

Sacramento Redistricting Citizens Advisory Committee

**Session 3 - May 9, 2011
Primer #4**

Communities of Interest

City of Sacramento 2011 Redistricting



In seeking to preserve communities of interest, district line drawers should be respectful of populations or communities that have common “needs and interests” reflected in patterns of geography, social interaction, trade, political ties, and common interests. Communities of interest can be identified by referring to the census, demographic studies, surveys, or testimony of community activists and civic leaders. A community of interest must be geographically definable and contiguous.

A community of common interest is a state-level redistricting standard, not a federally-mandated standard like population equality or compliance with the Voting Rights Act. There is no uniform definition of communities of common interest used by states. “Community of interest” is defined in California (2008, Proposition 11) as: “a contiguous population which shares common social and economic interests that should be included within a single district for purposes of its effective and fair representation.” This definition, however, is only binding on the state’s redistricting commission.

In California, prior to Proposition 11, there was no state constitutional mandate for line-drawers to respect communities of common interest. However, the California Supreme Court has recognized the use of communities of common interest as an important and legitimate criterion (*Legislature v. Reinecke* decision in 1973 and *Wilson v. Eu* decision in 1992), and line-drawers have commonly used communities of interest as a redistricting standard. In *Wilson v. Eu*, the Special Masters used the following definition: “the social and economic interests common to the population of an area which are probable subjects of legislative action, generally termed a ‘community of interest’....”

Proposition 11’s standards apply to redistricting of Congressional, State Assembly, State Senate, and Board of Equalization districts. With regard to county supervisor and city council redistricting, the California Elections Code specifies that county boards (Section 21500) and city councils (Section 21601) may consider communities of common interest as a factor in drawing district boundaries.

Consideration of communities of interest may be important in order to provide a meaningful and fair chance to elect officials who best represent the group’s concerns, interests, and priorities. Identification of whether a neighborhood is a “community of interest” is a necessary -- but not sufficient -- criterion for keeping it intact. The courts have not stated precise standards, but some evidence is required, including evidence based on anecdotal testimony and sound social science research methods (if available). The goal is to protect geographic areas neighborhoods that are “communities of interest” from being cut into different districts. It must also be determined if the common interest merits consideration in the redistricting process.

“Some people believe that it is best to keep communities of interest whole, so that each community of interest can have a chance to have its own legislator looking out for its interest in the legislature, and so that individual legislators feel particularly responsible to serve the discrete communities as communities. Others believe that it is best to split communities of interest up so that districts are more heterogeneous and each legislator must compromise to suit her constituents. There are also instances when a sizable community, like a city dominant in its region, may want to be split into two or more districts, in order to extend its influence in the legislature. Each response incorporates a different idea about what representative districts should be meant to accomplish.” (Brennan Center)

“For some minority communities, the community of interest approach is a mainstay of their redistricting efforts. This is particularly true for Asian American communities, which are often not large enough in population size to constitute majority-minority districts by themselves. Where Asian American communities are not large enough to constitute majority-minority districts they may be characterized as

a community of interest in order to advocate for districts that promote responsive representation by elected officials and protect against the fracturing of their communities. Communities of interest can be multi-racial communities that include Latino, Asian American and/or African American populations.” (Source: The Impact of Redistricting in YOUR Community: A GUIDE TO REDISTRICTING, A Publication of NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.; Asian American Justice Center; Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2010)

It may also be difficult to determine how to define communities of interest. The American Community Survey (ACS) will provide certain ancestry and citizenship data. The ACS data replaces the former “long-form” of the past few census operations. However, the data set for ACS measures only a subset of potential criteria for communities of interest.

The following are some commonly used examples of potential shared geographic, social, and economic characteristics (compiled from various sources – listed in no particular order of significance). This list does not purport to be all-inclusive and may inadvertently omit some very valid communities of interest:

Political/Geographic

- Urban and rural interests
- Housing patterns and living conditions (urban, suburban, rural)
- Cultural, religious, and language characteristics
- Communication and transportation networks
- Transportation hubs / centers
- Redevelopment areas
- School districts / attendance areas
- Congressional or State legislative districts

Socio-Economic

- Income levels
- Educational backgrounds
- Age demographics, household size / family size
- Group quarters, housing owners vs. renters
- Policy issues (concerns about crime, education, etc.)
- Employment and economic patterns (How are community residents employed? What is the economic base of the community?)
- Health and environmental conditions
- Work opportunities

Cultural

- Social interests
- Community centers
- Parks / dog parks
- Media markets
- Occupations and lifestyles

References:

The Asian Americans Redistricting Project: Legal Background of the “Community of Common Interest” Requirement, July 2009, University of California Asian American and Pacific Islander Policy Multi-Campus Research Program - UCLA Asian American Studies Center

[The Impact of Redistricting in YOUR Community: A GUIDE TO REDISTRICTING](#), A Publication of NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.; Asian American Justice Center; Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2010

[A Citizen’s Guide to Redistricting](#), Brennan Center of Justice at New York University School of Law, 2010

Communities of Interest in Redistricting: A Key to Drawing 2011 Lines – And For Their Defense, March 27, 2010, National Demographics Corporation, by Douglas Johnson