

REDISTRICTING

FAIR DISTRICTS FAQ

What is redistricting?

- **Redistricting:** the process of drawing federal and state electoral district boundaries. Every 10 years, after every decennial Census, Ohio must make new maps outlining Congressional and General Assembly districts.
- **Goal:** To create a legislative district in a geographical area that reflects changes in an area's population. Districts reflect new population numbers so that each district has similar population numbers for fairness.

Why should I care about redistricting?

- **The legislative maps created this year will determine how communities are divided, resources are allocated, and voters are represented for years to come.**
 - How and where the district lines are drawn will determine how strong a voice each voter or each group of voters has in coming elections.
 - It also affects how strong a voice each has when lobbying for or against legislation.

What is gerrymandering?

- **Gerrymandering:** when districts are drawn by incumbent politicians to maintain their power with the intention of influencing elections to their advantage.
 - **Gerrymandering is a form discrimination.** It intentionally favors one political party or candidate over the other
 - **Gerrymandering allows the party with more control over the redistricting process to artificially inflate the number of seats it gets.** Elected officials of both political parties have marginalized the other party through mapmaking, and Ohio has some of the most gerrymandered districts in the country.

How does gerrymandering work?

- **Gerrymandered districts manipulate district lines to benefit a particular party by either:**
 - **packing:** where voters from a particular party or demographic groups are concentrated into one district to reduce their influence in other districts
 - **cracking:** where voters from a particular party or demographic group are split up to dilute their voting power, making it harder for them to influence elections.
- **All this makes for districts that don't follow geographic or community logic.** Gerrymandering creates districts that are stretched out or broken into jagged areas, which undermines equal representation for Ohio voters.

How does gerrymandering impact incumbents?

- **Gerrymandering also occurs when maps separate incumbents of the opposition party from their established base to put them into a less favorable district.** Mapmakers also can “double-bunk” two of the opposition party’s incumbents into a single district, ensuring that at least one will be eliminated. In 2011, Congressional District 9 was created in order to pit incumbents Marcy Kaptur of Toledo against Dennis Kucinich of Cleveland.

How does gerrymandering hurt every voter?

- **Gerrymandering takes away voter choice.**
 - Because partisan gerrymandering causes legislative districts to be won heavily by one party, the primary election becomes more important than the general election.
 - A competitive primary election without a competitive general election leads to the election of extreme candidates who are less likely to compromise or work across the aisle on behalf of their constituents.
 - This system especially disadvantages independent voters who do not vote in partisan primaries and voters who generally do not vote straight-party tickets.

How does partisan gerrymandering make elected officials less accountable?

- **Given that the map is rigged, an incumbent legislator is virtually assured re-election as long as he or she cares to hold the seat.**
 - Gerrymandering provides individual legislators, legislative leadership, and the legislature as a whole immunity from changes in voter priorities or sentiments.
 - Such security means that lawmakers do not need to listen to their voters, but instead work just to please extreme partisan interests or major donors.

How does gerrymandering confuse voters?

- **Oddly shaped and sprawling districts create confusion.**
 - For 3.6 million Ohioans, the closest Congressional District Office to their home is for the wrong congressional district.
 - In the past decade, even County Boards of Elections have accidentally placed voters into the wrong districts.

Is gerrymandering new to American politics?

- **Nope!**
 - Gerrymandering has been part of American politics since– at least!–1812
 - That’s when Elbridge Gerry was governor of Massachusetts- (he later went on to become the VP of the US under James Madison).
 - He signed a bill that redistricted the state in a way that would benefit his party. Noticing that one of the districts looked like a salamander, the Boston Gazette coined the term ‘gerrymander’ in 1812, forever connecting the irregular shape of a district shaped by political power to Governor Gerry.

Is Ohio an especially gerrymandered state?

- **Sure is!**

- **We are consistently ranked in the top 10 most gerrymandered states. You can learn more [here](#) and [here](#),**

Is there anything in Ohio's constitution about redistricting reform?

