

Delimiting Electoral Boundaries

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I. Importance of Delimitation

The configuration of electoral boundaries can have a major impact on the outcome of an election – how constituencies are drawn can affect how many seats each political party holds and what party controls parliament.

Delimitation of constituencies provides the single most important opportunity to manipulate the results of an election, short of outright cheating.



Demonstration

X	0	X	0	X
X	0	X	0	X
X	0	X	0	X
X	0	X	0	X
X	0	X	0	X

Option A

X	0	X	0	X
X	0	X	0	X
X	0	X	0	X
X	0	X	0	X
X	0	X	0	X

Option B

X	0	X	X	0	X
X	0	X	X	0	X
X	0	X	X	0	X
X	0	X	X	0	X
X	0	X	X	0	X

Option C

X	0	X	0	X
X	0	X	0	X
X	0	X	0	X
X	0	X	0	X
X	0	X	0	X

Types of Electoral Systems that Delimit Electoral Districts

- First Past the Post: US, UK, Yemen, India, Nepal, Nigeria, Liberia
- Two Round Systems: France, Chad, Kyrgyzstan
- Alternative Vote Systems: Australia, Papua New Guinea, Fiji
- Block Vote: Mauritius, Singapore, Palestinian Territories
- Parallel Systems: Ukraine, Japan, Cameroon
- Mixed Member Proportional: Germany, Hungary, New Zealand, Bolivia
- Single Transferable Vote: Ireland, Malta
- Some List Proportional Representation Systems: Croatia, Bulgaria, Namibia



Significance of Delimitation Depends on Type of Electoral System

- First Past the Post and other Plurality-Majority Systems (Two Round System, Alternative Vote, Block Vote): delimitation can have a profound impact on election outcome
- Proportional Systems (List PR, Single Transferable Vote, Mixed Member Proportional): delimitation not likely to have large impact on election outcome although it can have an effect



Advantages and Disadvantages of Delimiting Constituencies

Advantages:

- Direct link allows voters to hold their representatives accountable
- Direct link facilitates communication and community service
- Constituencies ensure geographic diversity of the legislature

Disadvantages:

- Constituency-based elections often produce disproportional election outcomes
- Delimitation requires time, financial resources and technical skills



II. Legal Framework for Delimitation

- Who will draw the electoral boundaries?
- Who will have the power to decide on the final delimitation plan?
- Should redress options be put in place? Should, for example, the courts have a role in the process?
- What triggers a delimitation exercise?
- What criteria will the boundary authority be required to consider when delimiting constituency boundaries?



A. Designation of a Boundary Authority

Entities that may be tasked with delimitation:

- Boundary Commission
- Election Management Body
- Legislature
- Executive Body



B. Authority for Choosing Final Delimitation Plan

Bodies with responsibility for deciding on final plan:

- Boundary Commission
- Election Management Body
- Legislature
- Executive Body
- Judiciary



C. Options for Redress

- No objections possible – boundary or election commission serves as final authority
- Objections filed with a special tribunal established to hear election objections in general or delimitation issues more specifically
- Objections filed with the regular court



D. Delimitation Prompts

Possible triggers to undertake delimitation exercise:

- Mandatory time interval
- Following a national census
- Prior to or after an election
- Prescribed level of malapportionment reached



E. Criteria for Delimiting Electoral Boundaries

- Equal Population
- Geographical Factors
- Communities of Interest
- Special Provisions for Minority Groups



