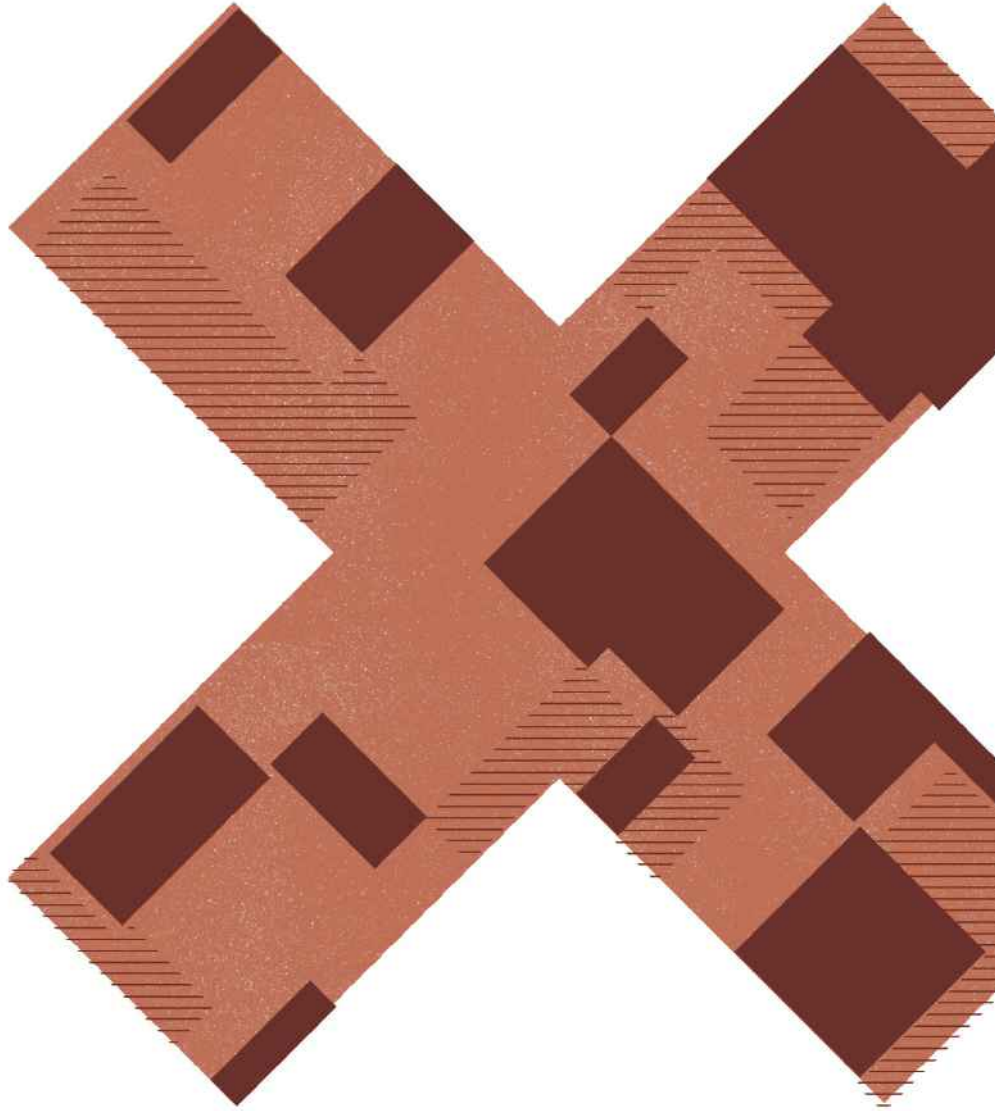




Mapping Electoral Districts

Considering what makes
electoral boundaries fair

Mapping Electoral Districts

Big ideas

1. People vote for someone to represent them in a particular electoral district.
2. Elections are land-based. Both human and physical geography are carefully considered in creating fair 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, civics or citizenship 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, then in the context of federal elections. Students will map electoral boundaries of 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.

✕ Competencies and skills

- 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 **geospatial literacy** skills to demonstrate understanding of both the physical and human geographic 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

- Main Map
- Reference maps
- Slide deck*
- *Interview with an Elections Canada Geographer* video*
- Teacher fact sheet (pages 10–11)
- Instructions for students (page 13)
- Exit card (page 14)
- Helpful vocabulary (page 15)
- Optional assessment rubric (page 16)
- Calculator (not provided)
- Dry erase markers (not provided)

*Online at electionsanddemocracy.ca/mapping-electoral-districts

Instructions

✖ Keep in mind

The maps in your kit are to be used only with dry erase markers. Avoid using a pen or permanent marker, as it will damage the maps. Additional maps are available to download, print and assemble at electionsanddemocracy.ca/mapping-electoral-districts.



✖ 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:

- One grandparent
- Two adults
- Three teenagers
- One 3-year-old

Everyone wants a piece of birthday cake. With a partner, discuss and draw 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 hundreds of 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 10 years.

Adaptation: For younger students or language learners, we recommend that you distribute the materials at the beginning of the lesson, pre-teach the relevant vocabulary and use the blank side of the Main Map to draw the cake. The use of manipulative materials is also encouraged.



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

- The size of the population
- Geographic factors
- 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:

- One Main Map
- Two reference maps:
 - Language Communities
 - Shared History
- One Instructions for students handout
- Dry erase markers

Together, review the Main Map and its legend. Observe the various physical and human geographical elements, such as mountains, bodies of water, roads, ferries and population density. 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." Then explain the purpose of both reference maps. Ask students to identify similarities and differences.

2. Mapping an imaginary country

Explain that students will apply the concept of fairness to map electoral boundaries of 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 Main Map. The total surface area of the imaginary country must be included within electoral boundaries.

