

Gerrymandering: united states house of representatives and election district boun...

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



Gerrymandering

The main purpose of gerrymandering is to increase the number of legislative seats that can be won by the political party which is in charge of redrawing the district boundaries during that period of time, and to create “ safe” seats for the party’s incumbent legislators which are seats in which the incumbent will always win re-election. Gerrymandering is the redrawing of election district boundaries to give an electoral advantage to a particular candidate or party. It has been recognized as a part of the American political landscape since 1812.

The term derives from a redrawing of US Representative districts in Massachusetts before the 1812 elections, when Elbridge Gerry was governor. People said the district was reminiscent of a salamander and thus the term Gerry-mander was coined. The Constitution requires that representation in the House of Representatives be apportioned to states on the basis of population. So, every ten years we count up the number of people living in each state and making sure that each state gets at least one House member, divide up the rest of the seats among the states equally.

States with large populations get a bigger amount of house seats smaller states get just the one. A variety of Supreme Court cases, however, have applied the 14th Amendment’s equal protection clause to the process of drawing legislative districts resulting in a requirement that each district have roughly the same population. So after each Census, states and localities have to redraw their district lines to ensure that the districts are roughly equal. This process redrawing of district lines has been blamed for almost

every problem in American politics. The redistricting process therefore became a target for political reformers.

In 2008, Californians enacted Prop. 11 and created the Citizens Redistricting Commission (CRC). State legislators would no longer be able to pick their own constituents. An independent commission would be in charge of drawing the lines for the Assembly and Senate. In 2010, the CRC's mandate was expanded to include House districts as well. The party in control of redistricting can weaken its opposition by "packing" or "cracking". Packing is to concentrate as many voters of the opposition party into a single electoral district to reduce their influence in voting in other districts.

In some cases, this may be done to obtain representation for a community of common interest thus creating i. e. a minority group (Blacks or Hispanics) what is called a majority-minority district. Cracking is the spreading out of opposition voters across numerous "safe" districts which will dilute their voting percentage and its effect on the outcome. If representatives are required to be residents of their districts, redistricting may redraw the boundary to exclude his/her house, or draw them into a district where they will lose the next election.

Gerrymandering is a very serious problem. Effective gerrymanders can have significant policy implications. In California, for example, it makes a difference whether there are 23 or 24 Republicans in the Senate. If there are 23, Republicans can't stop Democratic efforts to raise taxes. If there are 24, Republicans can. By pre-determining election outcomes, gerrymandering makes actual voting less consequential, and therefore it should discourage

voter turnout, but because of a lack of awareness on the subject voter turnout is not significantly affected.

Any variations in voter turnout mostly depend on voter age, income, education, race and ethnicity. Since ballots include many races for offices in various regions, some of which may genuinely be closely-contested, one or two "foregone conclusions" on the ballot will not diminish voter interest in other races. An effective way of combating gerrymandering is to follow the example of California and enact something similar to prop. 11 which will give the responsibility of redrawing the district line to independent non-partisan groups.

This will remove partisan machinations from the drawing process and remove the unfair advantage that incumbents have over challengers to their seats.

Sources Cited

1. Humphreys. M. 2009. "Can compactness constrain the Gerrymander?" <http://www.columbia.edu/~mh2245/papers1/gerry.pdf>
2. Smith, Kieth. "On Gerrymandering and Its Effects." Web log post. PoliticalScienceat University of the Pacific. Pacificpoliticalscience.wordpress.com, 2 Nov. 2011. Web. 04 Mar. 2013.