

What If Nebraska Had Two Congressional Districts?

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1 Introduction

Just before the 2024 General Election on November 5, 2024, I gave a talk about population shifts in Nebraska's Congressional Districts. The talk touched on the “blue dot” in the current District 2 (Omaha metro area). We now know that District 2 departed from the rest of the state by having a majority vote Democratic in 2008, 2020, and 2024. The departure awards one Electoral College vote to the Democratic candidate under Nebraska's nearly unique (shared with Maine) system of awarding some Electoral College votes by District instead of state-winner-take-all. At the talk, I was asked what would happen if Nebraska was reduced to two Congressional Districts in the next census and redistricting cycle in 2030. That was a great question, and I decided to investigate. This is a short report on some quick experiments in response to that question.

2 Two Congressional Districts

To have the most up-to-date population figures, I use the Census Bureau 2023 population estimates by county. The Census Bureau estimates the Nebraska population in 2023 is 1,961,965 persons. For two Congressional Districts with equal populations, each should have 989,190 persons (rounded). I chose

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to create Congressional Districts by starting with the most populous Douglas County, together with Sarpy County making up the most of the Omaha metropolitan area. I then added adjacent counties to make a contiguous District with as close to the ideal population figure as possible. Because I had populations by county this was easy and I did not split any counties. Avoiding splitting counties achieves one redistricting criterion of respecting existing governmental unit boundaries. I also tried to group the very broadly defined Omaha metro area by including Dodge, Washington and Saunders Counties. This tries to achieve another redistricting goal by preserving communities of interest, namely the greater Omaha metro area. I did not work to achieve compactness, yet another redistricting goal, but more about that below. Keeping with the current district containing Omaha being District 2, I continue to call this District 2.

Dividing by using whole counties also allows for easily collating the results of the 2024 General Election, reported by counties from the Nebraska Secretary of State, into the new districts. See the next section.

Two Congressional Districts with equal populations just about dictates the metro areas of Omaha and Lincoln will be in separate districts. This means the other District 1 will be the remaining counties in the state, including Lancaster County containing Lincoln.

I made two experiments with dividing the state into two Congressional Districts according to the principles outlined above. The first experiment has District 2 extending from Sarpy County (Bellevue) in the southeast to Madison County (Norfolk) in the northwest. By the eyeball test, this district is reasonably compact. (I did not compute any compactness scores such as Polsby-Popper.) This division is in the following Figure 1.

The second experiment was to divide the state with District 2 composed mostly with counties bordering the Missouri River, shaded in green in Figure 2. This division was arbitrary, to generate another division for comparison with the first more compact division. By the eyeball test, this District is not compact, but with only 2 districts composed only by whole counties, the equal population criterion takes precedence over other criteria. Other divisions are possible and these two are not special. Other divisions might meet the criteria of equal populations, compactness, preservation of prior cores better or worse than these two experiments.

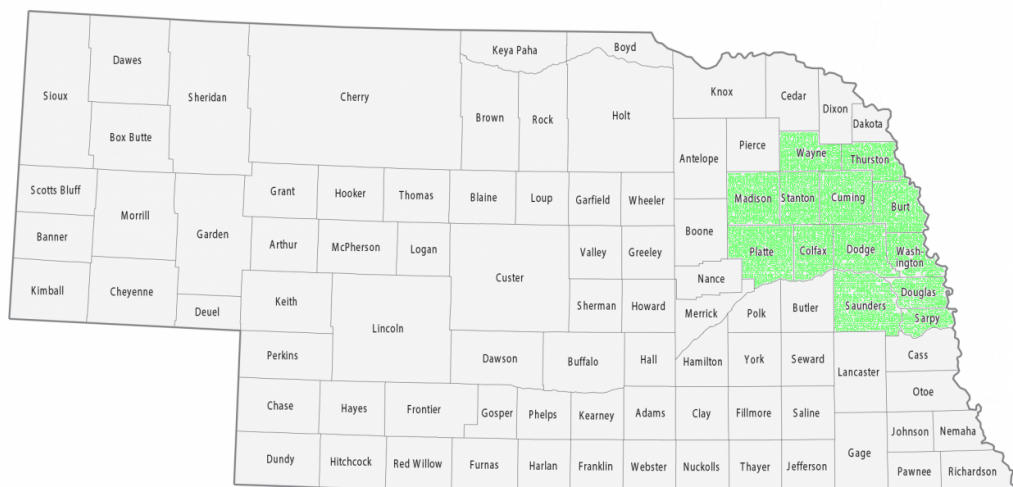


Figure 1: Reasonably compact District 2 shaded in green, District 1 is all else.

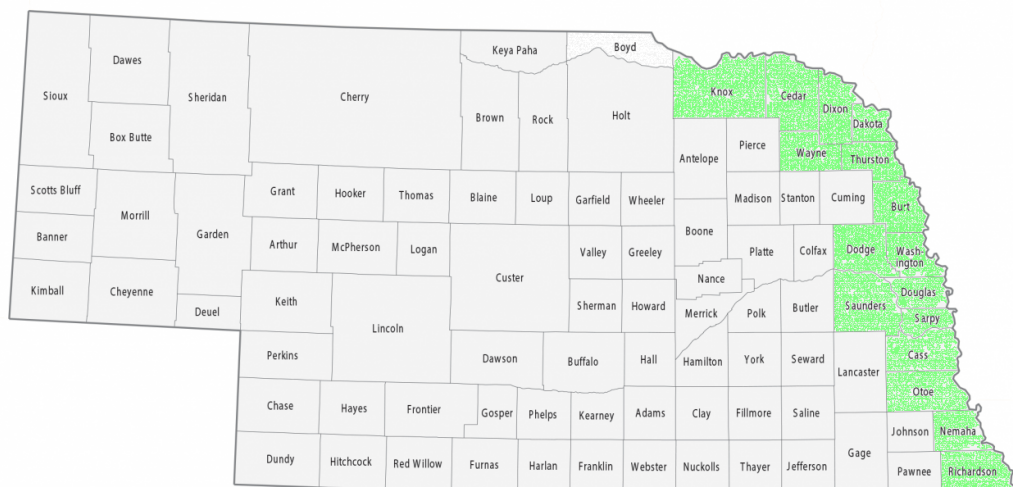


Figure 2: District 2 shaded in green, District 1 is all else.

Experiment	CD1 Popn	% Deviation	CD2 Popn	% Deviation
1: Compact	998417	-0.08	989962	+0.08%
2: River	982128	-0.7%	996251	+0.7%

3 Consequences using 2024 Election Results

3.1 Test 1 of Congressional Districts (Sarpy to Madison)

The following table gives the votes from the November 5, 2024 Presidential Election totaled into the first experimental districts.

District	Republican	Democratic
1	317994	151027
2	239162	210922

3.2 Test 2 of Congressional Districts (Bordering the Missouri River)

The following table gives the votes from the November 5, 2024 Presidential Election totaled into the second experimental districts.

District	Republican	Democratic
1	312412	145535
2	244744	216414

4 Conclusion

The conclusion is that if Nebraska is reduced to two Congressional Districts, it is almost certain to lose the CD 2 “blue dot” unless there are substantial political changes in the state.