



Los Angeles City Council
Redistricting Commission 2021

Appendix M: Report on Expansion of City Council

Statement from Vice Chair, Sonja F. M. Diaz on Expanding the Number of City Council Districts

I. Executive Summary

The current configuration of the Los Angeles City Council was established in the 1924 Charter and has remained the same size for nearly 100 years.¹ The 2020 U.S. Census estimates the population of Los Angeles at 3,898,725 residents. Between 1920 and 2020, the City's population increased by 576%.² When the Council structure was implemented, there was a ratio of one councilmember to roughly 38,000 Angelenos; today the ratio is one councilmember to approximately 260,000 residents. For almost one hundred years, the City Council remains an unaltered body of 15 single member districts. This report analyzes the levels of underrepresentation of residents in Los Angeles are receiving from such a small council structure, using other major cities in Los Angeles County, the State of California, and the nation at large as comparisons for more responsive council structures. Ultimately, the stagnant and limited number of council districts in the nation's second largest city restricts the contiguity, compactness, and interests of a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-dimensional metropolis.

As a comparison, the City of Los Angeles has approximately 99 Neighborhood Councils and 114 neighborhoods.³ Utilizing the principle of equal population, each of the City's neighborhood councils serve nearly 40,000 residents and each of the City's neighborhoods is home to roughly 34,000 residents. Using neighborhood councils and neighborhoods as proxies for communities of interest, the ratio of residents to city council districts is 650% larger than the ratio of residents to neighborhood councils and 764% larger than the ratio of residents to neighborhoods. Since redistricting can only occur within a framework of 15 council districts, the City's communities of interest are districted based on a constrictive structure that complicates the creation of compact, contiguous, and responsive districts.

The City's diverse geographic, demographic, and social landscapes are poorly served by the current size of the City Council. Here, the redistricting process must navigate natural boundaries like the Pacific Ocean, islands of unincorporated Los Angeles County neighborhoods and whole cities like Beverly Hills and West Hollywood, and land-locked neighborhoods in complying with *Reynolds v. Sims*' one person-one vote principle. Though some communities of interest articulate clearly that they are most aligned with other communities of interest to the north, south, east, or west, the constrictive nature of a body of 15 districts with the complex topography of Los Angeles almost guarantees inaction in the redistricting process. Compounding the geographic and topographic complexities of Los Angeles is the persistence of grave racial/ethnic discrimination in the areas of education, employment and health, which impede effective

¹ Voters have consistently refused to expand the number of council districts through the initiative process.

² See U.S. Census, State Compendium: California, Washington, DC: 1924, available here: <https://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/06229686v1-7ch04.pdf>, noting Los Angeles' population in 1920 was 576,673.

³ See City of Los Angeles, Neighborhood Councils, General Information, available at: <https://www.lacity.org/government/popular-information/neighborhood-councils#:~:text=There%20are%20currently%2099%20Neighborhood,each%20serving%20about%2040%2C000%20pople.> See also, The Los Angeles Times, Mapping L.A. Neighborhoods, available at: <http://maps.latimes.com/neighborhoods/>.

participation in the political process. Ultimately, the limited structure of the council impedes full political representation of Angelenos, and remains an outlier in its disproportionately high ratio between councilmember and residents compared to other major cities across the County, State, and U.S.

The 2021 Los Angeles City Redistricting Commission was tasked with creating the contours of each district's boundary and population size in the middle of a global pandemic and with an unacceptably flawed 2020 U.S. Census administered by the Trump Administration. The Commission conducted a transparent and inclusive public process that secured the civic participation of nearly 14,000 residents who submitted public testimony through an online portal, electronic communications, or through telephonic and digital means across 29 public hearings and special Commission meetings. The Commission received 200 map submissions from civil society, residents, civil rights advocates and other stakeholders to inform the Commission's line drawing. This work was informed by the 2020 U.S. Census data, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, state law, and robust public testimony that resulted in a fair, equitable, and lawful mapping scheme, supported by two-thirds of the Commission. Despite this timely and robust submission, the redistricting process will not achieve full representation for the nearly 4 million residents who call Los Angeles home without expanding the number of council districts for the first time in a century.

II. Analysis

The Los Angeles City Council structure creates districts that are too large and configured in a manner that is wholly inconsistent with existing communities. This constrictive structure complicates government trust, accessibility, and responsiveness in the 21st Century. Over the course of 29 public hearings and special meetings, the Commission heard about how some communities remain invisible and ignored by city government while their district peers expressed government responsiveness on the part of a council office. Conventional literature on urban political systems suggests that small districts may increase the responsiveness of government services and lead to substantive policy recommendations and implementation. The ratio of residents to council district will depend on whether the City Council and residents seek a minimal, moderate or significant increase.

