

Precinct Boundaries

June 8, 2023 | Redistricting Data Hub (RDH)

Agenda

1. What are precinct boundaries?
2. Why do they matter in redistricting?
3. Why is collecting them so difficult?
4. How can I help?
5. Questions?

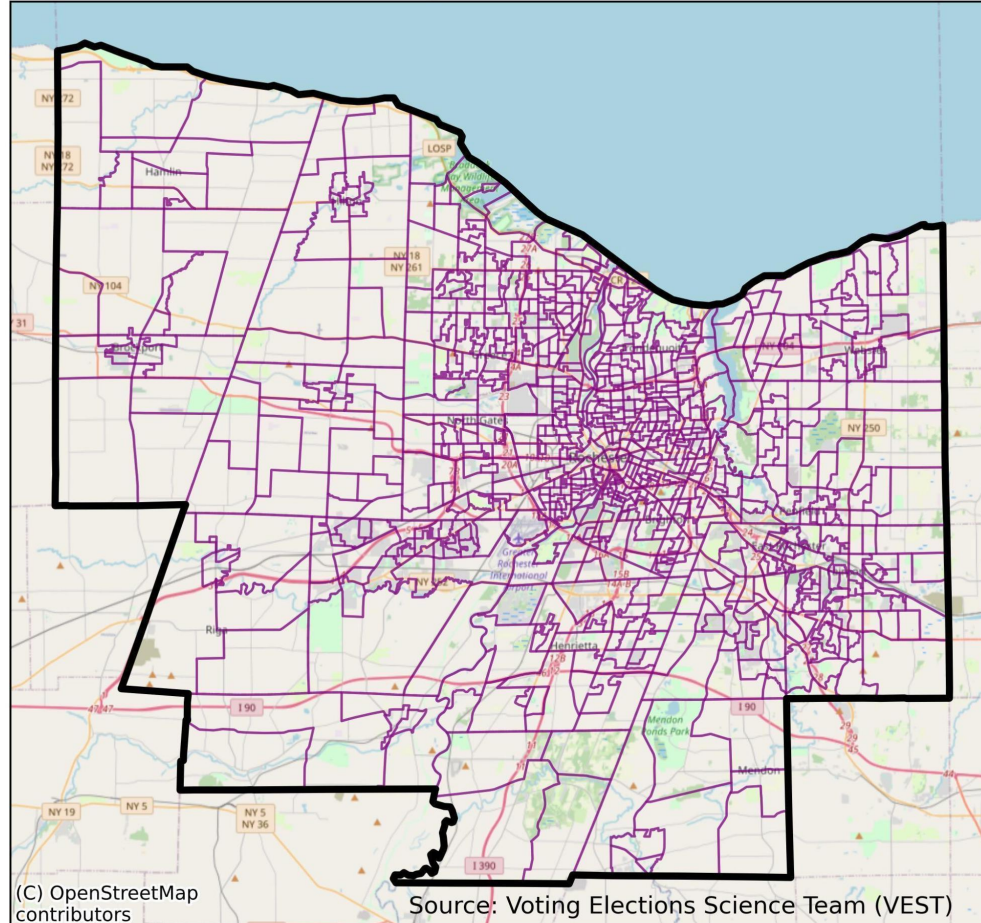


What are precinct boundaries?

- ◆ **Precincts** are the smallest geographic unit at which election results are collected and reported by election officials. They can also be called:
 - a. wards
 - b. election districts (EDs)
 - c. voting (tabulation) district (VTDs)

- ◆ **Precinct boundaries** are the geospatial data containing the geographic outlines of these precincts. They are then joined with precinct-level election results to draw and analyze redistricting maps.