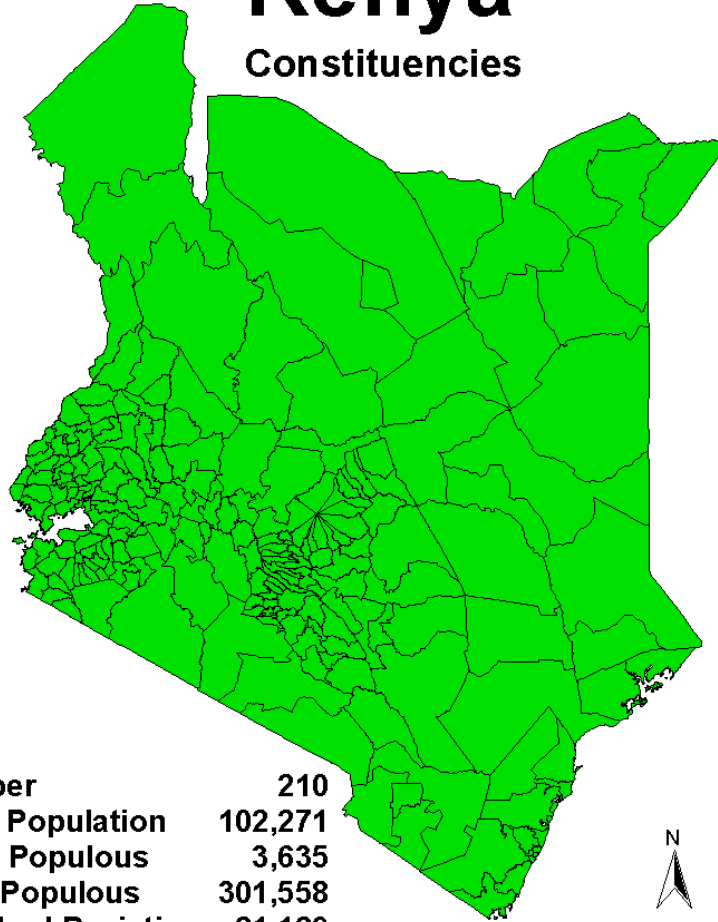
1. Population Equality

- Criterion that all constituencies should be relatively equal in population is the most widely accepted.
- The population figure used to measure equality and the degree to which “equality” is required vary substantially across countries.

Malapportioned electoral districts: constituencies that vary widely in population and therefore violate the principle of one person, one vote (active, passive and systemic malapportionment)

Kenya

Constituencies



Number	210
Mean Population	102,271
Least Populous	3,635
Most Populous	301,558
Standard Deviation	21,129
Percent Deviation	36.0

