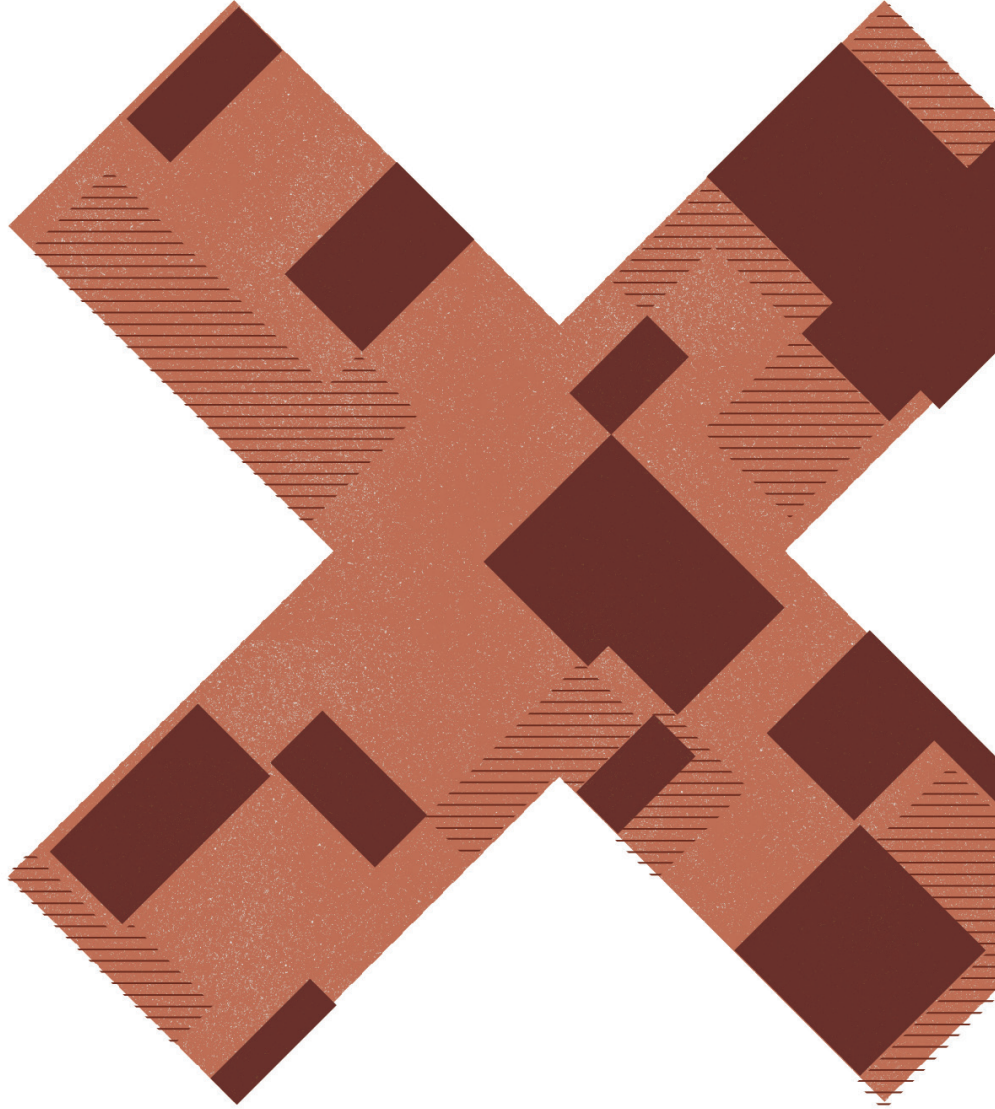


Engage.  
Empower.  
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Elections <sup>x</sup>  
& Democracy

Teacher's  
Guide



# Mapping Electoral Districts

Considering what makes  
electoral boundaries fair



# Mapping Electoral Districts

## Big Ideas

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1. Elections are place-based and land-based. People vote for a representative in a particular electoral district.
2. In order for elections to be fair, careful consideration is given to both human and physical geography in determining the boundaries of electoral districts.

Inquiry question:

**What makes an electoral district fair?**

✖ **Time needed**

**60 min**



# Overall description

This activity can be used in a geography, world issues, social studies or civics course to explore the concept of fairness in determining federal electoral boundaries.

In this activity, students consider the concept of fairness first in a familiar context, and then in the context of federal elections.

Students will map electoral boundaries on an imaginary country, with the goal of making the electoral districts as fair as possible.

They will interpret maps and analyze facts on population and geographical landforms to make their decisions. They will explain the rationale for their decision-making, considering the distinction between equality and equity. Finally, they will watch a video to learn about the real process for determining federal electoral districts in Canada.

