

## Virginia House of Delegates Plan With Election Data

Elections ensure popular participation and engagement while simultaneously lending legitimacy to the democratic process. However, uncompetitive elections can undermine this process by discouraging voter participation and creating a disconnect between perennial incumbents and their constituents. By taking into account 2008 and 2009 election data, we were able to create a highly competitive map that would help foster an ethic of accountability within elected officials. We began at the county level; and only moved to the precinct and VTD level when we could improve population equality or compactness measurements. This top-down approach allowed us to default to local jurisdictional expertise as much as possible.

Our primary criterion while drawing the district lines was dictated by federal legislation (the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and 1982), Supreme Court rulings, and the standards established by the 2001 Virginia Committees on Privileges and Elections. By adhering to these guidelines, we have developed an objectively fair plan that should withstand preclearance review by the Department of Justice.

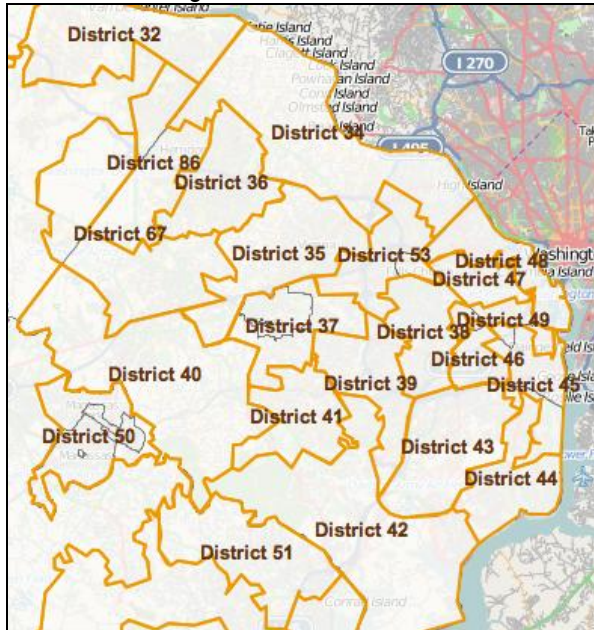
Over the past decade, the increase in registered voters has led to an increase in competitive elections within Virginia. Consequently, we felt that we should include a large number of competitive districts in order to reflect this trend. Our plan includes 13 “highly competitive” districts (defined as districts with election deviation of  $\pm 2\%$ ) as well as an additional 20 “competitive districts” (defined as districts with election deviation of  $\pm 5\%$ ). By having 1 out of every 3 elections competitive, our plan helps to maintain a responsive legislature because the majority's control could potentially be disrupted by voter reactions in these swing districts.

Our plan also has an additional 11 House of Delegates districts that are within 2% of being competitive. Given the population trends towards metropolitan areas over the past decade, it seems realistic to assume that an even more competitive political landscape could ensue over the next decade as a result of our redistricting plan.

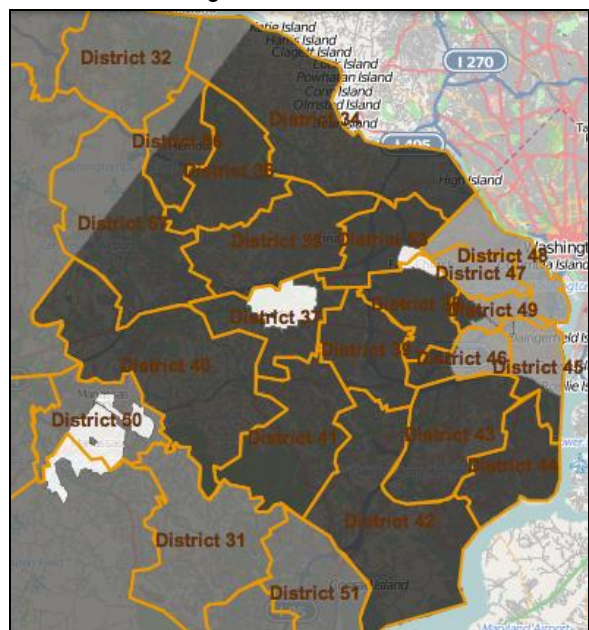
The target population for each House of Delegates district is 80,010 persons. U.S. Supreme Court decisions--especially *Brown v. Thompson* (1983)-- seem to allow for up to a 10% total deviation (+/-5%) within state districts. However, the 2001 Virginia Committees on Privileges and Elections--and later the Supreme Court in *Cox v. Larios* (2004)--set an even stricter goal of 4% total deviation (or +/-2%). Our 2011 plan satisfies this stricter guideline. Every Virginia House of Delegates district is within 1600 (2%) of the target 80,010; with 90% of the districts falling within 1% (800). Districts not falling within our desired 1% range were the direct result of our attempt to make that district, or an adjacent district, competitive. Furthermore, our average population deviation across all districts is a mere .59% (448).

More important, our attempt to attain population equality did not come at the expense of compactness. The 2001 House plan had an average compactness measurement of 49.78%; while our plan has an average compactness measurement of 58.5%. This increase in compactness is especially prevalent in Northern Virginia (see the images below). Due to the lack of a universal compactness measurement, we defaulted to the software's statistical validation of our compactness improvements.