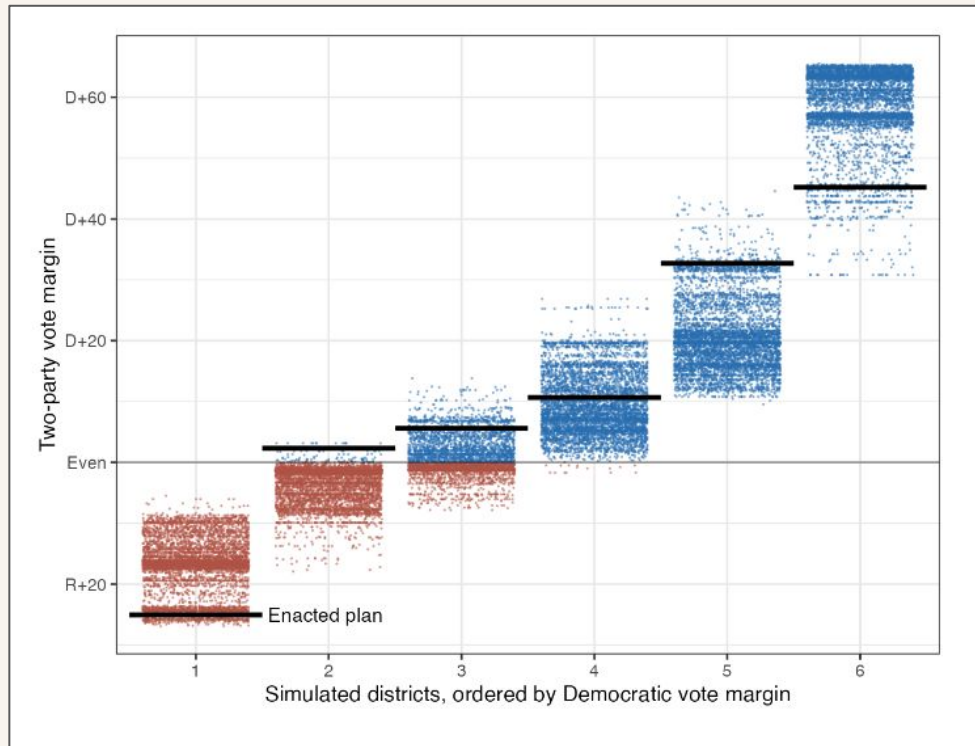
Monroe County, NY 2020 Precincts



Why do they matter?

- ◆ Precinct boundaries are essential for identifying gerrymandering
 - a. Racially polarized voting (RPV) analyses - which require precinct boundaries joined with election results - are necessary for litigation under the federal Voting Rights Act
 - b. Outlier analysis and other sophisticated methodologies to identify partisan and racial gerrymandering require precinct boundaries joined with election results

Why do they matter?



Source:

<https://alarm.rndict.org/fifty-states/about/>

Why do they matter?

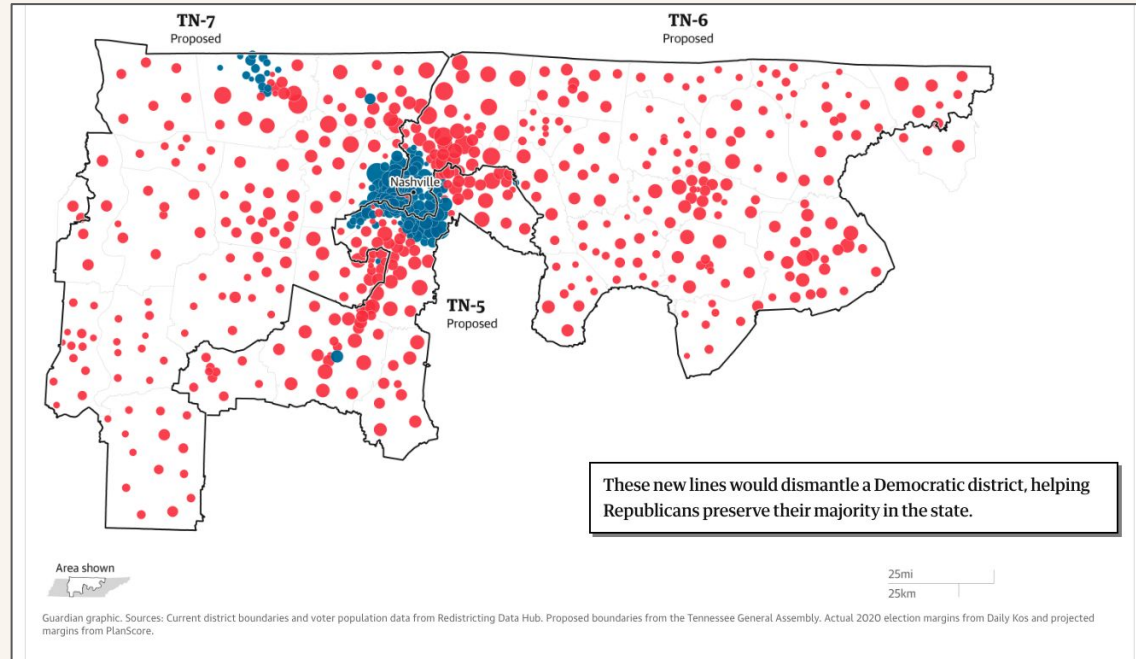
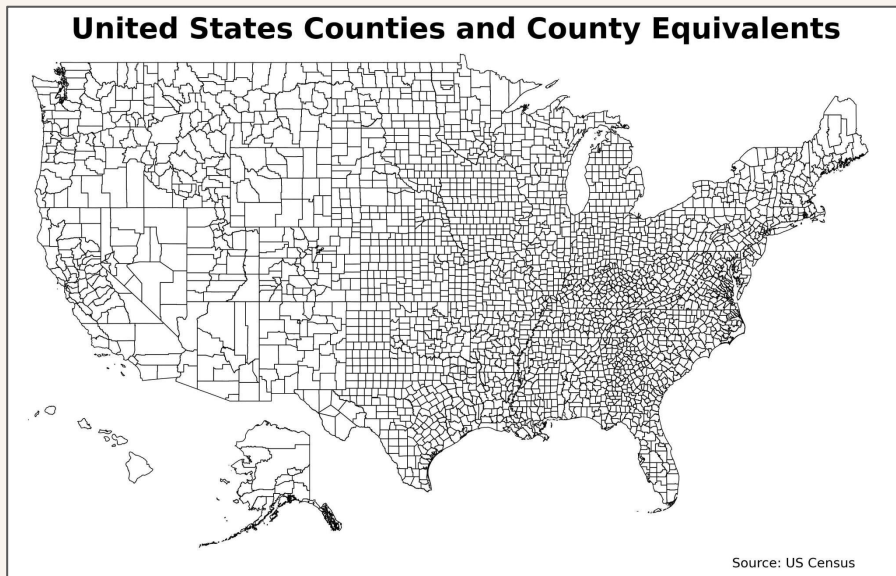