0 60 120 180 240 Kilometers



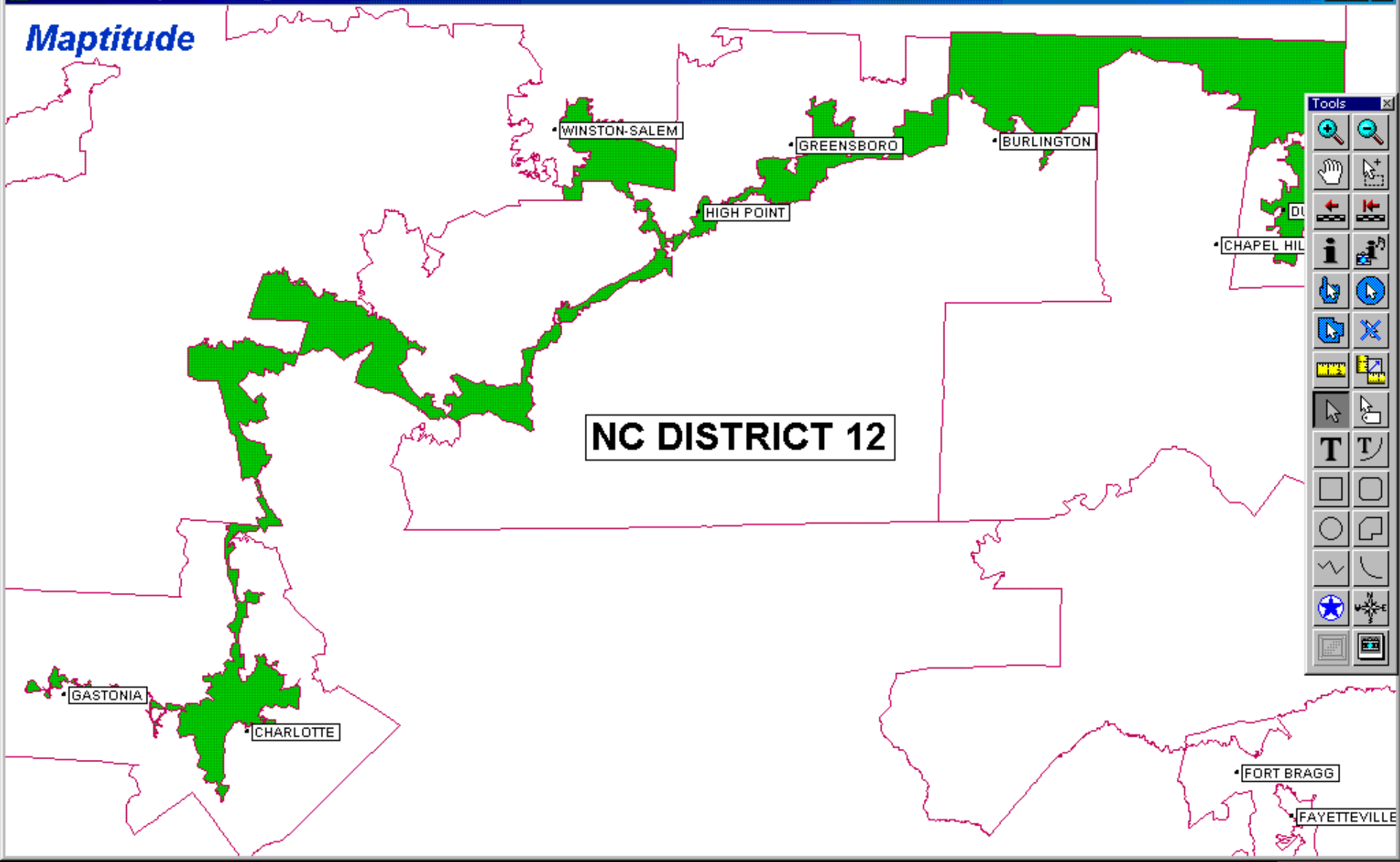


2. Geographic Criteria

Examples of criteria related to geographic factors:

- Administrative boundaries
- Physical features/natural boundaries (e.g., mountain ranges, rivers, islands)
- Accessibility, remoteness of territory
- Population density
- Contiguity and compactness

Maptitude



Tools

- Zoom In
- Zoom Out
- Hand
- Home
- Previous View
- Next View
- Info
- Measure
- Identify
- Print
- Print Range
- Layers
- Legend
- Scale
- North Arrow
- Grid
- Full Screen