Northern Virginia 2001

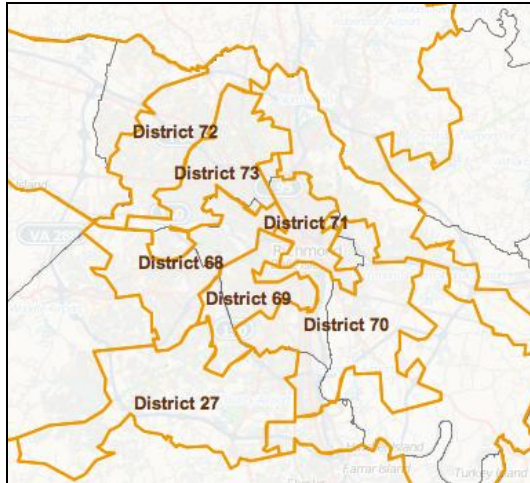


Northern Virginia 2011

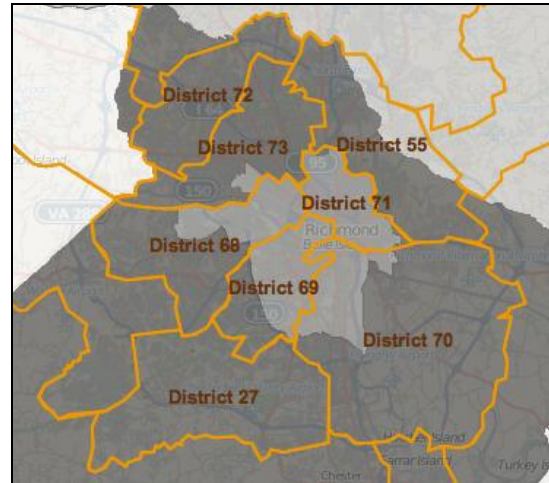


Our plan also is significant because it permits greater exercise of the right to vote as defined by the U.S. Constitution, Congress in the Voting Rights Act, and the U.S. Supreme Court in numerous decisions. While we did not make race the primary rationale for drawing our district lines, our plan increases the number of majority-minority districts in Virginia from 10 to 11 districts. According to the 2010 Census, African-Americans represent 19.4% of Virginia's population, and yet their representation within the General Assembly remains approximately half of their population proportion. Our plan's majority minority districts also increased in their district compactness. In previous Virginia redistricting plans in 1991 and 2001, majority-minority districts often came at the expense of compact districts (see images below). However, in our plan our majority-minority districts had an average compactness measurement of 66.33%.

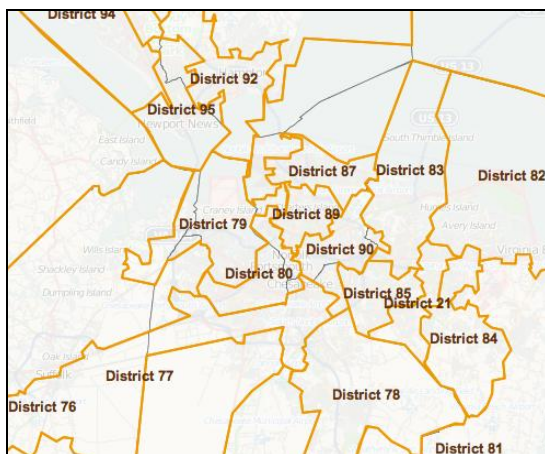
Richmond 2001



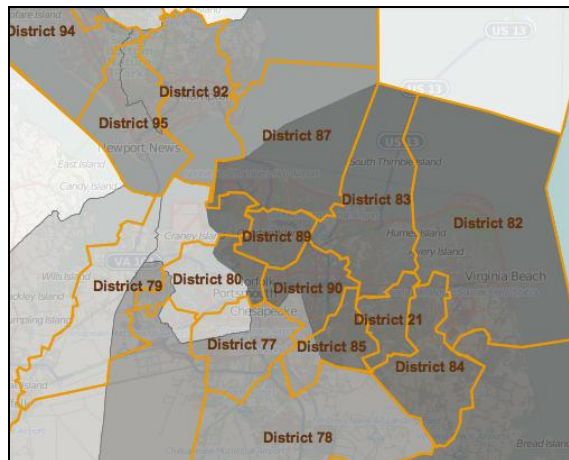
Richmond 2011



Virginia Beach 2001



Virginia Beach 2011



In addition to increasing district compactness, we also were able to create majority-minority districts that strictly adhere to the guidelines established by the Supreme Court decision in *Thornburg v Gingles*. As prescribed in this decision, minority candidates and minority-preferred candidates within these districts should have a chance of success comparable to the percentage of the population that they compose. In our plan, every majority-minority district is considered a Democratic district. Because the correlation between African-American voters and

Democratic votes is high and constant, we determined that this electoral effect is properly reflective of the constituents' interests.

Finally, every district within our plan is a contiguous, single-member district that respects local communities of interests as much as possible. Our emphasis on compactness allows for greater interest homogeneity by promoting greater residential proximity than in past Virginia redistricting plans.