



# What is a Gerrymander?

from the Esri GeoInquiries™ collection for Government

Target audience – Government learners

Time required – 15 minutes

## Activity

States can draw their own congressional districts, often allowing for creative shapes and sizes—and questionable constitutionality.

## Social Studies Standards

**C3:D2.Civ.8.9-12.** Evaluate social and political systems in different contexts, times, and places that promote civic virtues and enact democratic principles.  
**C3:D2.Civ.4.9-12.** Explain how the U.S. Constitution establishes a system of government that has powers, responsibilities, and limits that have changed over time and that are still contested.

## Learning Outcomes

- Students will analyze the connection between congressional districts and population.
- Students will assess the fairness of the congressional districts in representing the general will of the people.

Map URL: <http://esriurl.com/GovGeoInquiry7>

## ? Ask

### Why do shapes of congressional districts vary from state to state?

- Click the link above to launch the map.
- ? What is gerrymandering? [*The drawing of congressional districts to favor one party or class over another.*]
- In the map, click a few districts to find the average number of people per district.
- ? What is the average? [*Answers will vary but should be approximately 711,000.*]
- ? Why do some states have more congressional districts? [*States with higher populations have more districts.*]

## ! Acquire

### What is the connection between population and district size?

- With the Details button underlined, press the button Show Contents of Map.
- Check the box to the left of the layer, 2016 Population Density by Congressional District.
- Uncheck the box to the left of the layer, USA 115th Congressional Districts.
- Click the map in a few districts to explore population density.
- ? What is the connection between population density and the size of congressional districts? [*The higher the population density, the smaller the congressional district.*]
- ? Why do you think the Constitution's founding fathers created this system? [*So that each geographical area would have a representative, and states with more people would have more power in the House of Representatives.*]

## 🔍 Explore

### How can gerrymandering be recognized?

- Click Bookmarks and choose the Chicago Metropolitan bookmark.
- Turn on the Chicago Metro Districts layer and turn off all other layers.
- The Supreme Court ruled that districts must be drawn compact, contiguous, and have roughly equal populations.
- ? Which of Chicago's districts appear to be the most gerrymandered? [*Districts 3, 4, 5, and 7*]

## Analyze

### How do party politics affect the drawing of districts?

- Select the bookmark, North Carolina.
- Turn on the two layers for North Carolina Congressional Districts.
  - The state legislature is responsible for drawing district borders after each census.
- ? Assuming support for the Republicans and Democrats are roughly equal, which political party likely had majority control when districts were drawn? Why? [*Republicans because they won 10 of 13 districts.*]
- Compare the 115th Congressional Districts to North Carolina's previous districts by changing the transparency of one of the layers. (See below for tips.)
- ? Which seems to meet the court requirements better? [*115<sup>th</sup>*]

## Act

### How do different states draw their congressional districts?

- Turn off all layers except the 2016 Congressional Districts layer.
- Type the name of a state into the search field to zoom to the state.
- ? Do the districts seem to be drawn fairly or not? What criteria did you use? [*Answers will vary but should reference compactness and contiguousness.*]
- ? Which districts seem to be the most gerrymandered in the state? Explain your reasoning. [*Answers will vary.*]

### CREATE A BOOKMARK

- Click Bookmarks and choose Add Bookmark.
- Type the name of your bookmark and press Enter.

### CHANGE THE LAYER TRANSPARENCY

- From the Details pane, click the Show Contents Of Map button.
- Point to a layer, click the three blue dots below the layer name, and choose Transparency.
- Modify the layer transparency to see an active layer below the top layer.

## Next Steps

DID YOU KNOW? ArcGIS Online is a mapping platform freely available to public, private, and home schools. A school subscription provides additional security, privacy, and content features. Learn more about ArcGIS Online and how to get a school subscription at <http://www.esri.com/schools>.

THEN TRY THIS...

- Use map notes to draw new district borders, limiting the amount of gerrymandering for a state like Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, or North Carolina.
- Create a data enrichment (analysis) for newly drawn map note layer. Determine how many people live in the district.

## TEXT REFERENCES

This GIS map has been cross-referenced to material in sections of chapters from these high school texts.

- *Government Alive! Power, Politics, and You* by Teachers' Curriculum Institute — Chapter 6
- *We the People* by Center for Civic Education — Chapter 21