NC DISTRICT 12

GASTONIA

CHARLOTTE

WINSTON-SALEM

HIGH POINT

GREENSBORO

BURLINGTON

CHAPEL HILL

FORT BRAGG

FAYETTEVILLE

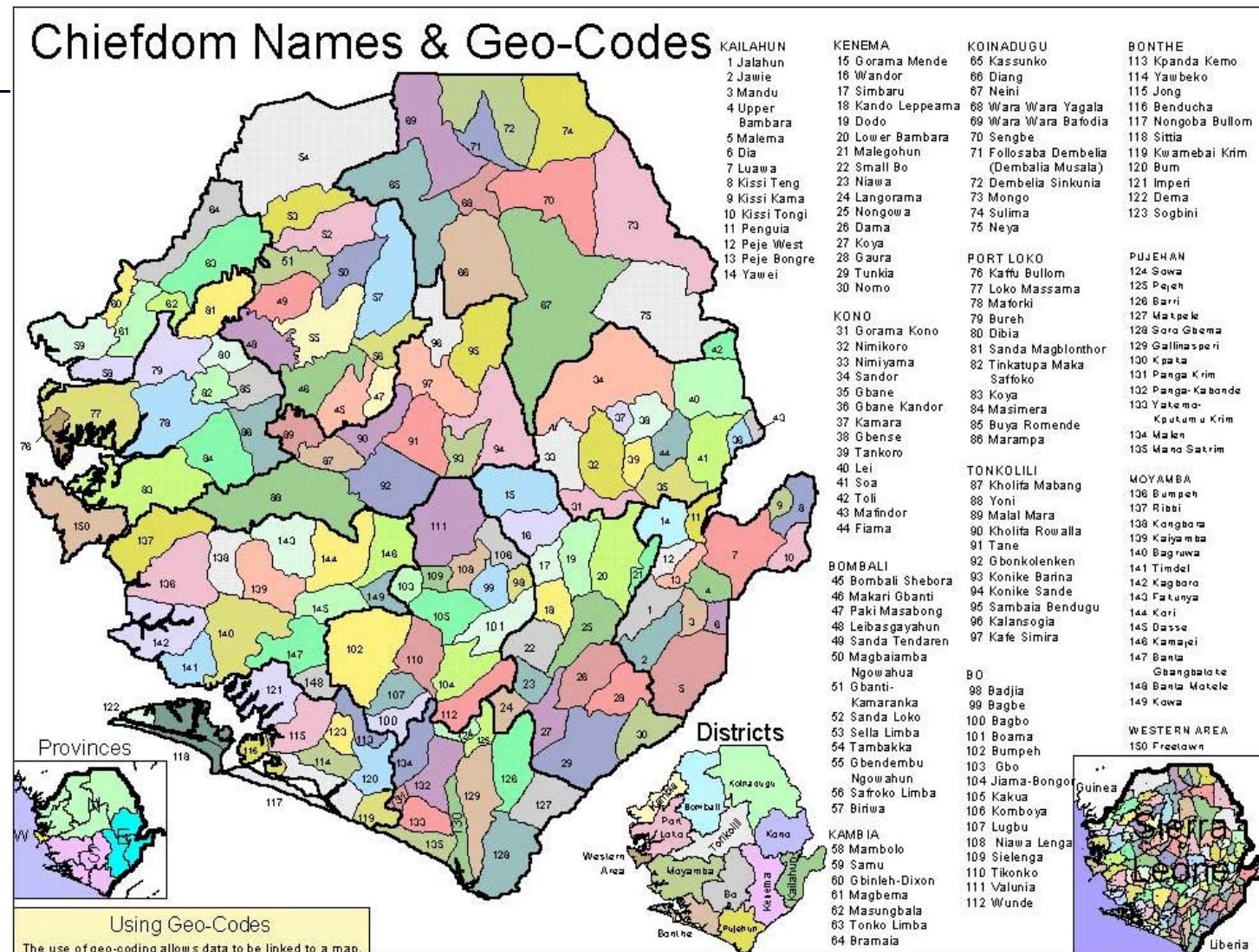


3. Communities of Interest

Communities of interest generally thought of as a group of individuals united by shared values or common interests:

- Political subdivisions and other territorial units defined by natural boundaries such as islands
- Common interests or common characteristics (common racial, ethnic, tribal or cultural background; shared religion, language or political beliefs)
- Common patterns of economic and other kinds of interactions (e.g., communication, transportation)

Sierra Leone: Map of Chiefdoms



This reference sheet was produced April 20, 2001 by the OCHA Humanitarian Information Center and the Sierra Leone Information System (an interagency project of OCHA and UNHCR). Contact 232-22-220770.