Image source: Levine, Sam (2022).

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2022/jan/25/nashville-tennessee-gerrymandering-congress-republicans>

Why is collecting them difficult?

- ◆ Precinct boundaries are maintained by counties or county equivalents without standardization



Why is collecting them difficult?

- ◆ Precinct boundaries can change every election, and historical boundaries may not be saved

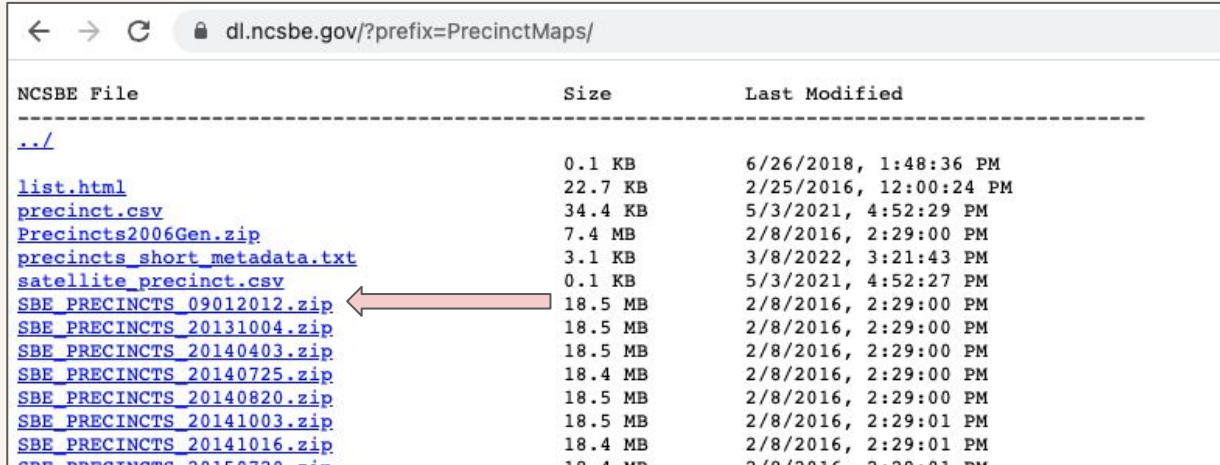


Image source: Bloomberg, via Getty Images. (2020).