- **Yes!**
 - 2015: Ohio voters overwhelmingly supported state legislative redistricting reform
 - 2018: Ohio voters followed up by passing congressional redistricting reform.
- Both constitutional ballot measures won in all 88 Ohio counties and by more than 70% of the vote. We have a once-in-a-decade chance to protect our democracy, and we need people from across Ohio calling for a transparent, open, and bipartisan redistricting process that results in legislative maps that truly serve Ohio voters, not partisan interests.

So what's the problem– why is gerrymandering still so bad?

- **Ironically, gerrymandering itself explains this.**
 - Even after Ohioans voted overwhelmingly twice to amend our Ohio constitution with redistricting reform protections, Ohio's district maps are still drawn unfairly because incumbent politicians can't be held accountable.
 - They can't be held accountable because legislators at the state house know that with the rigged districts created for them by the incumbents in power, they will keep getting reelected– so why wouldn't they do whatever they wanted?
 - They've flouted our constitution and ignored the Supreme Court five times because only Ohio voters can hold these politicians accountable.
 - And we can't hold politicians accountable when politicians make the rules for themselves.

What would fair maps look like?

- **All voters should be fairly represented, no matter race, background, zip code, or income.**
- **Some aspects of fair maps include:**
 - **Population equality:** Political districts need to generally have the same number of residents.
 - **Contiguity:** All areas in the district are physically connected to each other.
 - **Geographic integrity:** To the extent possible, local governmental subdivisions should not be divided into different districts. Districts should also minimize the division of communities of interest, which are areas with similar interests (economic, social, cultural, geographic, historic identities, etc).
 - **Responsiveness:** Districts should not be drawn to favor one political party/candidate over another.
 - **Representational Fairness:** The total number of votes cast for each political party should be roughly equivalent to the number of seats each party receives.
 - **Racial equity:** Districts should not harm voters based on their race or ethnicity.
 - **Compactness:** Where practicable, districts should not be too elongated, spread out, or jagged.

Who approves state legislative district lines?

- **The Ohio Redistricting Commission** approves districts for state legislators.
- **Commission members are:**
 - **Ohio Governor:** Mike DeWine (Republican)
 - **Ohio Auditor:** Keith Faber (Republican)
 - **Ohio Secretary of State:** Frank LaRose (Republican)
 - **One individual appointed by the Ohio Senate President:** Senator Rob McColley (Republican)

- **One individual appointed by the Speaker Ohio House:** Representative Jeff LaRue (Republican)
- **One individual appointed by the Senate Minority Leader:** Senator Nickie Antonio (Democrat)
- **One individual appointed by the Ohio House Minority Leader:** Representative Allison Russo (Democrat)
- **You can see the problem just looking at this for a second:** One party will likely always be dominant, leading to map drawing that benefits the party in power.
- **But incumbents from both parties work to create safe seats for their members, not just the party in charge.**
 - That's what happened with Ohio's latest maps, which were approved by all seven members because each party was able to manipulate the maps to their advantage.
- The party in charge will do this the most, but both parties will do it, given the chance.

What's the solution– how do we fix this, once and for all?

- **We fix this by getting politicians out of the map-making process.**
- **That's what the [Citizens Not Politicians](#) amendment would do:**
 - Create a citizen-led commission
 - Ban politicians and lobbyists from the process
 - Empower citizens to pick their representatives, not the other way around
- **Read the amendment [here](#)**
- **Learn about the amendment [here](#)**

Sign up to help [here](#)



[Fair Districts Ohio](#) is a coalition of grassroots organizations committed to fairer state legislative and congressional maps. We are a non-partisan team of voting rights experts and organizations working to create a better and more equitable representational democracy.

The coalition is led by [Common Cause Ohio](#) and the [League of Women Voters of Ohio](#), and joined by the [Ohio A. Philip Randolph Institute](#), the [Ohio Council of Churches](#), the [Ohio Voter Rights Coalition](#), and other good government organizations.