

Draw the Lines

Flashes of Insight

This simple but absorbing exercise highlights this truth: Redistricting isn't just about statistics and lines on a map.

Just as a government budget isn't just a bunch of numbers, but rather a statement of values and priorities, so it is with election maps. They also embody values, values that speak to how you want democracy to work, how you want to be represented, how you define community.

No single person can generate the “one perfect map” just by plugging numbers into an algorithm and letting ‘er rip. The map you like best might be sound and constitutional, yet the person next to you might prefer a very different but also constitutional map. The two of you might just be prioritizing different, legitimate values.

Flashes of Insight gives you a set of flashcards, each listing and defining one of seven values that people commonly bring to the task of drawing an election map. An eighth card allows you to add to the mix with one “Wild Card” value of your choice.

Here's what you do: Find a friend, relative or co-worker to do this exercise with you. Print out two sets of the cards. Then each of you stack your set of cards top to bottom, based on the priority you place on each—most important at the top, least important on the bottom. Once you've got your stack, compare results, asking questions about why each of you ordered your stacks in the way you did.

Chances are, you made different choices. Your dialogue will help show how much more goes into drawing a map than just moving a mouse around on a screen.



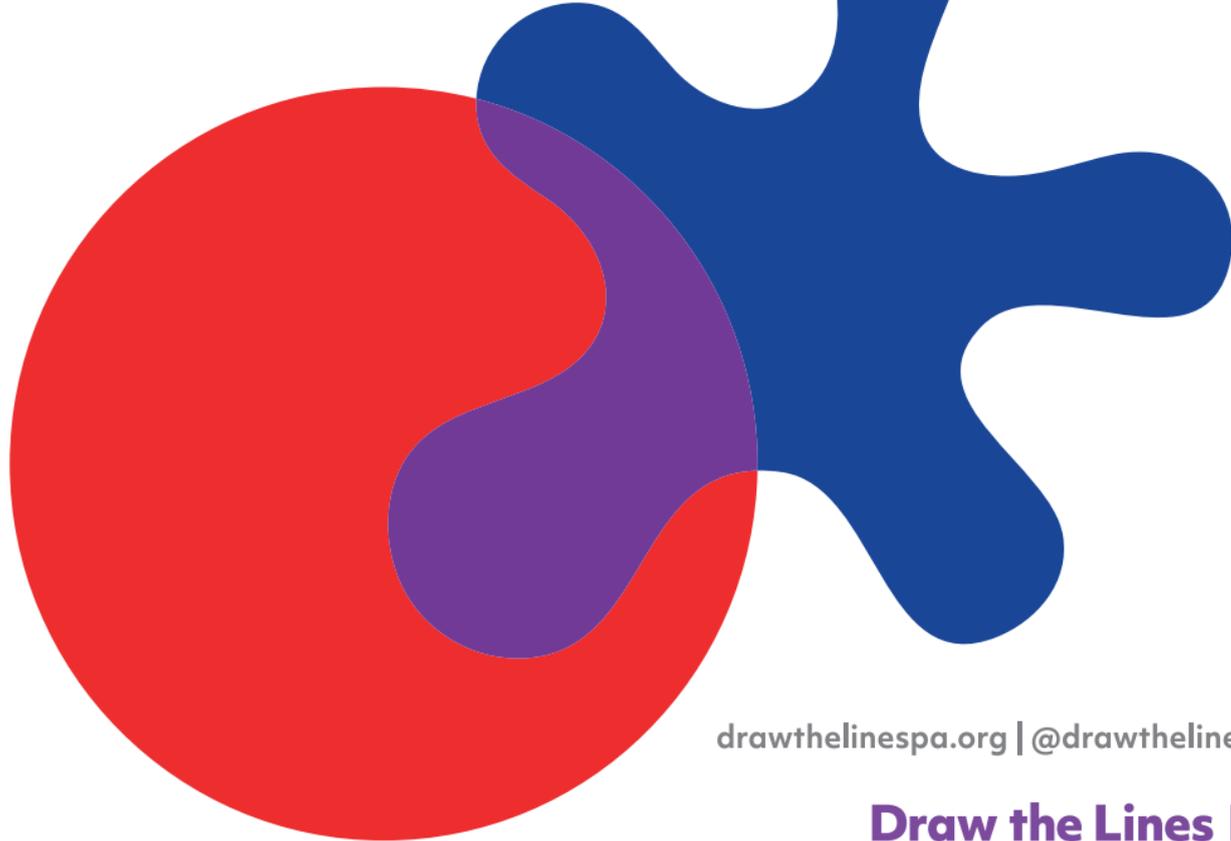
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**COMMUNITIES
OF INTEREST**

COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST

I want maps to take into account well-known regional identities (e.g. Lehigh Valley, Main Line, Mon Valley), even if those don't fit neatly with county boundaries. Maps may also take into account a region's shared policy interests (e.g. fracking, watersheds).



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COMPACTNESS

COMPACTNESS

I want districts that spread as little as possible from their centers, with borders that are smooth, not jagged or contorted.



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COMPETITIVE ELECTIONS

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COMPETITIVE ELECTIONS

I want maps to take into account political data (e.g. party registrations, recent election results), to create as many districts as possible where each party has a relatively equal chance to win.

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CONTIGUITY

CONTIGUITY

I want districts where no one part is disconnected from the rest, and no connections strike me as minimal or absurd (e.g. the width of an interstate highway).



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COUNTY/MUNICIPAL SPLITS



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COUNTY/MUNICIPAL SPLITS

I want maps that focus on limiting the times that either counties or municipalities get split among multiple districts.



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EQUAL POPULATION



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EQUAL POPULATION

I want all election districts to have exactly the same number of people in them, to comply with the constitutional principle of "one person, one vote."



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MINORITY REPRESENTATION

MINORITY REPRESENTATION

I want maps that ensure communities of color have regular, meaningful opportunities to elect a candidate of their choice.

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PARTY ADVANTAGE



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PARTY ADVANTAGE

I want maps that enable my political party to win as many seats as it can within the rules.

WILD

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CARD

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WILD CARD

Is there another value you'd like to see maps uphold? Write it on a sticky note and put it here.