

What is redistricting and why do we do it?

Depending on how the government is organized, lawmakers can either represent a whole geographic area or they can represent a part of an area that we call a “district.” For example, U.S. Senators from Wisconsin represent everyone in the state, but U.S Representatives in Congress are elected by residents of a specific election district.

Every ten years after the federal census, district lines must be adjusted to ensure that each district contains the same number of residents. This process is called redistricting: the redrawing of election district boundaries. The U.S. Constitution requires that every American receive as close to equal representation as possible in government - for example, one congressional district shouldn't include more people than another congressional district. As time passes, the population of election districts can change dramatically, leaving some people overrepresented and others underrepresented in government. Redistricting equalizes the population between districts to help reach the ideal of equal representation.

Federal congressional and state legislative districts are redrawn by the state legislature in Wisconsin. Local redistricting is the process of redrawing the boundaries of local election districts, such as county supervisor, school board, or city council districts. The U.S. Supreme Court has held that local governments must redistrict at least once every ten years. This local redistricting is generally done using data from the federal census about who, how many, and where people live in Wisconsin.

Redistricting determines which communities are placed together into a district and whether communities are split up across different districts. The decisions made during the redistricting process determine whether residents have fair representation in government and whether their representatives will reflect their interests.

Gerrymandering happens when the election district boundaries are drawn in a way that gives a particular set of people - like a political party or racial group, an unfair political advantage over another. The League of Women Voters opposes gerrymandering.

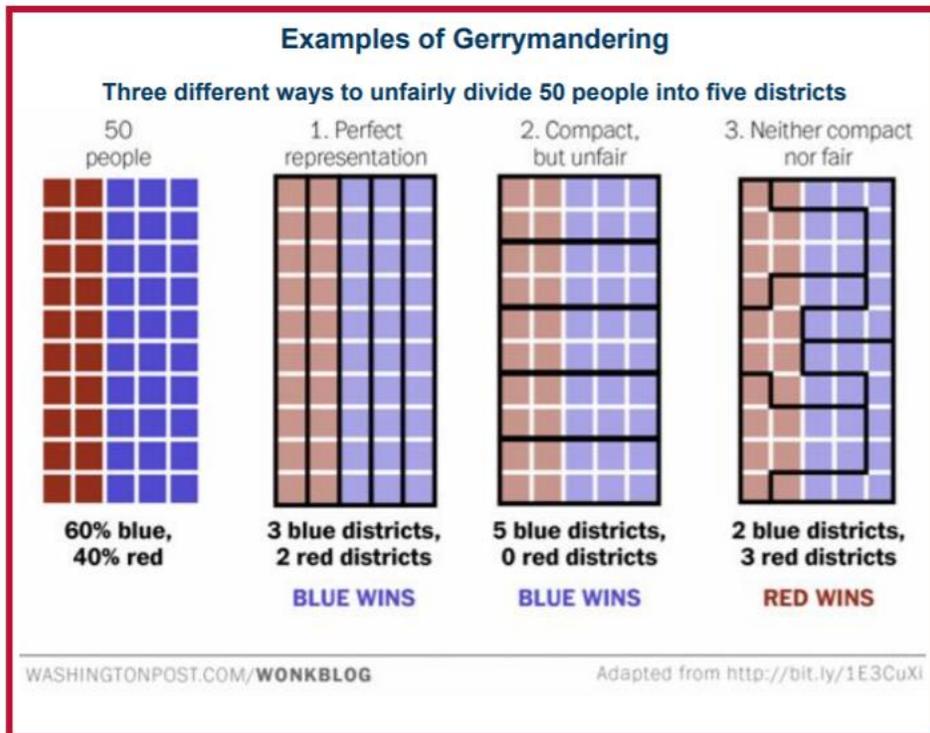
Democracy depends on voters having the opportunity to choose their representatives. When elected officials redraw the lines of their own districts, they get to design their own territory and choose who their voters are. This distorts representative democracy. It can lead to manipulation of various types. Racially discriminatory manipulation weakens the voting strength of targeted minority communities. Partisan manipulation favors one political party over another.

The League of Women Voters believes that to be fair, districts should be drawn in a transparent manner by politically independent special commissions that use unbiased criteria to help keep communities intact and to ensure that everyone is equally represented.

The politicians control redistricting in Wisconsin. Why is this a problem?

Putting elected officials in charge of drawing their own districts creates an incentive for those officials to draw districts that are favorable either to them or to their political allies. This sometimes leads to districts that are purposefully drawn to enhance the influence of certain groups and/or to reduce the influence of other groups. This is referred to as “gerrymandering.”

Two of the most common techniques for gerrymandering are “cracking” and “packing.” “Cracking” is when a targeted group is split up into multiple districts to dilute its voting power, so members of that group cannot elect a representative in any district. “Packing” is when a targeted group is over-concentrated into a single district to reduce its voting power in other districts, so members of that group end up with fewer representatives than their votes deserve. The “Examples of Gerrymandering” graphic on the next page illustrates how geographic areas could be unfairly divided.



Please note that odd-looking districts **do not** necessarily equal gerrymandering, and simple looking districts do not always mean good representation has been achieved. Districts need to reflect communities, and communities may have a wide variety of geographic boundaries.

Above information from

<https://cavotes.org/sites/default/files/downloads/LWVCEF%20Fair%20Maps%20California%20Local%20Redistricting%20Toolkit.pdf>

Fair Maps Referendum

In order to let our legislature know our opinion of the current partisan redistricting method, residents of Wisconsin counties and towns have voted on non-binding referendums and resolutions that state the residents want a fair, non-partisan redistricting procedure. Referendums are decided by all residents of a county and resolutions by the county boards. In Wisconsin, 17 counties have passed referendums and 51 counties have passed resolutions.

Status of Fair Maps Referendum in the LWV-GCV Area

- Barron County – Not passed yet.
- Barron City - Passed resolution on July 14, 2020; **Referendum is on November 3, 2020 ballot**
- Chippewa County – Passed resolution on June 13, 2017
- Dunn County – Passed resolution on April 21, 2017. **Referendum is on November 3, 2020 ballot**
- Eau Claire County – Passed referendum on Nov 8, 2018 with 74% voting yes
- Pepin – Not yet passed
- Pierce County – Passed referendum on April 7, 2020 with 76.2%
- St. Croix County- Passed referendum on April 7, 2020 with 76.3%

In **Dunn County** the resolution question on the November ballot states:

“Should the Wisconsin Legislature create a nonpartisan procedure for the preparation of legislative and congressional district plans and maps? YES _____ NO _____”

A “Yes” vote states the voter is for a fair map process to end gerrymandering.

Learn More:

League of Women Voters of Wisconsin: <https://my.lwv.org/wisconsin/article/league-women-voters-supports-redistricting-reform>

Pierce County GRO: <https://piercecountygro.org/western-wi-for-nonpartisan-voting-districts/>

Wisconsin Democracy Campaign: <https://www.wisdc.org/reforms/support-fair-voting-maps>

Wisconsin Farmers Union: <https://www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/fairmaps>