To guide the magnitude of the council district expansion are a series of analysis of' 1) how Los Angeles compares to other large, medium, and small cities in the County of Los Angeles, 2) how Los Angeles compares to the five largest cities in California, and 3) how Los Angeles compares to the five largest cities in the U.S. This analysis considers a city's population, number of council districts, and geographic footprint.

a. Comparison of City of Los Angeles District Scheme to Other Cities in Los Angeles County

In reviewing large, mid-size, and small cities in the County of Los Angeles, the ratio between council districts and residents is as low as 1:13,297 (Santa Monica) and as high as 1:259,916 (Los Angeles). Unsurprisingly, the City of Los Angeles has the largest ratio between council members and residents of any city analyzed.

Table I. Comparison of Major Los Angeles County Cities' Council District Size, 2020 U.S. Census Population Data

City	Number of Council Districts	Total Population (2020)	Residents Per District
Santa Monica	7	93,076	13,297
Pasadena	7	138,699	19,814
Burbank	5	107,337	21,467
Pomona	6	151,713	25,286
Glendale	5	196,543	39,309
Santa Clarita	5	228,673	45,735
Long Beach	9	466,742	51,860
Los Angeles	15	3,898,747	259,916

Here, Los Angeles residents are less represented than their County peers at the local level. This is especially troublesome given that the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors has the highest ratio of residents to elected representative in the U.S. (1 supervisor: 2,000,000 residents). Where other residents of the County may experience better local level representation to their policy and quality of life needs, residents of Los Angeles are at a further disadvantaged by suffering districting schemes that leave them with such high resident to elected official ratios.

Put another way, the difference between a non-Los Angeles city’s ratio can be analyzed using the following equation:

$$\frac{(\text{City Population} - \text{City of Los Angeles Population})}{\text{City of Los Angeles Population}} \times 100 = \% \text{ Difference in Resident: Elected Representative Ratio}$$

According to an analysis of the ratio between council members and residents in Los Angeles to other cities, Los Angeles residents have 95% less representation than Santa Monica residents, 96% less representation than residents of Pasadena, 94% less than residents of Santa Clarita, and 88% less than residents of Long Beach.

When comparing the geographical context of Los Angeles’ districting structure compared to other cities in the County, other jurisdictions experience better representation than California’s largest city. Table II assesses the same jurisdictions as Table I. and finds that Santa Monica’s council district size reflects a ratio of 1 council district to 1 square mile; Pasadena and Burbank both have a ratio of 1 district: 3 square miles, followed by Pomona, Glendale, and Long Beach. Santa Clarita has a ratio of 1 council district to 12 square miles, followed by Los Angeles at 1 district: 34 square miles.

Table II. Comparison of Major Los Angeles County Cities’ Council District Size to City Area (Square miles)

City	Number of Council Districts	City Area	Residents per Square Mile
Santa Monica	7	8.3 square miles	1
Pasadena	7	23.1 square miles	3
Burbank	5	17 square miles	3
Pomona	6	22.99 square miles	4
Glendale	5	30.6 square miles	6
Long Beach	9	80 square miles	9
Santa Clarita	5	62.16 square miles	12
Los Angeles	15	503 square miles	34

Not only does Los Angeles have the largest ratio between residents and city council districts, but its large geographical footprint also operates to create districts that are larger than whole cities.

b. Comparison of City of Los Angeles District Scheme to the 5 Largest Cities in California

Expanding the analysis from the County of Los Angeles to the State of California’s five most populous cities, Los Angeles’ council structure limits the representation of city residents compared to the representation experienced by residents of San Diego, San Jose, San Francisco, and Fresno. Table III analyzes the ratio between districts and residents across five cities in order of population. Here, Fresno has the narrowest ratio with 1 district to 77,444 residents followed by San Francisco (1:79,451), San Jose (1:101,324), and San Diego (1:154,104). Los Angeles has 335% more residents per council district than Fresno.

Table III. Comparison of the ratio between council districts and population in California’s 5 Largest Cities, 2020 U.S. Census Population Data

City	Number of Council Districts	Total Population (2020)	Residents Per District
Los Angeles	15	3,898,747	259,916
San Diego	9	1,386,932	154,104
San Jose	10	1,013,240	101,324
San Francisco	11	873,965	79,451
Fresno	7	542,107	77,444

c. Comparison of City of Los Angeles District Scheme to the 5 Largest Cities in the United States

Rounding out the analysis is a comparison of the ratio between the number of districts and total population of the five largest cities in the U.S. Similarly, Los Angeles trails other large cities in this respect. Table IV. analyzes the ratio between districts and residents across five cities in order of population. Here, Chicago has the narrowest ratio with 1 alderman per 54,928 residents, followed by Houston (1: 146,194), New York (1:172,631), and Phoenix (1:200,475).

