



STEWARDS OF OUR EARTH All of God's Creation

What Is Gerrymandering All About and How Does It Affect Us?

Every ten years following the nationwide Census, States redraw their congressional district maps to reflect population changes to assure a fair, one person/one vote process that reflects the will of the people.

Since “those maps help shape political power and community representation, politicians have long used the process to benefit themselves by gerrymandering the lines or drawing them to unfairly benefit themselves and their party.” (Jonathan Lai, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2/4/22)

Gerrymandering refers to political manipulation of electoral district boundaries with the intent of creating undue advantage for a party, group, or socio-economic class within the constituency. Two principal tactics are used. **Cracking** is spreading voters of a particular type among many districts to deny them a sufficiently large voting bloc in any particular district. **Packing** is concentrating many voters of one type into a single electoral district to reduce their influence in other districts.

For the last six years Fair Districts PA <https://www.fairdistrictspa.com> and other national and local organizations (Committee of 70, ACLU) have been trying to change this practice through legislation supporting an independent commission, identifying clear criteria, and employing a fair and transparent process. All efforts for an independent citizen commission have failed even though seven out of ten PA voters support it. Other efforts have failed through obstruction.

On February 2, citing both the impasse between the legislative and executive branches and the immanence of the election timeline, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court took control of a high stakes redistricting lawsuit to decide how the state's congressional districts will be drawn for the next decade. (Jonathan Lai, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2/4/22)

On February 4, a state panel approved Pennsylvania's new legislative district maps, which could substantially alter the balance of power in the General Assembly for the next decade. At least one is likely to be challenged in court.

Compared to the initial plan released in December, the new state House map reduces the number of incumbent Republicans who would have to face off against one another. The final state Senate map remains largely unchanged, though it was amended to create a new district in Philadelphia with a significant number of Hispanic voters.

With court challenges likely, candidates for office are facing an uncertain future as the February 15 start date to collect signatures for the May primary rapidly approaches. (Spotlight PA 2/4/22)
People interested in running for office cannot start the process without districts being established. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court will begin hearing oral arguments February 18.

Gerrymandering tactics pave the way for politicians to choose their voters — rather than letting the voters choose their politicians. **Take your voting responsibility seriously and make sure your voice is heard and that your choices benefit the common good of our brothers and sisters.**

~ Thanks to Moya Kinnealey for her contributions on this issue.