

Iowa's Redistricting Procedure

Research Paper – September 2019

Iowa conducts redistricting unlike any other state because it prohibits the use of political or election data, including the addresses of incumbents. The nonpartisan Legislative Services Agency (LSA) develops maps for the Iowa House, Iowa Senate and Congressional districts. After that, the Legislature votes up or down (the first two times) on the proposed plan.

While Iowa receives accolades for its non-partisan approach to redistricting, our system is in state law, not in the state Constitution. That means it is always subject to repeal and/or change from one legislative session to the next.

Historical Background

In 1962, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a person could challenge an improper redistricting plan via the court system. As a result, state legislatures were forced to draw redistricting plans consistent with constitutional and statutory requirements or risk having redistricting maps drawn by the courts.

The Iowa Constitution was amended in 1968 to draw boundaries based upon population and to establish the timeline for redistricting maps following the federal census. Since 1980, Iowa's districts have been drawn by nonpartisan legislative staff. They follow a strict set of criteria, including a [prohibition on the use of political data](#). Iowa is one of only a [handful of states](#) that doesn't allow political data in its redistricting process.

Iowa's Redistricting Criteria

1. Districts shall be established on the basis of population and shall have a population as nearly equal as practicable.
2. For Congressional districts, each district shall be composed of whole counties. For Legislative districts, the number of counties and cities divided into more than one district shall be as small as possible.
3. Districts shall be composed of convenient contiguous territory.
4. Districts shall be reasonably compact in form, to the extent consistent with the first three standards. In general, reasonably compact districts are square, rectangular or hexagonal in shape, and not irregularly shaped, to the extent permitted by natural or political boundaries.
5. A district shall not be drawn for the purpose of favoring a political party, incumbent legislator or member of Congress, political party, or other person or group.

Required: 1) Compact, 2) Contiguous and 3) Preserve Political Subdivisions

Prohibited: 1) Intentionally Favor a Party/Incumbent and 2) Use of Partisan Data

Nesting Districts

Iowa maps are drawn based on the "nesting" concept. First drawn are the Congressional district boundaries, making sure population deviation is as small as possible and the compact formula is as tight as possible. Iowa's 50 senate districts and 100 house districts must be "nested" together, meaning each Senate district has exactly two House districts within its boundaries. To the extent possible, these districts are nested within the Congressional districts, although this is not required by law. In the 2011 cycle, Congressional boundaries were crossed just twice when drawing legislative districts.

State Senate District Numbering

- Senate districts are numbered to keep the number of senate elections for two-year terms to a minimum.
- A new map requires numbering of senate districts to create as many "holdover" senatorial districts as possible. For 2011, the focus was on odd numbered districts (those that had been on the ballot in 2010).
- Numbering is only done after district boundaries are established.

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Redistricting Timeline (www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/2016/42.3.pdf)

Data from the census is the basis for realigning district boundaries to ensure population equality. While some states use other types of data, such as the American Community Survey, Iowa does not. Iowa only uses census data.

The next census data will be released in multiple stages. First, the census blocks and other geographic units will be released between November 2020 and January 2021. Second, the population numbers start in February 2021 and must be completed by April 1, 2021.

LSA must deliver a redistricting plan in the form of a bill to the Legislature no later than April 1, 2021, or within 45 days of the state receiving data from the census. There is no interaction or involvement with the [Temporary Redistricting Advisory Commission \(TRAC\)](#), legislators or any outside interest while plans are developed and selected.

After the submission of the first set of maps, the Legislature gives the plan an up-or-down vote. The only permitted amendments are to correct errors in the LSA's submitted plan. If the Legislature rejects the plan, the LSA has 35 days to deliver a new plan, which must address the reasons the first plan was rejected. If this second plan is also rejected, the process repeats itself; the LSA has another 35 days to deliver a third plan. Unlike the first two plans, the third plan may be amended in the same manner as any other bill, or the Legislature may draft a plan of its own.

If by September 1 of any year ending in "1," a legislative reapportionment bill fails to pass, the Constitution directs the Iowa Supreme Court to adopt a redistricting plan. There is no similar provision for congressional redistricting.

Since the enactment of this nonpartisan approach in 1980, there has been no Court intervention. The first redistricting proposal was enacted in 1991 and 2011; the second map was enacted in 2001; and the third map was enacted without amendment in 1981.

In 2011, Iowa lost one congressional seat because of slow population growth. We are not expected to lose one this cycle.

Temporary Redistricting Advisory Commission (TRAC):

Iowa Code calls for the creation each decade of a [TRAC](#) to provide guidance to LSA on certain redistricting matters. Four members are appointed by legislative leaders and a fifth member is selected by the other appointees. Once LSA finishes its proposed maps, TRAC conducts at least three public hearings on the maps and submits a report to the Legislature.

In 2011, the five members of the TRAC Commission were Chair Maggie Tinsman of Davenport, Rose Brown of Council Bluffs, Lance Ehmcke of Sioux City, Matt Paul of Des Moines and Eric Turner of Des Moines.

Sources:

- Iowa Code - [42.4 Redistricting Standards](#)
- NCSL: The Iowa Model for Redistricting. April 6, 2018 - www.ncsl.org/research/redistricting/the-iowa-model-for-redistricting.aspx
- Iowa Legislative Agency: Legislative Guide. Ed Cook, December 2007 - www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/publications/LG/9461.pdf