## × Student Learning Competencies

- Students will work **collaboratively** to **manage information** and **think critically** in analyzing, interpreting and making reasoned judgments in order to map electoral district boundaries.
- Students will apply **numeracy skills** to determine population numbers within electoral boundaries.
- Students will use **map literacy** skills to demonstrate understanding of both the physical and human geographical factors unique to each electoral district.
- Students will analyze **geographic factors of regional significance** when determining electoral district boundaries.
- Students will apply **citizenship** skills by considering issues of fairness and equity in the process of creating electoral boundaries.
- Students will **communicate** their thinking in small groups, and their conclusions in whole-class discussions and through personal reflection, to become **self-aware** of any changes to their thinking since the start of the activity.

## × Materials

- Base map\* (4 tiled sheets comprise one large map)
- Reference maps\* (1: Population Distribution Map; 2: Language Communities Map; 3: Shared History Map)
- Info sheet for reference maps (page 11)
- Mapping Electoral Districts video: Interview with an Elections Canada Geographer\*
- Teacher fact sheet (pages 8–9)
- Wild cards for optional extension activity (page 12)
- Exit card (1 per student) (page 13)
- Optional assessment rubric (page 14)
- Calculator (not provided)
- Pencils or markers (not provided)

\* Available online at [electionsanddemocracy.ca](http://electionsanddemocracy.ca) and [cangeoeducation.ca](http://cangeoeducation.ca)

# Instructions

Print and assemble enough base maps to provide one to each small group. If possible, laminate this map so students can easily make revisions using dry erase markers.



Print one set of the three reference maps for each student group (1: Population Distribution Map; 2: Language Communities Map; 3: Shared History Map). Make photocopies of the info sheet (one or two per group).

Read the teacher fact sheet to review the real process for determining the boundaries for federal electoral districts before you begin this activity.

## × Minds on

5 min

Ask students to imagine they are at a family party to celebrate a grandparent's birthday. There are seven people at the party:

- Two grandparents
- Two adults
- One 3-year-old
- Two teenagers

Everyone wants a piece of birthday cake. As a class, discuss how you would divide the cake so that everyone gets their fair share. Should everyone get the same-sized piece, or should it be divided based on each person's age, size or other factors?

Discuss the difference between equality and equity.

Introduce the inquiry question: What makes an electoral district fair?

## × Activity

30 min

### 1. Getting started

Begin by explaining that Canada is divided into 338 electoral districts, or ridings. In each district, voters elect one member of Parliament to represent the voice and interests of everyone who lives there. To reflect changes in the Canadian population, the number of electoral districts is adjusted every ten years.

When deciding the boundaries of an electoral district, several factors are considered, including:

- the size of the population;
- geographic features; and
- social factors, such as culture and language.

The most important factor is making sure that the number of people represented is as equal as possible, so that every vote counts the same.

Explain that students will need to consider these factors in their next task: drawing electoral boundaries for an imaginary country. This country has some similar characteristics to Canada, including a parliamentary system of government.

Divide students into groups of three to five. Give each group the base map, the three reference maps (Population Distribution, Language Communities, and Shared History), and an info sheet. Together, review the base map legend to identify the various physical and human geographical elements (mountains, bodies of water, languages spoken, and so on). Then explain the purpose of each reference map. Take a moment to make some quick comparisons to the students' own space: "Our town is surrounded by mountains, too"; or "We live in an urban area with a high population density like this."

## 2. Mapping an imaginary country

Explain that students will apply the concept of fairness to map electoral boundaries on their imaginary country.

They begin by naming their country. Then they must divide the entire area of the imaginary country into eight electoral districts that are as fair as possible, and draw the boundaries on the base map. The total surface area of the imaginary country must be included within electoral boundaries.

On the base map, one electoral district has been included as an example. Students must use that boundary as a starting point to divide up seven additional electoral districts within their country, for a total of eight. If students are having difficulty limiting their electoral districts to eight, they may create more, but must provide a justification of why this is required.

Students should aim to have a similar number of people in each electoral district. Students can use the Population Distribution Map to sketch out their boundaries in pencil before drawing their final versions in marker on the larger base map.

## ✕ Consolidation

25 min

### 1. Gallery walk

There are no right answers to this activity, and every group's map will look different. To consolidate their learning, have students participate in a gallery walk. This will give them an opportunity to explain their decisions and to compare the similarities and differences of their maps.

For the gallery walk, choose a format that works for your class. We suggest that you display each of the base maps throughout the classroom and divide each group into two sub-groups. One sub-group stays with their map to explain their decision making in drawing their boundaries, and the other visits the maps of the other groups. Halfway through, have the sub-groups switch.



Finally, have the original groups reconvene to share their observations and consider any changes they would make to their maps, in the context of fairness. Lead a discussion about the differences and similarities that can be observed in the maps and the reasons behind these.

