

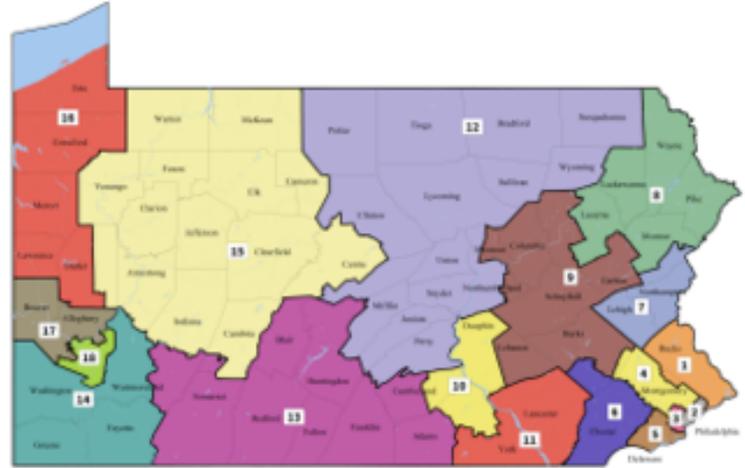
# MAPPING THE FUTURE OF LEGISLATIVE REDISTRICTING

FEBRUARY 20 • 5 PM - 7 PM  
FRASER STREET COMMONS

HOSTED BY PENN STATE RCL

# Background Information

Every ten years, following the completion of the United States census, new congressional and state legislative boundaries are drawn. The purpose of redrawing boundaries is to make districts easily identifiable and equally represented, ensuring fairness and consistency. The federal government stipulates that districts must have nearly equal populations and must not discriminate on the basis of race or ethnicity.



Although compliance with the federal constitutional requirements are mandatory, states are allowed to adopt their own redistricting criteria for drawing plans. A few traditional districting principles that have been appropriated by many states include compactness, contiguity, and partisan fairness. Unfortunately, the redistricting system has been corrupted by the strategic manipulation of boundaries to favor specific political parties and incumbent candidates.

Occurring far too frequently, this deceitful form of boundary drawing is known as gerrymandering. For example, after the 2010 census, Republicans were in control of approximately 60% of state legislatures and were able to redraw district boundaries in those states. However, during the congressional elections held later that year, the Republicans gained a majority of House seats despite the fact that Democratic candidates received more votes nationwide. Americans vote to have a voice in politics and current issues, yet gerrymandering dilutes and discounts the opinions of concerned citizens. As seen in many instances, gerrymandering impacts communities across the country, often hurting underrepresented minorities the most. Gerrymandering forsakes democracy in the self-interest of politicians and officials who have stake in district outcomes. Even with the best of intentions, ethically dividing districts is no easy feat. A complex process, discussions about redistricting often dissolve without any viable solutions. Nonetheless, impassioned Americans take on the task in hopes of bettering the system and providing fair representation. For instance, Fair Districts PA is petitioning for the appointment of an impartial, independent citizens commission to redraw district lines rather than allowing legislators to control the process. With growing support for the proposal, Pennsylvania residents are coming together and making efforts to change the procedure. Ultimately, when reaching a resolution, it is important to maintain civil discourse by considering different perspectives and offering new solutions. Through research and investigation, our team has developed four approaches to congressional map making.

# Approach 1: Communities of Interest

## Overview:

Oftentimes, districts are gerrymandered to separate communities and disperse like-minded people into multiple districts to limit their voting power and political voice. Recently, Pennsylvania legislation declared the PA congressional districts unconstitutional and found many communities were gerrymandered and split into many different congressional districts. When considering possible district lines, achieving a true representation of the constituents within a single district is the goal of many state legislatures. To achieve this goal of equal representation, the communities of interest approach is often considered. This approach focuses on the sociodemographic characteristics such as personal, social, cultural, racial, ethnic, and economic interests within a local community.

The concept is those who live in the same geographical area, such as neighborhoods or regions of a state, and share similar sociodemographic characteristics should all be placed within the same district. Twenty-four states already implement of keeping communities of interest in the same district when drawing state legislative districts. Theoretically, this approach may seem like the best option; but unfortunately, the ambiguity of this concept is altered due to the varying interpretations from state legislators.

