

# 2021-2022 REDISTRICTING

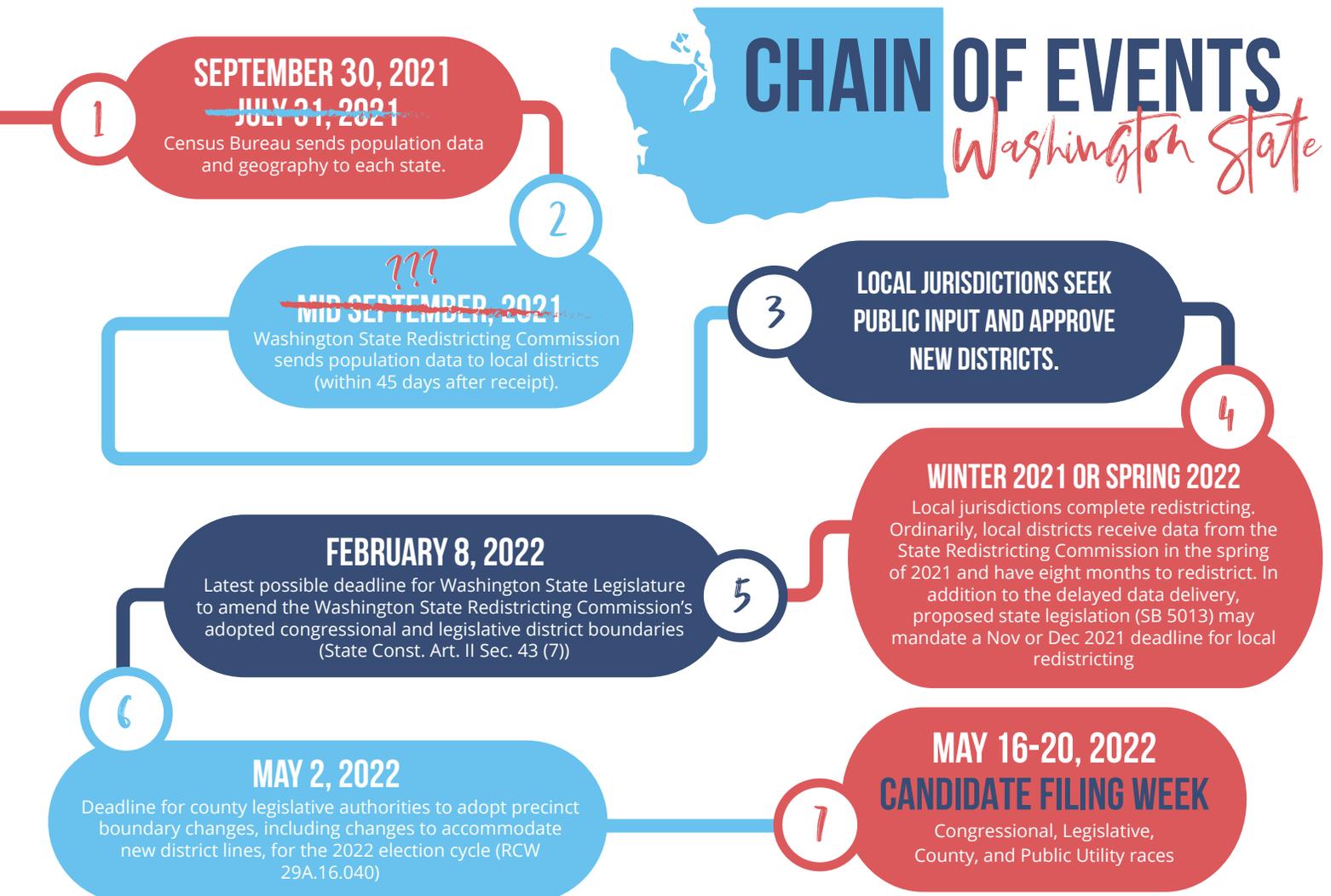
## WHAT IS REDISTRICTING?

Redistricting is the process of changing boundaries of voting districts so that all districts have the same number of people. This occurs every 10 years, immediately following the decennial census.

As states and communities grow and change, peoples' representation in government begins to get out of balance. Redistricting brings everything back into balance.

**The U.S. and state constitutions require that each congressional and legislative district:**

- Represent roughly equal numbers of people. Congressional and Legislative districts shall be nearly equal in size as is practicable.
- Keep groups who have common minority interests together to make sure political power is distributed fairly.



## CURRENT STATUS OF U.S. CENSUS DATA

COVID-19 has caused delays. The U.S. Census Bureau announced on February 12 that it will deliver the Public Law 94-171 redistricting data to all states by Sept. 30, 2021. The redistricting data includes counts of population by race, ethnicity, voting age, housing occupancy status, and group quarters population, all at the census block level. This is the information that states need to redraw or “redistrict” their legislative boundaries.

## 2022 CHALLENGES

Delays in census data create serious challenges for downstream jurisdictions, especially counties which are responsible for final adjustments and managing elections. Ordinarily, local districts would receive data from the State Redistricting Commission in the spring of 2021 and have eight months to redistrict., enabling the counties to accommodate new district lines and adjust precinct boundaries in time for May 2022 candidate filing. In this unprecedented 2021 – 2022 redistricting cycle, Census population data won't be sent to states until September 2021 (not July 31, 2021) and at this time it isn't clear when counties might receive the necessary information to define election districts.

## WHICH LOCAL JURISDICTIONS MUST REDISTRICT?

Any jurisdiction that elects representatives by internal district (as opposed to at-large) must ensure that the office districts are population-balanced. Counties, Port Districts, Cities, Schools, Fire Districts and possibly others may be required to redistrict. Charter counties may have specifics in the charter which govern the redistricting process. County size may also impact the number of commissioner districts in a county.

