Redistricting: The process of drawing electoral district boundaries

In the U.S., this is most commonly congressional districts

In the U.S., congress is divided into two houses: the senate and the house of representatives. The senate has two senators from each state. The House of Representatives has representatives based on the population of the U.S.

We redistrict to ensure that each representative to the House of Representatives has roughly the same number of constituents, determined by census data

Process of Redistricting:

Redistrict every 10 years

Length of redistricting process varies by state

Some states only have 1 district and don’t redistrict at the national congressional level, but may redistrict at smaller scales

Washington’s redistricting was signed into law in Feb 2012

Following 2010 census, each district is supposed to have on avg 711,000 ppl

Washington gained a seat after the 2010 census (as did some other western and southern states, while the NE mostly lost seats)

Depends on state:

Some states have only one district (7): Alaska, Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Delaware, Vermont

State Legislatures Commission: Usually by a simple majority vote in both houses, though two states (Connecticut and Maine) require 2/3 majorities. Most states allow the governor to veto the decision (though 5 don’t: Connecticut, Florida, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina). Many have backup plans in case of gridlock such as the governor drawing the districts, the secretary of state drawing the districts, backup commissions appointed by the legislature, commissions of other statewide elected officials, etc.

Advisory Commissions: Commissions redraw lines and recommend such “solutions” to the legislature, but the legislatures are not necessarily required to adhere to these recommendations (Iowa, Ohio, Virginia, New York, Rhode Island, Maine)

Politician (?)/Backup(?) Commission: In New Jersey and Hawaii, a commission of appointed or elected politicians redraws the boundaries (this is also used as a backup plan by a number of other states)

Independent Commissions: (Washington, California, Idaho, Arizona) How the commissions are assigned varies from state to state, but generally do not include legislatures or other elected officials

Washington’s Independent Commission

5 People (4 voting, 1 non-voting)

1 Registered Voter appointed by the majority state senate leader

1 registered voter appointed by the minority state senate leader

1 registered voter appointed by the majority house of representatives leader

1 registered voter appointed by the minority house of representatives leader

Non-Voting: 1 chair person appointed by the previous four (if they can’t agree, appointed by the state supreme court)

The state legislature can amend (make some changes to) the commission’s maps by a 2/3 vote in both the senate and the house of representatives

Gerrymandering: The manipulation of electoral boundaries to favor one group over another

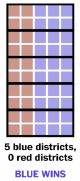
1812: Redrawing Massachusetts state senate election districts under then governor Elbridge Gerry to benefit his political party. The term was first used by Boston Gazette: Gerry’s Salamander -> “Gerrymander”

Benefits a particular political party

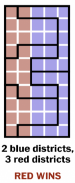
To protect a particular incumbent (someone currently in office) or oust an incumbent

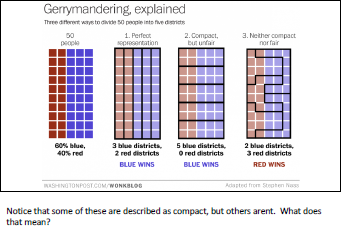
To give advantage/disadvantage to a particular group (interest/racial/ethnic/age group, etc)

Cracking/Splintering: A method of gerrymandering in which a particular population is broken up and distributed amongst a number of districts in order to minimize their voting impact



Packing: A method of gerrymandering in which a particular population is packed into a single district (or small number of districts) in order to maximize their voting impact in that district or to minimize their voting impact elsewhere





**WHAT DOES COMPACT MEAN**

Racial Gerrymandering I: Cracking and packing to attempt to dilute/weaken the minority vote

Racial Gerrymandering II: Cracking and packing to attempt to strengthen the minority vote (usually through the creation of majority-minority districts)

Gerrymandering Rules:

Equal Representation: Same number of people per district

Compactness: Physical proximity of one part of the district with another

Contiguity: Must be an unbroken shape (a rule in many states, but not all)

Legality of Gerrymandering:

To a degree. “It’s kind of a Goldilocks problem. You must take race into account somewhat to comply with the Voting Rights Act, but you if you take into account too much the racial considerations you can get in trouble as well. The question is how do you know when you’ve gotten it just right.”

That balance tends to fluctuate with the balance of the supreme court. The supreme court has on its docket now a case that will likely clarify its current threshold of what is allowable: Bethune-Hill v Virginia State Board of Elections

Strategies Proposed to Avoid Gerrymandering

Independent Commissions

Computerized Redistricting

The Collapse of the Congressional District System

Interesting Case: Prisons

NY State is has received recent attention b/c it has a large prison pop in some rural areas of upstate NY. While convicted felons can’t vote and those prisoners who can vote often continue to vote in their home communities (generally urban areas downstate), they count as part of the rural upstate pop for the purposes of redistricting).