## 2. Real-life video

Play the video “Interview with an Elections Canada Geographer,” which explains the real process of mapping federal electoral boundaries in Canada.

After students watch the video, invite them to return to the inquiry question: What makes an electoral district fair?

Distribute an exit card to each student and ask them to reflect on their learning.

## ✕ Extend your geographic thinking

1. Distribute 1 or 2 wild cards to each group. Explain to students that they are to take into account the factors indicated on the cards and update their map accordingly. Have students explain the reasoning behind any boundaries they have adjusted, making sure to justify changes in the context of fairness.
2. Have students create names for each of the electoral districts by referring to the information or geographical features included on the maps, especially the Language Communities Map and the Shared History Map.

3. If technology is available, display the following map, which shows how electoral boundaries changed from 2003 to 2013: [redecoupage-federal-redistribution.ca/map/pwt/pwt.html?lang=e&](http://redecoupage-federal-redistribution.ca/map/pwt/pwt.html?lang=e&). Find your community on the map and ask students if or how your boundary changed, and to suggest possible reasons why it did or did not change. Have students consider their real-world electoral boundary in terms of its physical and human geographic features.

## ✕ Teacher Tips

- Exit cards require students to write responses to prompts or questions based on the lesson. The cards provide immediate feedback to help you assess students’ understanding of content, to gather feedback for your teaching and to see what questions students are asking to suggest new areas of learning. For students, exit cards provide a reflective space to consolidate and reflect on their learning and practice and to enhance their metacognition.
- A gallery walk is a learning strategy that involves an informal walk around the classroom. It can provide opportunities for students to talk to each other about the material in a less structured way, and allows them to reflect on their own learning.



# Background information

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For teachers

## ✘ Teacher fact sheet

### How are federal electoral boundaries decided in Canada?

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#### A note about terms

Federal riding, federal electoral district and constituency can all be used interchangeably.

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#### When and why do the boundaries need to change?

According to the Constitution of Canada, federal electoral boundaries must be reviewed every 10 years based on the most recent census to reflect Canada's ever changing population.

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#### Who decides where the boundaries go?

An independent electoral boundaries commission is created for each province, for a total of 10 commissions. The commissions use demographic data from Statistics Canada and spatial data from Natural Resources Canada to determine if the boundaries need to be changed.

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#### What about the Territories?

Due to their limited population size and the *Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act*, the territories are each allocated only one federal electoral district, which is not reviewed.

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#### Who is a part of a federal electoral boundaries commission?

Each commission has three key players: one judge who chairs the commission and two members appointed by the Speaker of the House of Commons (usually academics and researchers).



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## What criteria are used to determine the new boundaries?

The main criterion is population equality (plus or minus 25%); however, other criteria are also considered by the commission, such as:

- communities of interest or identity,
- historical patterns of previous boundaries, and
- manageable geographic size.

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## Do citizens get a say?

Of course! Once the commission has prepared proposals of the revised boundaries, there are public hearings held in the affected districts for the public to participate in the process. Members of the House of Commons can also participate in the hearings.

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## Does Elections Canada decide where the boundaries go?

Elections Canada plays an impartial support role, such as providing data and assisting with mapping. It then implements the boundary decisions made by the commissions and produces new electoral district maps.

### For more information:

- Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act (R.S.C., 1985, c. E-3)  
[bit.ly/2Qv8he7](https://bit.ly/2Qv8he7)
- Redistribution of Federal Electoral Districts  
[bit.ly/1wjcaEE](https://bit.ly/1wjcaEE)



# Materials

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To be photocopied

## ✘ Info Sheet for Reference Maps

Use this information to help you draw boundaries on your Base Map.

### Reference map 1: Population Distribution Map

#### Use this information first

One of the main considerations for mapping electoral boundaries is population equality. The population of your imaginary country is 560,000 people. The law requires that the population of each electoral district not vary from the average by more than 10 percent.

Average population per district = Population/Number of Districts  
(560,000/8 = 70,000 people per district)

Think about how you are going to divide the population by electoral district while keeping in mind the 10 percent law. Note that you may make exceptions to this law if you can justify your decision.

### Reference map 2: Language Communities Map

This map indicates the top languages, besides the majority, in various areas of the country. It shows communities of people who share the same mother tongue, or first language.

Think about the importance of language in making decisions about creating electoral boundaries.

### Reference map 3: Shared History Map

Observe the historical electoral boundary on the base map (see island). Think about some of the reasons the boundary might have been established there.

Think about preserving the historical pattern – or consider whether it is time to change the tradition.

