

INFORMATIONAL BRIEF

District Count

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Core Question

This brief explores which ethnic groups in Los Angeles (a type of “community of interest”) are large enough to be considered a viable voting block?

Summary of Topline Findings

In a 25-district configuration, districts could be drawn with much greater confidence that Korean descendants would form something near a majority capable of electing a candidate of their choice. Filipinos, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans could perhaps, especially if there are 25 or more districts, but because people from these groups are dispersed across the city of Los Angeles, it would be difficult to draw a district that was favorable to any of the three.

Assumptions & Calculations

These calculations assumed the following:

- 1) The ethnicities live in contiguous neighborhoods (we know that most do not)
- 2) An ethnic group is “viable” if it accounts for at least 50% of the population of any single district.
 - a. A lower threshold for “viability” could be chosen. Consider, at just over 8% of Los Angeles’ population, African Americans are well represented on Los Angeles’ City Council despite having no plurality in any of the districts represented by Black councilpersons. In District 9, Blacks make up only about 13% of the population in a district dominated by Hispanics (of multiple nationalities). So perhaps 15% is worthy of consideration for “viability”.

As the number of city council districts increases, more ethnic or national groups are capable of successfully meeting the 50% minimum.

The largest ethnic groups (Whites, Hispanics, Blacks, Asians) are each viable in the current 15 districts. Asians, however, are represented only by Lee, who represents a district that was around 20% Asian in 2020. Oddly, Lee’s 12th district in the mostly White northwestern corner of the San Fernando Valley has the highest percentage of Asians among all districts. Other well-known Asian regions, including Koreatown, Chinatown, and various Filipino neighborhoods have been split, or ‘cracked’ rendering their strength or influence.

The “big four” L.A. categories (Non-Hispanic Blacks, Asians, Whites and Hispanics) are the categories the US Census Bureau provides at the census tract level. The data is from a 100% count.

In Los Angeles, linguistic and continental-level markers of identity are inadequate at best and counter-productive at worst because some ethnic groups may find their interests poorly aligned with another group whose ancestors once shared broad linguistic or geographic commonalities.

In Los Angeles, other, linguistic or nationality-based identities are worthy of consideration. Groups including Filipinos, Guatemalans, and Salvadorans would probably constitute viable communities of interest even in a 15-district configuration if they lived contiguously.

People of Mexican descent are viable as a group regardless of their contiguity or clustering. However, controversial remarks made by former city council members strongly indicate that even within national communities (Mexican Americans) that colorism or other ethnic biases may preclude subnational groups from being effectively represented by elected officials with the same nationality.

Based on national or linguistic identification, other groups may deserve attention as council expansion is considered. Korean descendants, many of whom live in only two clusters (K-town and Porter Ranch/Northridge) are probably numerous enough to constitute a viable community of interest in a district, especially if the number of districts increases to around 20.

Koreans are probably the ethnic group currently most disenfranchised by the current configuration of council districts and the current number of districts. In 2020, a favorably drawn district around Koreatown (in a 15-district configuration) could have made Koreans a plurality compared to other *national-level* identities (around 20%). However, people claiming either Mexican or Guatemalan heritage who live in and near Koreatown are just as numerous as Koreans. Compared to Hispanics, even in a district favorably created to encompass greater Koreatown were drawn, Koreans, would likely be in a minority. White non-Hispanic voters are also nearly as numerous as Koreans in such a district. So challenges persist for smaller ethnic groups with only 15 council seats.

In a 25-district configuration, at around 150,000 population threshold a district could be drawn with much greater confidence that Korean descendants would form something near a majority.

Chinese descendants become possibly viable in a 25-district configuration, but that may not hold by 2030 because of the age structure in the Chinatown region and the outmigration of younger Chinese-Americans to the San Gabriel Valley. Even at 30 districts, a district favorable to a Chinese community of interest would be challenging to create.

Armenians are in a similar situation as the Chinese. They number around 80,000 in the city of Los Angeles. They would likely be a good candidate for representation (they have been historically well represented), but within the city of Los Angeles, do not form a majority in any census tract. Instead, Armenians are dispersed throughout much of the San Fernando Valley, with some higher concentrations in the Sun Valley region (cleverly included in Krekorian's District 2 boundaries). Much higher concentrations of Armenians do exist in neighboring Burbank and Glendale, but those percentages fall off dramatically upon crossing the city limits.

Few other recognizable ethnic groups exist within Los Angeles are capable of forming a viable geographically defined voting block. Filipinos, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans could perhaps, especially if there are 25 or more districts, but because people from these groups are dispersed across the city of Los Angeles, it would be difficult to draw a district that was favorable to any of the three.

ETHNICITY	Approx. 2020 %	Minimum Districts to 50%
<i>White Not Hispanic</i>	28.08	15
<i>Armenian</i>	2.03	25
<i>Black Not Hispanic</i>	8.31	15
<i>Hispanic/Latinx</i>	48.40	15
Other Hispanic (linguistic cat.)	23.48	27
Mexican	31.47	15
Salvadoran	6.89	15
Guatemalan	4.38	15
<i>ASIAN Not Hispanic</i>	11.56	15
Filipino	3.87	15
Korean	2.91	18
Chinese	2.47	25
CENTRAL AMERICAN	12.69	15
SOUTH AMERICAN	1.42	40