1) and transformed elections in the U.S. by prohibiting racial discrimination in voting. Pursuant to the VRA, the Attorney General undertakes investigations and litigation throughout the United States and its territories, conducts administrative reviews of changes in voting practices and procedures and monitors elections. The Act has been amended several times over the years, and in 2013, a portion of it was struck down by the Supreme Court. (See FAQs for more in-depth information about the VRA.)

**Sources include:** NAACP, MALDEF (*Mexican American Legal defense and Educational Fund*), Brennan Center for Justice, League of Women Voters of California, League of Women Voters of Oregon, U.S. Department of Justice, Azavea, Wikipedia. See NTF Websites for the websites of these organizations.