<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/yo-yo-election-officials-grapple-flood-confusing-minute/story?id=73890047>

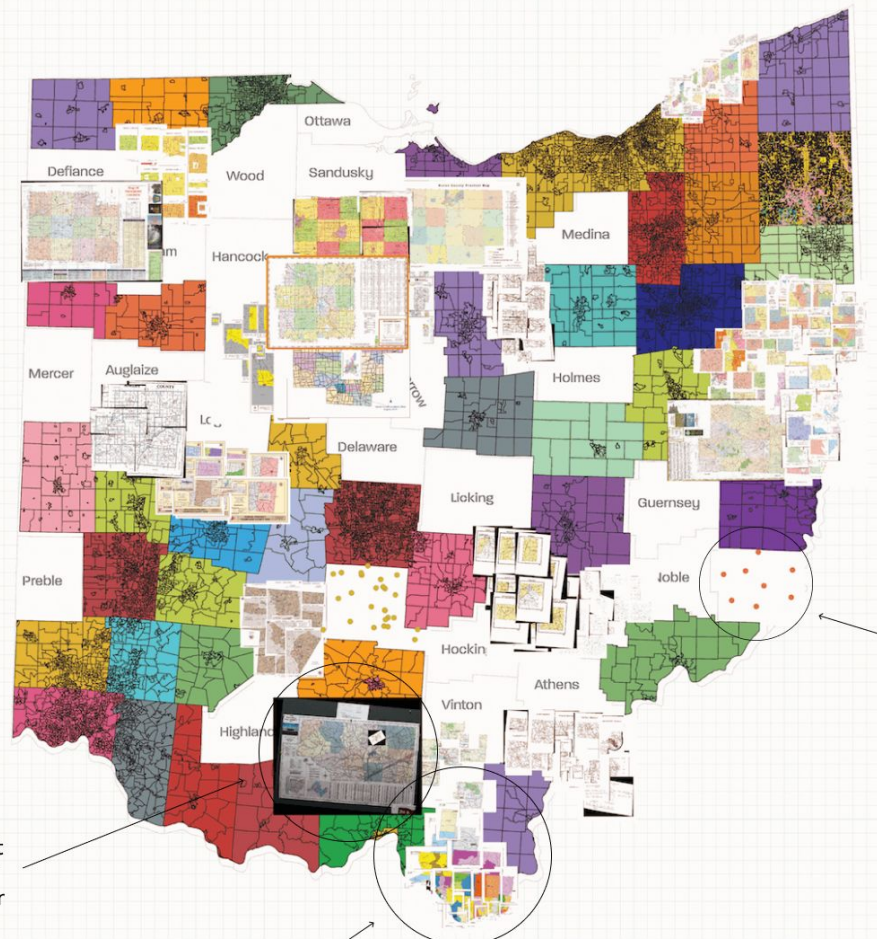
Why is collecting them difficult?

- ◆ The format of the data containing precinct boundaries varies from county to county
 - a. Ideally it is in **geospatial format** (most commonly shapefiles, in a zipped folder)
 - b. But may be in non-geospatial format, such as a PDF or image (PNG, JPG, etc.)



← → ↻ dl.ncsbe.gov/?prefix=PrecinctMaps/

NCSBE File	Size	Last Modified
../		
list.html	0.1 KB	6/26/2018, 1:48:36 PM
precinct.csv	22.7 KB	2/25/2016, 12:00:24 PM
Precincts2006Gen.zip	34.4 KB	5/3/2021, 4:52:29 PM
precincts_short_metadata.txt	7.4 MB	2/8/2016, 2:29:00 PM
satellite_precinct.csv	3.1 KB	3/8/2022, 3:21:43 PM
SBE_PRECINCTS_09012012.zip	0.1 KB	5/3/2021, 4:52:27 PM
SBE_PRECINCTS_20131004.zip	18.5 MB	2/8/2016, 2:29:00 PM
SBE_PRECINCTS_20140403.zip	18.5 MB	2/8/2016, 2:29:00 PM
SBE_PRECINCTS_20140725.zip	18.5 MB	2/8/2016, 2:29:00 PM
SBE_PRECINCTS_20140820.zip	18.4 MB	2/8/2016, 2:29:00 PM
SBE_PRECINCTS_20141003.zip	18.5 MB	2/8/2016, 2:29:00 PM
SBE_PRECINCTS_20141016.zip	18.5 MB	2/8/2016, 2:29:01 PM
SBE_PRECINCTS_20150228.zip	18.4 MB	2/8/2016, 2:29:01 PM



In some cases, MGGG was sent paper maps, or photos of paper maps.

MGGG received separate images and used overlapping reference points to combine them.

MGGG used addresses from Ohio's public voter file to approximate boundaries for counties that provided no maps.

Why is collecting them difficult?

