

The Voting Rights Act protects communities of interest in redistricting.

Central South Austin, essentially defined by the 78704 zip code and the slice of the Travis Heights neighborhood east of IH-35, is perhaps more than any other region of the city a community of interest. These neighborhoods share a common identity that crosses economic boundaries. They meet together, lobby together, and particularly on issues relating to City of Austin policy, have much common ground not shared with other parts of town, in particular downtown, the campus area, and the Mueller development.

This is especially true where 78704's interests clash with those of areas north of the river. For years many of Central South Austin's issues have been pitted against downtown interests, and our lack of representation at City Hall has resulted in a wave of Council decisions favoring well-monied downtown and development interests to the significant detriment of our neighborhoods. Conjoining 78704 with areas north of the river will perpetuate the dominance of downtown power over 78704 and continue to render our neighborhoods defenseless at City Hall. A far more cohesive district would include all of 78704 and Travis Heights and the northern portion of 78745.

The thwarting of communities of interest via gerrymandering is the essential problem with the polarization of government in the U.S. The Voting Rights Act provides a path for litigation in defense of communities of interest which is not as well travelled as the Act's relation to racial equity but is just as valid. I doubt you would wish to defend your districting decisions in court, but a decision to break up 78704 would be an open invitation for that outcome.

Sincerely,

Larry Akers