#### Keep in mind:

- Examine the various physical geographical factors (e.g., mountains, roads, islands, waterways, ferries) when drawing electoral boundaries.
- The interests of all the people within each electoral boundary will be represented by one member of Parliament.

## ✘ Wild cards (Extension Activity)

### ✘ Wild card 1

Rising sea levels! In the historical electoral boundary district, the smaller of the two islands, southeast of the larger one, has been flooded and is now uninhabitable. Distribute the population elsewhere in a reasonable manner. Does this change your current boundaries?

### ✘ Wild card 2

The Constitution assures that the rural community west of the mountain range has two districts, no matter their population. This guarantee is known as a grandfather clause. Divide this region into at least two districts.

### ✘ Wild card 3

The people who live mostly in the northeast were separated into two districts in the last redistribution process. They were very displeased with this separation, which they felt watered down their voice. How are you going to address this concern with your boundary selection?

## ✗ Exit Card

### Mapping Electoral Districts

#### What makes an electoral district fair?

Here are some factors discussed during the activity. Rate their importance in relation to the inquiry question. For the most important factor, explain in the space below why it is most important.

#### A. Population equality

1	2	3	4	5
(unimportant)				(very important)

#### B. Respecting communities of interest or identity (e.g., language, shared culture, shared history)

1	2	3	4	5
(unimportant)				(very important)

#### C. Respecting historical patterns of previous boundaries

1	2	3	4	5
(unimportant)				(very important)

#### D. Maintaining a manageable geographic size

1	2	3	4	5
(unimportant)				(very important)

The most important factor for me is \_\_\_\_ (write letter), because

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# ✘ Elections Canada Civic Education Assessment Rubric

## Task: Mapping Electoral Districts

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_ Group: \_\_\_\_\_

	Absent / Incomplete	Level 1 (Below expectations)	Level 2 (Approaches expectations)	Level 3 (Meets expectations)	Level 4 (Exceeds expectations)
<b>Understanding Content</b> (e.g., ideas, opinions, concepts, relationships among facts)		Demonstrates limited understanding of content	Demonstrates some understanding of content	Demonstrates considerable understanding of content	Demonstrates thorough understanding of content
<b>Understanding Context(s)</b> (e.g., relationship of content to big ideas, such as "fairness," "democracy," and "inclusion vs. exclusion;" themes; frameworks)		Demonstrates limited understanding of context(s)	Demonstrates some understanding of context(s)	Demonstrates considerable understanding of context(s)	Demonstrates thorough understanding of context(s)
<b>Applying Critical Thinking Skills</b> (e.g., analyzing, evaluating, inferring, interpreting, revising, refining, reviewing, reflecting, forming conclusions, detecting bias, synthesizing)		Uses critical thinking skills with limited effectiveness	Uses critical thinking skills with some effectiveness	Uses critical thinking skills with considerable effectiveness	Uses critical thinking skills with a high degree of effectiveness
<b>Using Collaborative Group Learning Skills</b> (e.g., communication skills, questioning, active listening, problem solving, focus on task, level of engagement, teamwork)		Shows communication skills and collaborative group learning skills with limited effectiveness	Shows communication skills and collaborative group learning skills with some effectiveness	Shows communication skills and collaborative group learning skills with considerable effectiveness	Shows communication skills and collaborative group learning skills with a high degree of effectiveness
<b>Demonstrating Civic Disposition</b> (e.g., respects diversity of opinion, recognizes that rights come with responsibilities, considers what is good for society as a whole)		Expresses few civic dispositions	Expresses some civic dispositions	Expresses many civic dispositions	Expresses a considerable number and range of civic dispositions

Comments:



## Contributors note

Elections Canada, the Royal Canadian Geographical Society and Canadian Geographic Education are pleased to have contributed to this educational resource which focuses on mapping with a critical eye for the fair establishment of electoral boundaries.

Elections Canada is the independent, non-partisan agency responsible for conducting federal elections, by-elections and referenda. It also has a mandate to implement educational programs at the elementary and secondary levels. The agency works with educational and subject-matter experts to develop tools that promote inquiry-based, student-centred learning. With *Mapping Electoral Districts*, Elections Canada hopes to better support teachers to build students' knowledge, understanding and interest in elections and democracy through the lens of geography education.

The Royal Canadian Geographical Society is dedicated to promoting and enhancing public awareness for Canadian geography, and to strengthening the bond between Canadians and their diverse and vast geographical heritage. As one of Canada's oldest and largest educational, non-profit organizations, the RCGS, and its iconic publication, *Canadian Geographic*, has been our country's most recognized voice for connecting Canadians with the land, culture and environment in which they live. The Society's education program, Canadian Geographic Education, is one of the most robust in the country. It currently provides free geographic educational material and support for over 21,000 educator-members, with its membership expanding each year.

## Contact us

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