Table IV. Comparison of the ratio between council districts and population in the Nation’s 5 Largest Cities, 2020 U.S. Census Population Data

City	Number of Council Districts	Total Population (2020)	Residents Per District
Chicago	50	2,746,388	54,928
Houston	11	1,608,139	146,194
New York	51	8,804,190	172,631
Phoenix	8	1,603,797	200,475
Los Angeles	15	3,898,747	259,916

Notably in this comparison group is the variance in the structure of the council, with New York having 51 districts and Chicago 50 districts. Here, the council district structures of Chicago and New York City are over 330% bigger than that of Los Angeles.

III. Proposal to Increase the Number of Council Districts in the City of Los Angeles

Based on this analysis, the City of Los Angeles has room to expand its council to better align the representation of city residents to a district representative with peer jurisdictions in Los Angeles County, the State of California, and the U.S. Here, Los Angeles has the largest ratio not because it has the largest population, but because it has such a small number of council districts in light of this population. From this perspective, the nation's first and third largest cities have 50 and 51 districts, respectively. The council structures of both New York and Chicago represent a 330% increase over Los Angeles' 15 districts.

Though Los Angeles' population is most closely aligned with the nation's largest urban cities, expanding the council to better reflect this peer group is politically unfeasible. As such, Los Angeles should focus on a structure that best positions a representative government in light of complex and unique factors, including protected racial/language groups under the Voting Rights Act, natural boundaries like the Pacific Ocean, political boundaries like unincorporated County neighborhoods and whole cities, and community of interest testimony that has been recurring under the LACCR's redistricting processes in 2001, 2011, and 2021.

To illuminate these factors, the structure of an expanded council must be unique to Los Angeles but also robust enough to not position the City as such an outlier among peer cities in the County and State of California in its ratio between councilmembers and residents. For example, careful consideration should be made to current council districts that are landlocked based on proximity to natural boundaries CD 15 (San Pedro) and CD 11 (Beach Cities). Similarly, the political boundaries of unincorporated County neighborhoods constrict CD's 8, 10, and 11, and the cities of Beverly Hills and West Hollywood impact CD's 5 and 4. Structural expansion should pay close attention to the equal population requirement that will better achieve compactness, contiguity, and the preservation of communities of interest while adhering to the Voting Rights Act.

a. Three Scenarios for Expanding the Number of Council Districts in the City of Los Angeles

There are three types of council configurations for Los Angeles that depend on political feasibility, costs, and administrative functions. Below are three types of reconfigurations:

- Minimal Increase in Number of Council Districts: 17 to 21 Members
- Moderate Increase in Number of Council Districts: 22 to 26 Members
- Significant Increase in Number of Council Districts: 27 to 31 Members

Each of these reconfigurations will impact the form and function of Los Angeles government. At minimum, each alternative will improve racial/ethnic community representation that better aligns with the City's growing Asian American Pacific Islander and Latino communities. Each alternative will also create new district boundaries that improve the cohesion of communities of interest by closing in on the ratio between residents and City Council member and addressing the current issue of too large in population, council districts. Further, the increase in the number of

council members will impact power relations with the Mayor’s Office and Council, reduce the citywide political influence inherent with the current council to better respond to hyper-local needs and forge new voting blocks for city policy, and create the opportunity for a more agile leadership as the City mitigates the intersecting crises of housing, climate, policing, and racial inequality.

Based on the unique contours of Los Angeles, the decision as to whether to pursue a minimal, moderate, or significant increase should also include deference to reducing the ratio between councilmembers and residents. Table V analyzes the number of residents per district under each reconfiguration category.

