

Michigan 2021 Redistricting: Least Change Plan

Author: Zac Stoor

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This map aims to draw a perfect population map following the current Michigan congressional lines as closely as possible. Since Michigan lost a district, it is difficult to do so without major changes. On this map, the Detroit metro area was where the most changes occurred, as the past District 14 (a Voting Rights Act [VRA] district) was eliminated. Because of this, it was necessary to shift lines considerably to continue to comply with the Voting Rights Act in Detroit by having two plurality Black districts: District 12 at 44.2% Black and District 13 at 49.6% Black. Both districts are still, however, majority-minority. Because racially polarized voting is less pronounced in Detroit, these districts are sufficient for the Black population to elect their candidates of choice in both, even if they are not a majority of the population. Even though this is a least change map, Districts 12 and 13 diverge significantly from old district lines in order to comply with the VRA.

Because of the shifts necessitated to meet VRA requirements in Detroit, the other districts in the Detroit metro area also diverge substantially from the old district lines. District 11 still stretches upwards from Livonia and its surroundings to Oakland County, but now takes in Pontiac and other portions of former District 14. District 9 is still concentrated in Macomb and Oakland Counties, but also absorbed more of former District 14, including a portion of Wayne County. Ann Arbor and southern Wayne County were moved from District 12 to District 7. District 8 lost Lansing and incorporated more of Oakland County. District 10 only expanded slightly.

The other major change was the addition of Lansing to District 4, which is a significant change in District 4's character, but is the best way to remain close to the old lines in the non-Detroit metro portions of the state as District 4 was originally significantly underpopulated. District 4 lost the City of Midland and much of its portion of Saginaw County to District 5, and portions of its northern border to District 1. District 3 still stretches from Battle Creek to Grand Rapids, with minor additions. District 2 traded some suburban areas around Grand Rapids for northern Kent County. Districts 1 and 6 expanded only minorly, taking in some of surrounding rural areas.

This map is unlikely to meet many of the standards established in state law for the Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (MICRC), the first of which not focused on federal law requirements is that districts must "reflect the state's diverse population and communities of interest." Since the old plan split many communities of interest, such as the Lansing metro area, Oakland County suburbs, and the Grand Rapids metro area, this map does as well because of its least change nature. It would likely meet all of the other requirements of the MICRC, including partisan fairness, political subdivision splits, and compactness, but all of these criteria are lower priority than communities of interest. Due to this, it does not reflect the commission's constitutional obligation to prioritize communities of interest and would likely be illegal under Michigan law. Nevertheless, it is an interesting example of what a new slate of districts aiming to follow the former district lines would look like, and provides a useful point of comparison for other Michigan congressional plans.