## Benefits:

District boundaries should be drawn in a way that allows each individual to have equal representation and political power within his or her specific district. Preserving communities of interest ensures that people who have a similar racial, geographic, or economic identities will be grouped within the same district, as opposed to being split into multiple districts and limiting the group's voting power. When individuals who share a common interests are placed within the same district, a key benefit is the ability for the district to elect a politician whose policies and beliefs align with their own interests. Additionally, the elected official is better able to represent and act on behalf of the homogeneous district. Communities of interest main focal point is to allow groups and communities to benefit from common representation through strength in numbers.

## Trade-offs:

State legislature aims to preserve communities of interest; however, there is no formal definition and universal criteria of what communities of interest really are. In 1994, the concept of communities of interest was introduced in the Supreme Court case *Vera v. Richards*, but a formal definition was never clearly stated. The ambiguous definition results in contrasting interpretations among state legislators. A standardized, universal definition of communities of interest is essential for successful, effective grouping of different people with different interests in Pennsylvania. Another frequent issue that occurs is the non-geometric district shapes that are created from this concept, making it difficult for representatives to travel within districts' bizarre shapes, limiting the different constituents' voices in the district to be heard. In addition, gerrymandered lines spread poor urban communities out among suburban and rural areas. Gerrymandering places these urban communities together with rural farmers, who have very different interests. Big city populations are packed into as little districts as possible and split voters in communities of interest like Harrisburg, Bethlehem, Chester, Erie County, and the suburbs of Philadelphia.



# Approach 2: Political Balance and Proportional Representation

## Overview:

When redistricting, it is common to consider the sociodemographic characteristics of groups. Although these aspects are important, an individual's party affiliation proves to be even more crucial. Based on a study by the European Journal of Political Research, "the strength of...partisan bond [in America is] stronger than race, religion or ethnicity." (Martinovich 1). Thus, one of the redistricting approaches looks at achieving political balance and proportional representation in government to ensure that officials elected to represent the different districts of a state reflect the state's overall political inclinations.

Proportional representation can be achieved in a multitude of ways; however, this approach considers the possibility of physically redrawing the map so that the number of Democratic districts and Republican districts roughly reflects the overall political trends of the state. Ideally, if there were ten seats and the state was 60% Democrat and 40% Republican, six of the seats would go to Democrats and four would go to Republican representatives. Based on the philosophy of proportional representation, even if a Republican lives in a district mostly occupied by Democrats, he/she should ultimately still have representation in government if the percentage of Republicans and Democrats living in the state is truly considered when redrawing the map. By assuming that partisanship reflects an individual's views more accurately than other factors, proportional representation ensures that everyone's political standpoint will be reflected by those elected to serve in the government.



## Benefits:

Proportional representation encourages more competition, which helps to eliminate districts that ensure an incumbent will win. This is because the "margin of victory" causes "parties...to try to communicate with [and] appeal to....voters" (Yglesias 3). Usually, an election emphasizes the race between two political parties. If you pre-establish a district to be Democrat or Republican, candidates will really have to target individual viewpoints of the voters, creating a stronger interpersonal relationship between the candidate and the voters (Yglesias 3). Moreover, although the districts are designed to reflect overall political ideologies, proportional representation does also establish competition between the two parties. According to FiveThirtyEight's The Atlas of Redistricting, proportional representation would raise the number of competitive districts in the U.S. from 72 to 82 (however, this trend is not consistent for every state) (Bycoffe 1).

"Wasted Votes" would also be reduced significantly. If proportional representation were used for the entire nation, the efficiency gap would be extremely small, favoring Republicans by 1% (Bycoffe 1). Thus, ideally, everyone's vote would hold equal weight regardless of where they live.

## Trade-offs:

If a Republican lives in a predetermined Democratic district, he/she will likely not receive direct representation. Furthermore, the issues that may affect that Republican in that particular district may not be understood by a Republican delegate serving in another district. One must also consider the possibility that the political demographics of the delegates elected may not be an exact match of the political demographics of the state.

By redrawing the districts to be Democratic or Republican, voters may feel like their vote doesn't matter as they may think that the results have already been decided by the way the map is drawn. Furthermore, district lines may need to be redrawn several times in order to reflect changes in political balance. This could possibly lead to political turmoil down the road. The public will also need to consider the the possibility that it may be easier for candidates with extreme views to gain political traction (Amy 4) in a particular election as districts are now more about people in the same political party fighting against one another rather than individuals from different parties debating one another.

# Approach 3: Voter Choice and Competition

## Overview:

One of the main principles of a democracy is to make every citizen's vote count and every voice heard. By dividing districts with the intent to make them competitive, we can ensure that the elected representative is truly a figurehead for everyone's beliefs. This intent to stimulate competition will, hopefully, prevent incumbents from easily slipping back into office and allow a diverse group to come together in choosing the best possible candidate.

