

# Gerrymandering: definition, types, statistics, solutions

[History](#), [American History](#)



## **Background Summary**

Gerrymandering is a practice designed to establish a political advantage for a party or political group by manipulating district boundaries. Lawmakers will draw districts in ways that, despite a larger voter base for the opposition, will favor their party. There are two primary techniques used in gerrymandering: “packing,” which involves cramming the opposition party’s voting power into a concentrated area, and “cracking” which is designed to dilute the opposition’s voting power across many districts. The term is named for Elbridge Gerry, who signed an 1812 bill that created a district manipulated to look like a salamander. Today, gerrymandering is visible in almost every congressional district in the United States. Gerrymandering promotes partisanship and a lack of competition in voting. Many voters are likely to “throw away” their vote due to this issue, and this discourages voters from participating in the electoral process.

## **Statement of Facts**

Gerrymandering has been practiced in the United States for over 200 years. Gerrymandering promotes a lack of competition and results in many wasted votes. Lines are redrawn every 10 years. Many would argue that districts should be drawn to include exclusively urban/rural areas so that issues are relevant, while others argue that all districts should promote healthy competition.

## Discussion of Issues

American democracy is based on the foundational principle of fair representation. Elected officials should be held accountable to express the people's views. Gerrymandering promotes a lack of competition and oftentimes officials don't express the true will of the people. The sustainability of our democracy depends on a fair electoral process, healthy competition, and voter participation. Voters in gerrymandered districts may not be motivated to vote against the dominant party because ultimately their vote will be wasted. This is contradictory to the principle of free and competitive elections where politicians express the views of the people that put them in office. Gerrymandering diminishes the influence of voters in their respective districts and promotes partisanship. Partisan gerrymandering flips the normal functionality of politics on its head, with legislators selecting the voters instead of voters selecting the legislators. In some instances, legislators draw the district lines themselves and promptly approve their own proposal. Maps drawn following a partisan agenda treat citizens not as voters who have the responsibility of choosing what they think is right for them, but as a means to an end. In the 2010 election, the Pew Research Center found that in only 84 of the 435 congressional districts were the elections even remotely close (won by a margin of 55 to 45 percent or closer.) In 2012, only 63 of those 435 mentioned districts experienced competitive elections. Legislation is structured in such a way that a party's share of the vote does not translate into equivalent representation. Technological developments have only amplified the problem, with algorithms maximizing the efficacy of the redistricting process. Many would argue that relying on neutral computer

algorithms to shape districts would be an effective option, but computers are ultimately programmed by humans. This is a source for issues and controversy, as a computer could be programmed to shape biased districts. Other advocates claim that “proportional representation” is an effective way to go about it — with representatives being appointed proportionally based on the voter base. For instance, if there were a theoretical 100 seats and the voter base was 45% Republican and 55% Democrat, 55 of the seats would be given to the Democrats and 45 to the Republicans. Finally, one more solution proposes that a neutral group draw the district lines and, after the lines are drawn, it is approved or disapproved by a judge. The potential drawbacks of this proposal lie in the potential political bias of the judge and/or the people drawing the lines.

## **Conclusion**

Our system of government functions best when it's based on bipartisanship and neutral legislation. Currently, lawmakers are practically stealing votes from American people all across the country. In order to reinforce the values of fair representation, something must be done about gerrymandering. Ultimately, the concept of an independent redistricting commission seems the healthiest for the political environment as long as steps are taken to minimize partisan influences on decisions. For instance:

- Committee members should consist of an equal number of members affiliated with each party in addition to members affiliated with neither party.

- The committee should be instructed to promote the creation of competitive districts.
- Meetings held to establish district lines should be open to the public, and should involve public input.