- ◆ PDFs and similar formats must also be digitized, or converted to geospatial data

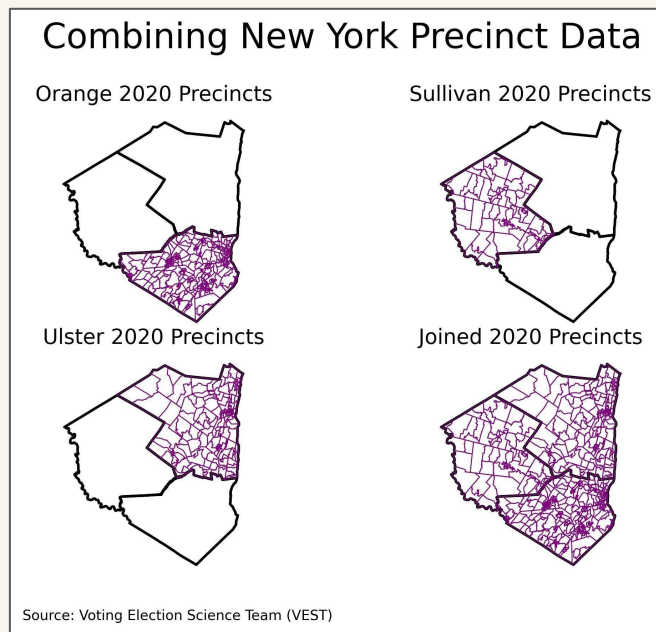


Image source: Learn GIS. (N.D.)

<https://vector.geospatial.science/textbook/chapter-six/scanning-and-digitizing-data>

Why is collecting them difficult?

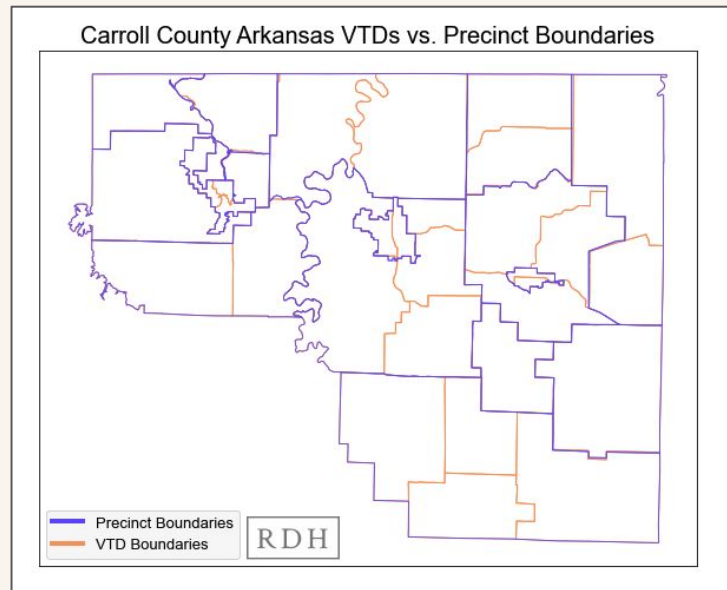
- ◆ Then all the county precinct boundaries must be joined into a single statewide file



Why is collecting them difficult?

- ◆ The US Census Bureau releases VTD boundaries in all 50 states, but state participation and data quality vary
- ◆ Accuracy declines throughout the decade

* There are also Texas VTDs!



Why is collecting them difficult?

- ◆ Some states create and maintain statewide precinct boundary files, for example:
 - a. North Carolina
 - b. Georgia
 - c. Louisiana
 - d. Texas
 - e. Wisconsin
 - f. And others...
- ◆ But the majority of states do not.

How can I help?

- ◆ Join our volunteer collection effort in collaboration with Open Elections:

<https://forms.gle/ft7ieTHRbHJoCEtYA>

- ◆ Volunteers recently finished collecting 2022 general election precinct boundaries in Ohio (!), and we are now starting in New York

How can I help?

◆ Basic steps involve:

- a. Searching a county's website to see if they have a map (if they do, it is often a PDF)
- b. Finding contact info for an election and/or GIS official in the county
- c. Using a script to email or phone the county officials and ask for a map
- d. Being persistent and following up on your request
- e. Looking at the precinct boundaries and ensuring they are “reasonable” and county-wide
- f. Looking at the precinct names and ensuring they match those in election results
- g. Recording all your interactions and supporting information

How can I help?

- ◆ Apply for our fellowship: <https://redistrictingdatahub.org/engage/work-with-us/>
- ◆ Be an advocate for data accessibility
 - a. State Voting Rights Act in CA, NY, VA and WA
 - b. Pending legislation in CT, MD, and NJ
- ◆ State reports on redistricting data accessibility in 14 states:
<https://redistrictingdatahub.org/tools/support/state-reports-on-data-accessibility-in-the-2021-redistricting-cycle/>

Questions?

You can always email
info@redistrictingdatahub.org