4. Special Provisions for Minority Groups

Electoral systems that rely solely on constituencies to elect representatives usually cannot guarantee even some minimal number of seats to minority groups unless special provisions are put in place:

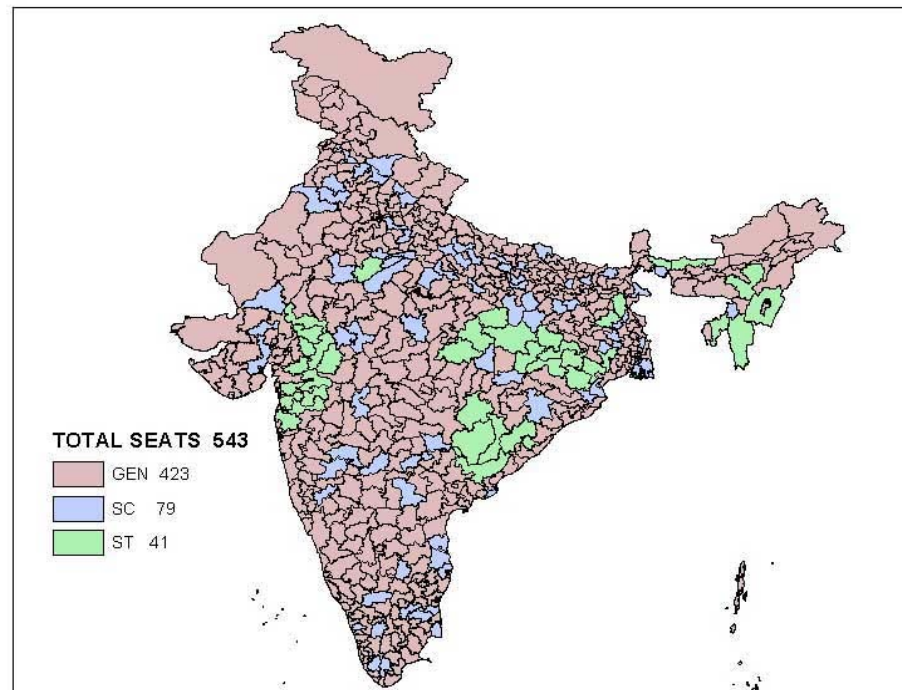
- Reserved Seats
- Reserved Constituencies
- U.S. Voting Rights Act of 1965

Lebanon: Reserved Seats by Religion

<i>Muslim Sects</i>		<i>Christian Sects</i>	
Sunnis	27	Maronite Catholics	34
Shiite	27	Greek Orthodox	14
Druz	8	Greek Catholic	8
Alawites	2	Armenian Orthodox	5
		Armenian Catholic	1
		Evangelic Catholic	1
		Other Groups	1
<i>Total</i>	64	<i>Total</i>	64

