



Frequently Asked Questions about Redistricting

What is redistricting?

Every ten years the state redraws district lines for federal and state legislative districts. This redrawing is called redistricting.

Why are U.S. House, Ohio Senate and Ohio House districts redrawn every ten years?

The U.S. Census is conducted every ten years (in 2000, 2010, 2020) to count how many people live in each community around the country. Following each U.S. Census, legislative districts are redrawn to account for population shifts (in 2001, 2011, 2021). Redrawing the districts ensures that each district has the same population, so that no one's vote counts more or less than someone's vote in another district.

What is the impact of redistricting on voters and politicians?

Legislative district boundaries change. Even if you live in the same home and have not moved, you may find yourself living in a different district with a different representative. From the legislator's standpoint, she may find herself representing a different set of communities than the ones who first elected her.

What is gerrymandering?

When legislative districts are redrawn, they can be manipulated to favor or disfavor a particular person or group. This manipulation of district lines is called gerrymandering.

Is gerrymandering legal?

Yes and no. Manipulating district lines based on race - to make it harder for a minority community to elect the candidate of their choice - is illegal.

However, the courts often do not prohibit manipulating district lines for other reasons - such as drawing lines to favor the political party in control, to disfavor the opposing political party, to create "safe seats" for incumbents, or even to ensure major campaign contributors are in the district of the candidate they support.

What is the short-term impact of gerrymandering?

When district lines are redrawn, a voter may find himself moved out of his old district and into a neighboring district, even if the voter lives in the same place.

If the district was gerrymandered to protect an incumbent or political party, it may be harder for voters to vote them out and their preferred candidate or party in.

Elected legislators in districts designed to be "safe seats" may be less responsive to their constituents, because they are virtually guaranteed to win re-election.

Gerrymandering can also diminish the voice of an entire community by splitting that community into multiple districts where they have a minority voice, instead of one district where they can speak (and vote) as a unified community.

What is the long-term impact of gerrymandering?

Everyday voters have less say in who represents them, and the system is designed to give more political control to the extremes of both parties and their supporters.

If districts are drawn to heavily favor one political party over the other, then the primary election for the favored party determines who wins more than the general election. Candidates in primaries must appeal to that party's voters rather than the electorate as a whole, which often pressures candidates to embrace more partisan views to appeal to that party's voter base and campaign contributors.

If a legislative body is dominated by representatives who have "safe seats" controlled by their political party, that can lead to a hyper-partisan atmosphere in which representatives are less open to working or compromising with members from the other party.

Gerrymandering can not only lead to more politically extreme and less publicly accountable representatives in the current legislature, but long-term it can also limit the pool of candidates available to run for higher elected office later to current office-holders with more partisan and less mainstream political views.