Table V. Comparison of Council District Expansion Scenarios Under 2020 City of Los Angeles Population (n=3,898,725 residents)

Reconfiguration Category	Number of Council Districts	Residents Per District
Current Configuration	15	259,915
Minimal Increase	17	229,337
Minimal Increase	18	216,596
Minimal Increase	19	205,196
Minimal Increase	20	194,936
Minimal Increase	21	185,654
Moderate Increase	22	177,215
Moderate Increase	23	169,510
Moderate Increase	24	162,447
Moderate Increase	25	155,949
Moderate Increase	26	149,951
Significant Increase	27	144,397
Significant Increase	28	139,240
Significant Increase	29	134,439
Significant Increase	30	129,958
Significant Increase	31	125,765

b. Los Angeles’ Ratio Under Reconfiguration Scenarios Compared to 5 Major U.S. Cities

All three scenarios put Los Angeles on par with three of the five largest cities in the U.S. The minimal increase scenario can position Los Angeles in alignment with Phoenix. Notably, Phoenix is the least populated of the nation’s five largest cities, and has nearly 2.3 million less residents than Los Angeles. The moderate and significant reconfiguration scenarios provide opportunities for an expanded Los Angeles City Council to be within range of the district: resident ratio experienced by residents of New York City (moderate increase) and Houston (significant increase). Finally, none of the three scenarios come close to achieving Chicago’s ratio of councilmembers to residents. This analysis supports the adoption of a reconfiguration of at least the moderate increase band, so that Los Angeles is at least better commensurate with New York City, the nation’s largest city.

c. Los Angeles’ Ratio Under Reconfiguration Scenarios Compared to California’s 5 Most Populous Cities

Of these three reconfiguration scenarios, only the moderate increase scenario puts Los Angeles on par with the ratio currently employed by San Diego’s city council district structure. None of the three reconfiguration scenarios achieve the ratio between council member and residents currently exhibited by three of the five most populous cities in California (Fresno, San Francisco, and San Jose). This suggests that at minimum, Los Angeles should pursue a moderate increase scenario to expand the number of council districts.

d. The Opportunity for Bold Leadership

In addition to the above analyses, it is also important to consider the magnitude of reconfiguring the number of council districts in light of the current structure, employed for nearly a century. Table VI analyzes the percent change of each of the three reconfiguration scenarios as compared to the current structure of 15 districts.

Table VI. Percent Change Under Council District Expansion Scenarios over Current Configuration (n=15 Council Districts)

Reconfiguration Category	Number of Council Districts	Residents Per District	% Change Over Current Configuration
Current Configuration	15	259,915	
Minimal Increase	17	229,337	-11.8%
Minimal Increase	18	216,596	-16.7%
Minimal Increase	19	205,196	-21.1%
Minimal Increase	20	194,936	-25.0%
Minimal Increase	21	185,654	-28.6%
Moderate Increase	22	177,215	-31.8%
Moderate Increase	23	169,510	-34.8%
Moderate Increase	24	162,447	-37.5%
Moderate Increase	25	155,949	-40.0%
Moderate Increase	26	149,951	-42.3%
Significant Increase	27	144,397	-44.4%
Significant Increase	28	139,240	-46.4%
Significant Increase	29	134,439	-48.3%
Significant Increase	30	129,958	-50.0%
Significant Increase	31	125,765	-51.6%

Table VI suggests that residents of Los Angeles would experience a 11.8% to 28.6% difference under the minimal increase scenario, followed by a 31.8% to 42.3% difference under the

moderate increase scenario, and then a 44.4% to 51.6% difference under the significant increase scenario. It is notable that none of the three reconfiguration scenarios represent a 52% difference between the current council structure.

IV. Conclusion

The Los Angeles City Council's structure, in tandem with unique geographic, demographic, and sociopolitical landscapes, impedes the descriptive and substantive representation for all Angelenos. Expanding the number of council districts is necessary to better create council boundaries that speak to the City's 99 neighborhood councils and 114 neighborhoods. Ultimately, Los Angeles lags behind other large cities in the County, State, and U.S. with respect to the ratio between councilmember and residents. As we approach the third decade of the new century, it is recommended that the City expand the number of council districts to meet the needs of a complex and changing society. This analysis suggests that the City should pursue, at minimum, a moderate increase to the number of districts, representing an increase of at least 7 council districts.

Over the last twelve months, it is clear that the current Council structure does not achieve the type of government representation possible in the nation's second largest city nor does it equip emerging and historical communities of interest from substantive representation. By expanding the number of council districts, communities, whether ethno-racial like Black Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders or Latinos can increase their opportunities to elect a candidate of choice; communities of interest like Jewish Americans or Armenian Americans can form coalition districts to increase their capacity for descriptive representation; neighborhoods like Watts can move into a district that better reflects their socio-cultural dynamics; and growing neighborhoods like Playa Vista, Downtown Los Angeles, and parts of the West San Fernando Valley can be clustered into more compact districts.

Expanding the number of council districts is a necessary intervention to shift the City in alignment with the representation accessed by residents of other major cities in California and the U.S. It is also increasingly important as the County of Los Angeles retains an outdated and insufficient supervisory structure that leaves Angelenos further behind in achieving a responsive government.