**NOTE:** Although County Auditors make every effort to collaborate, local jurisdictions are responsible for their own redistricting process.

# WHAT IS A PRECINCT?

A precinct is the smallest unit into which electoral districts are divided. A larger geographic unit such as a county or city council district is typically subdivided into precincts. Every household is assigned to a specific precinct.

In Washington State, law requires precincts to be no larger than 1,500 active registered voters. Our state currently has about 7,500 precincts. County Auditors are responsible for keeping precincts balanced, adjusting precinct boundaries, and ensuring that precinct lines are contiguous and don't straddle other district lines. While this maintenance occurs annually, the decennial redistricting process often requires significant changes, rather than small adjustments.

## CANDIDATE FILING 2022

Many – but not all – elected offices are filed by district. Redistricting must be completed far in advance of Candidate Filing (May 16 -May 20, 2022). Most counties agree that March 31, 2022 is the latest date to complete redistricting and provides a minimal amount of time to program boundaries into the election management system. Boundaries ensure that prospective candidates reside within the district and only qualified voters may cast a vote for district candidates.

## HOW COUNTY AUDITORS MIGHT MANAGE THE SHORT TIMELINE

Redistricting has always been a high-pressure event. The population data delay, plus the new November 15 deadline means redistricting will be on an accelerated cycle.

County Auditors will encourage local jurisdictions to redistrict quickly. They will work with local jurisdictions to “front load” the process to the greatest extent possible. The more preliminary data counties can gather by January 2022, the more efficient they will be redrawing precincts to match districting plans.

### **The following activities may be done now:**

- Appoint redistricting committees or determine processes to be followed.
- Determine procurement process to hire redistricting masters and vendors.
- Get redistricting masters and vendors under contract.
- Determine any goals or objectives for the redistricting process.
- Seek out early public input.

### County Auditors might prioritize changes for districts that hold elections in even years:

- Congressional districts
- Legislative districts
- (Most) county council and commissioner districts
- Public utility districts

## WASHINGTON STATE REDISTRICTING COMMISSION

[www.redistricting.wa.gov](http://www.redistricting.wa.gov)

The Washington State Redistricting Commission is responsible for creating new Congressional and Legislative Districts. The commission has five members: two from each of the majority party caucuses (this year, two Democrats and two Republicans), and a non-partisan, non-voting Chair.

### Current Commissioners

- Sarah Augustine, Chair
- April Sims (House Democrats)
- Joe Fain (Senate Republicans)
- Brady Piñero Walkinshaw (Senate Democrats)
- Paul Graves (House Republicans)

# WASHINGTON STATE REDISTRICTING

### State and federal law direct Legislative and Congressional district boundaries to be drawn to:

- Encompass, as nearly as can be done (or is “practicable”) equal numbers of people.
- Comply with the state Voting Rights Act to ensure that minorities have an equal opportunity to elect representatives of their choice.
- Make sure that parts of a district are not physically separated (except by bodies of water, where required).
- Make sure that, to the extent possible, boundaries of cities, counties, neighborhoods and communities that have common interests are respected, and their division minimized.
- Make sure they do not favor or discriminate against any incumbent, candidate, or political party.

### Congressional Districts

- Washington State has 10 Congressional Districts.
- One representative is elected to each district.
- The individual elected serves in the House of Representatives in Washington DC.

### Legislative Districts

- There are 49 legislative districts in Washington State.
- The residents of each district elect one Senator and two Representatives to the Legislature.
- The individual serves as a state senator or state representative in Olympia.

- This will be the first time the Washington State Voting Rights Act statute will be in place during a decennial redistricting. There will likely be the population to draw a majority-minority district in some parts of Eastern Washington for the first time.

# EXPECTED POPULATION CHANGES

- Washington State will not gain or lose any seats at the Congressional level.
- However, the 5th and 4th congressional districts will need to move west and the 7th and 2nd will need to shed voters.
- At the state level the new VRA statute will be put to the test in Yakima County. There will likely be the population to draw a majority-minority district.
- Legislative districts in the western foothills of Pierce and King as well as the Northern Seattle and Bellevue will also shed voters to their neighbors.

# LOCAL REDISTRICTING

Local redistricting, governed by RCW 29A.76, happens concurrently with state redistricting. Requirements for local redistricting are very similar to state requirements.

In general, local redistricting plans are required to draw internal districts to be:

- Nearly equal in population as possible to each.
- As compact as possible.
- In a geographically contiguous area.
- NOT used for purposes of favoring or disfavoring any racial group or political party.
- To the extent feasible, coincide with existing recognized natural boundaries and preserve existing communities of related and mutual interest.

# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

People are likely to be highly engaged all levels of government. National parties and media have increasingly publicized this once sleepy affair. Policymakers at all levels should be prepared for increased participation and a high volume of public submissions.

The League of Women voters has prepared a campaign to teach people how to provide effective testimony (<https://www.lwvwa.org/speakup>).

Interested people should contact their county council or county commissioners to engage in local redistricting. To give input and track legislative and congressional redistricting, contact the Washington State Redistricting Commission [www.redistricting.wa.gov](http://www.redistricting.wa.gov).

The Washington Census Alliance has transformed into the Washington Community Alliance and will be heavily involved in the redistricting process. The Alliance can be followed on Facebook or Twitter.



# LEGAL REFERENCES

Federal Law - [P.L. 94-171](#)

Census delivers redistricting summary files to the state.

Redistricting Commission - [RCW 44.05](#), [RCW 44.05.100](#), [Article II Section 43](#)

Local Redistricting - [RCW 29A.76](#), [RCW 29A.76.010](#)

Precincts - [RCW 29A.16](#)

Review all three sections. They all apply.

Washington State Voting Rights Act - [RCW 29A.92](#)