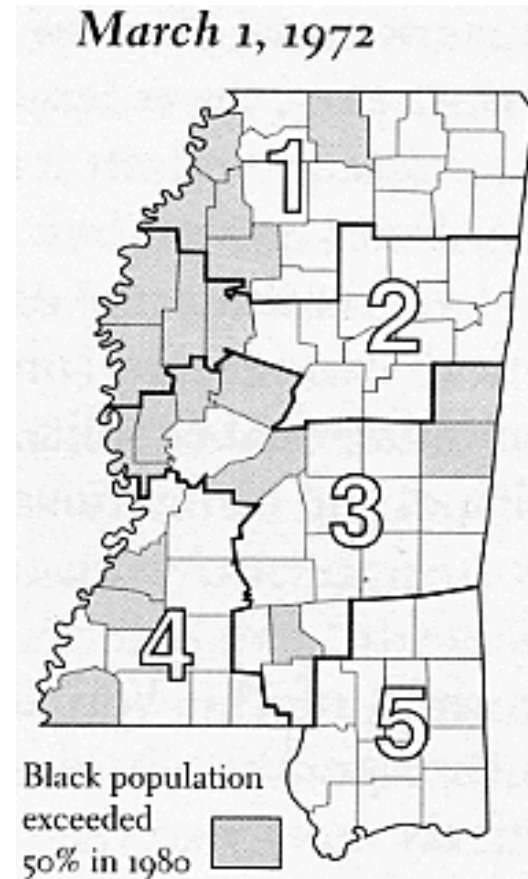
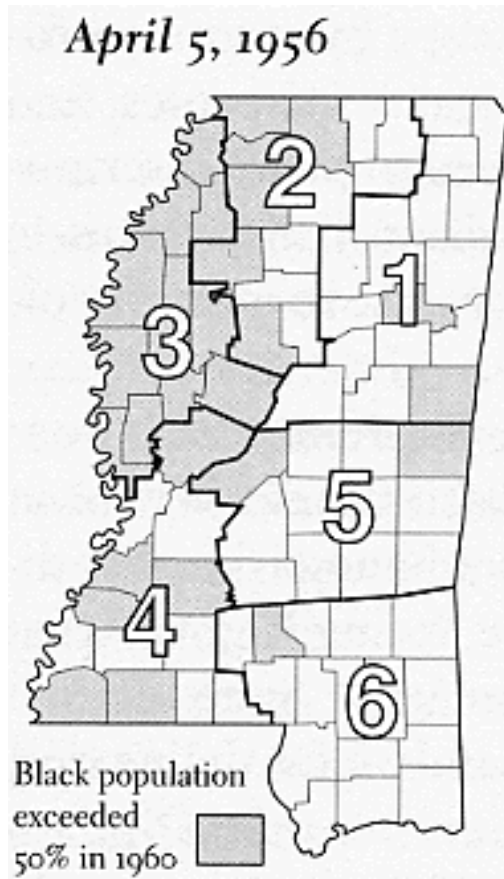
India: Constituencies Reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

INDIA - Existing Parliament Constituencies



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US: Discriminatory Districts in the State of Mississippi





III. Factors that Can Affect Delimitation in Transitional or Post-Conflict Societies

- Absence of a legal framework
- Limited resources and inadequate information
- Shifting populations
- Deep divisions with society
- Weak commitment to democratic principles



Limited Resources and Inadequate Information

Delimitation requires financial and technical resources, trained personnel and detailed information related to the geography and demographics of the country. Some or all of these things may be missing in transitional, fragile or post-conflict countries.

Shifting Populations

The population in post-conflict situations often influx:

- Assuming refugees are going to be permitted to vote, can they be assigned a constituency? How?
- To what constituencies should IDPs be assigned? Their home villages? Or their current residences?

Liberia: Seat Allocation to Counties

County	Number of Seats based on Population	Number of Seats Adjusted for IDPs
Bomi	3	3
Bong	9	6
Gbarpolu	2	3
Grand Bassa	7	4
Grand Cape Mount	1	3
Grand Gedeh	2	3
Grand Kru	1	2
Lofa	6	4
Margibi	6	4
Maryland	3	3
Montserrado	14	14
Nimba	7	7
River Cess	1	2
River Gee	1	3
Sinoe	1	3



Divisions within Society

If societal divisions are ignored when delimiting boundaries, or even worse, if boundaries are actively manipulated to benefit one segment of the population over others, the outcome could be that one group is far better represented in parliament than might otherwise be the case. This could well exacerbate divisions within society.

Gerrymandering: the drawing of constituency boundaries deliberately to favor one political group over others

Dispute Over Nigerian Constituencies and Political Representation Leads to Riots





Weak Commitment to Democratic Principles

The commitment of political elites and other stakeholders to democratic principles may be weakly rooted in fragile and post-conflict societies. Instituting a legal framework designed to encourage a delimitation process that is fair and is as open and transparent as possible is essential.

Launch of Boundary Delimitation Project in Sierra Leone





Conclusions

Legal framework must be established well in advance:

- Independent and impartial boundary authority should be established
- Criteria to be taken into account should be identified
- Efforts should be made to assign as many potential voters as possible to constituencies
- Sensitivity to societal divisions is essential
- Process should be as open and transparent as possible – public consultation is important