



Nonpartisan Redistricting Fair Maps & Democracy for All

Gerrymandering is a tool used by both political parties to maximize their legislative representation despite the will of the voters. Gerrymandered districts are characterized by irregular shapes that deviate from municipal lines and pack voters of the same political party together, resulting in uncompetitive elections. That is why many states have authorized nonpartisan commissions to draw new district lines every 10 years. However, Wisconsin still leaves this task up to the state legislature, giving the majority party an opportunity to skew results of future elections to their own advantage. The Wisconsin legislature will draw new districts in 2021, so we need to make sure that the problem of gerrymandering in Wisconsin gets better—not worse.

“We’re at a place now in this country where voters are not picking their representatives anymore. Representatives, through the gerrymandering process and redistricting, are picking their voters.”

- Former Republican Wisconsin Congressman Reid Ribble, 2013

There are several problems with the current partisan redistricting process:

VOTER DISENFRANCHISEMENT — Wisconsin’s current district maps were ruled unconstitutional by a federal court in 2016 because they unfairly dilute the votes of over half of the state’s citizens, violating the First Amendment and the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. We should empower voters to participate in the democratic process by preserving our right to open and accountable elections.

UNCOMPETITIVE RACES — In competitive districts, candidates and elected officials have an obligation to respond to the needs of their constituents. In recent elections, up to a third of Assembly candidates ran unopposed. In the state Senate, races may be decided by fewer than 10 percentage points. In order for democracy to thrive, voters must have a real choice when they go to the polls.

EXTREME PARTISANSHIP — Most Wisconsinites want members of the Legislature to work across party lines. Unfortunately, our legislative districts are drawn to be “safe” for one party or the other, favoring extreme partisanship. Nonpartisan redistricting would result in more mixed districts where moderate views prevail.

VOTER AND CANDIDATE CONFUSION — Voters and elected officials alike count on town halls, county fairs, and other local events to meet one another. When districts are carved up, constituents struggle to know whether they’re talking to the right legislator, and candidates struggle to know whether they’re talking to one of their constituents. Fair maps would cut the confusion and lead to more robust dialogue between elected officials and voters.

UNNECESSARY EXPENSE — Partisan political maps have resulted in expensive court battles at taxpayer expense. Rather than drawing fair, nonpartisan districts, the state has spent over millions of dollars defending the current gerrymandered maps. Taxpayer dollars should be used for public needs like roads, schools, broadband infrastructure, and clean water, not to defend political battles the majority of citizens do not support.

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Wisconsin’s electoral districts are so heavily gerrymandered that in 2016 a federal court deemed them unconstitutional, and in 2017, the state was ordered to redraw the maps. The decision was appealed to the Supreme Court which ruled that the state, not a federal court, must decide whether current electoral maps represent a partisan political gerrymander. The onus is now on the legislature to stand up for democracy and utilize a fair system for drawing maps that reflect the will of Wisconsin voters.

NONPARTISAN REDISTRICTING

What can the state do?

SUPPORT A NONPARTISAN COMMISSION FOR REDISTRICTING

In January 2020, Governor Tony Evers signed Executive Order #66, creating the People's Maps Commission, comprised of 9 voting members tasked with drawing fair, impartial maps to be presented to the Legislature for consideration following the 2020 Census. The Commission conducted hearings across the state of Wisconsin and use the input from citizens who testify at the hearings to draw and submit maps to the Legislature to vote on in 2021.

Wisconsin Farmers Union calls on the legislature to:

- Reintroduce a bill that would hand redistricting over to a nonpartisan commission (such as the People's Maps Commission) and direct the Legislative Reference Bureau to create new state and federal district maps that would align more closely with municipal boundaries and not favor any one political party over another. Additionally, WFU supports the reintroduction of a bill that would encompass redistricting legislation in the form of a constitutional amendment. If passed, no political party will be able to unfairly rig district maps in their favor again. The amendment requires adoption by two successive legislatures, and ratification by the people, before it can become effective.

IMPLEMENT AN IOWA-TYPE MODEL TO CONDUCT REDISTRICTING

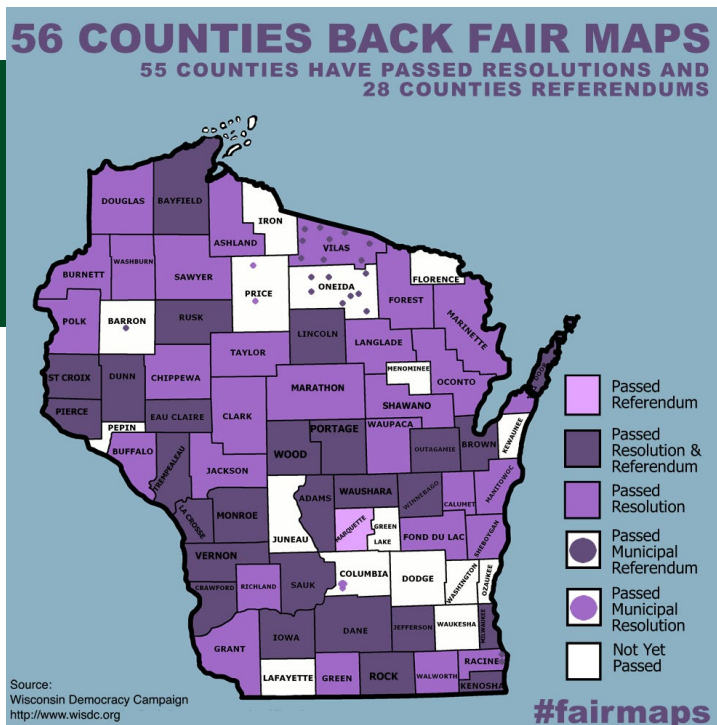
- A non-partisan commission draws the district lines for state and a federal office.
- The maps are presented to the state legislature for an up or down vote.
- If the plan fails to pass after 3 separate votes, the courts step in and take over the process. Since the inception of Iowa's 1981 model, the maps have only required a second vote once and courts have not had to be involved.

STOP SPENDING TAXPAYER MONEY TO DEFEND GERRYMANDERED LEGISLATIVE DISTRICTS

There is no justification for spending taxpayer money to oppose fair legislative districts. Voters want the legislature to spend tax dollars on roads, schools, broadband infrastructure, and clean water — not costly legal battles over redistricting.

DON'T MAKE THIS A PARTISAN ISSUE.

Although Republicans were in power for the previous redistricting and now Democrats are calling for reform, the opposite is true in Illinois. In their last redistricting in 2010-2011, Democrats gerrymandered the state to their advantage and Republicans are now calling for redistricting by an independent commission. Both parties will continue to use this to their own advantage until it is given over to a nonpartisan commission, and both parties will eventually suffer unless something is changed.



"What the people of Wisconsin have overwhelmingly asked for is fair maps ... if we draw our maps fairly, where people are equally represented, we will move past this logjam of partisan politics and really be able to work for everybody in Wisconsin."

- Rep. Sara Rodriguez (D-Brookfield)

Wisconsin Farmers Union is member-driver organization that is committed to enhancing the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities and all people through education, cooperation, and legislation. Learn more at www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com.

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