Adaptation: For younger students or language learners, we recommend that you spend more time reviewing the geographic factors shown on the map and use only one reference map to simplify the activity.



Teacher tip:

Sometimes students draw circles only around the areas with population markers. Remind them that people also live in the areas where there are no population markers, even though those areas seem empty. This is a great learning opportunity to help students understand how maps use symbols to represent reality. Where they draw the electoral boundaries can tell you a lot about their geographic thinking.

On the Main Map, one electoral district has been included as an example. Students can use its boundaries as a starting point, then divide up the rest of their country into seven additional electoral districts, for a total of eight.

Students should aim to have a similar number of people in each electoral district. They should also consider the shared history and language communities of the population when deciding on boundaries. Guidelines are provided in the Instructions for students handout.

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.

✕ Consolidation

25 min

1. Gallery walk

There are no right or wrong answers in this activity, and every group's map will look different. To consolidate their learning, have students participate in a gallery walk. 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. 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 Main Maps in the classroom and divide each group into two subgroups. One subgroup 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 subgroups switch.

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

Adaptation: For younger students or language learners, instead of a gallery walk, we recommend having each group present their maps to the class.



2. 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, have 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.

Teacher tip:

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.

✕ Optional extension activities

1. Have students create a name for each of the electoral districts by referring to the information or geographic factors included on the maps, especially the Language Communities Map and the Shared History Map.

2. For students who finish early, suggest more scenarios for them to consider. For example:

- The population is unhappy with a boundary you've drawn. They say that it divides their language community or shared history. Redraw the boundaries to better reflect their needs.
- The country's constitution guarantees that the main island on the map remains its own electoral district, no matter the population. Redraw the boundaries.

3. Look up the most recent redistribution of federal electoral districts. Find your community's electoral district and ask your students if or how the boundaries changed. Suggest possible reasons why they did or did not change. Have students consider these real-world electoral boundaries in terms of the physical and human geographic factors. If a redistribution is taking place, consider proposing that your students participate in the public hearings.

4. During the individual reflection, students decide which factor is most important in making electoral districts fair. Then, ask them to reflect on their choice from a historical perspective:
 - In your opinion, was this factor important in the past?
 - Has its importance changed over time?
 - Will it remain the most significant factor in the future?

Encourage students to support their reflection based on historical examples, technological developments and projections about how society might change in the future.



Background information

For teachers

✖ Teacher fact sheet

How are federal electoral boundaries decided in Canada?



A note about terms

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



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.



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.



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.



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).

**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
- Manageable geographic size

**Do citizens get a say?**

Of course! Once the commission has prepared proposals for 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.

**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)



Materials

To be photocopied

✕ Instructions for students

Population distribution

Consider population equality first. Review the legend on the Main Map.

- The population of your imaginary country is 560,000.
- Your task is to divide your country into 8 electoral districts.
- Your districts should have on average 70,000 people.
- The law requires that the population of each electoral district not vary from the average by more than 10%.
- You may make exceptions if you can justify your decision.

8 districts

±10% = 63,000–77,000 people per district

Geographic factors

Consider geographic factors next:

- Examine and use the physical geographic factors when drawing electoral boundaries. These factors include mountains, roads, islands, waterways and ferries.
- Think about how the geographic factors can divide and unite communities.

Keep in mind that the interests of all the people within each electoral district will be represented by one member of Parliament.

Language communities

Next, examine the Language Communities Map.

- This map shows communities of people who share the same mother tongue, or first language.
- Think about the impact of dividing or uniting language communities.

Shared history

Then, examine the Shared History Map.

- This map shows communities of people who share historical experiences and traditions.
- Think about preserving the historical pattern, or consider whether it's time to change the tradition.

✕ Exit card

Mapping Electoral Districts

1. I think that the most important factor in making electoral districts fair is ...

This factor is important because ...

2. It is important to make electoral districts fair because ...

3. One question I have now is ...
-

✕ Exit card

Mapping Electoral Districts

1. I think that the most important factor in making electoral districts fair is ...

This factor is important because ...

2. It is important to make electoral districts fair because ...

3. One question I have now is ...

✕ Helpful vocabulary



Electoral districts

A geographical area where voters elect a candidate to represent them in Parliament. It is also known as a riding.

Equality

When everyone is treated fairly because they have the same rights and opportunities.

Equity

When everyone is treated fairly because help is given to those who need it.

Geographic factors

A natural or human-made part of the Earth's surface, like mountains or roads.

Population distribution

The pattern of where people live.

Redistribution

When boundaries of electoral districts are reset to follow changes and shifts in Canada's population.

✕ 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)
Understanding Content (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
Understanding Context(s) (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)
Applying Critical Thinking Skills (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
Using Collaborative Group Learning Skills (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
Demonstrating Civic Disposition (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:

Collaboration

Elections Canada (EC), the Royal Canadian Geographical Society (RCGS) and Canadian Geographic Education collaborated on this educational resource, which focuses on analyzing maps to establish fair electoral boundaries.

Elections Canada is the independent, non-partisan agency responsible for conducting federal elections, by-elections and referendums. 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*, EC hopes to better support teachers to build students' knowledge of, understanding of 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 RCGS'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 20,000 educator members, with its membership expanding each year.

Learn more

If you and your students enjoyed this lesson, we encourage you to use Elections Canada's other educational resources. These cross-curricular materials can be taught in a variety of subjects. Find the right fit for your class using our online Curriculum Connections tool at electionsanddemocracy.ca/curriculum-connections.

All resources are available in English and French, and there are versions for language learners.

Visit electionsanddemocracy.ca to browse our complete list, download or order.

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