## Benefits:

Competition is essential for maintaining fairness in elections. In order to increase competition in district elections, research has shown there are significant benefits to using nonpartisan redistricting methods when redrawing the district lines. Modern-day map making technologies currently allow legislators to redraw the district lines to ensure reelection, thus eliminating competition. In a study done by Chen and Rodden (2013), they generated random redistricting maps where, "Political motivations, like partisanship or incumbency, are never considered. In being randomly drawn, these maps should capture whatever baseline electoral security we would expect absent any "politics" in redistricting," (Hamel, Henderson, and Goldzimer). From there they analyzed the maps to see if the redistricting had any effect on electoral competition. Despite the limitations of using simulated voting data, they were able to determine this method shows some promise in increasing competition in elections. The use of new simulated map data makes it now possible to implement this process across the country, which will increase fairness in competition of elections nationwide.

## Trade-offs:

While competition is a founding principle of democratic elections, redistricting solely for the purpose of fostering competitive voting can be pointless and even detrimental for the community. One of the most important jobs of an elected official is to know their district's interests and make connections with their voters. Redistricting for competition can disrupt these organic relationships and fall into extreme gerrymandering to split apart unified communities and areas. Geographic proximity typically correlates to like-minded ideals in the people, so a mapmaker would have to divide compact pockets of people in order to make a "competitive" election. We would suddenly see wildly misshapen maps that have to cut out bits and pieces of each area and end up making the map even more distorted than it already was. Some critics even argue that competitiveness is not a feasible goal because it is such a nebulous topic that there are no clear ways to accurately measure and create districts based off of it.



Make Every Vote Matter

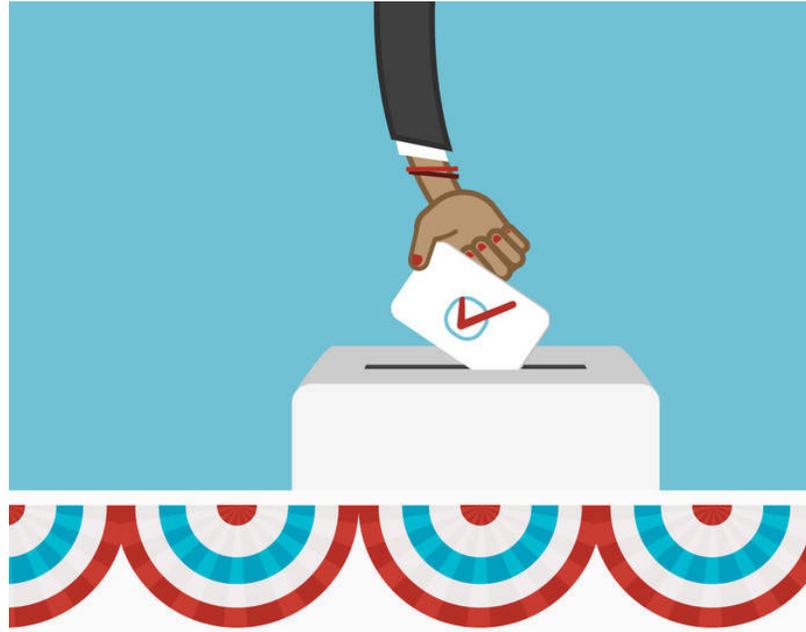


# Approach 4: Alternative Voting Measures

## Overview:

Although few of us here at Penn State are aware of it, the "winner take all" voting system that we currently employ is certainly not the only method of fair, balanced, and accurate representation. Considering the status quo, our mini-team has come to the conclusion that mapped district voting and the current single-candidate, a single-vote system is no longer feasible for a world surrounded with interconnected interests. Pulling from a large breadth of historical trends, we have also come to believe that an impartial district is wholly impossible to draw because inherent bias is characteristic of human nature. In light of this, our group values competition and fairness, so we propose a voting system without the use of districts, and there are many ways to achieve a statewide voting system without the use of districts (Ballotpedia):

- Ranked Choice Voting system: Voters rank candidates and the top choices fill the positions that they are running for.



Block Voting: Voters vote for the number of seats up for election and the top vote getters get the position. Single Voting system: the Voter gets one vote and top candidates get the position. Cumulative Voting: Voters are given a certain amount of votes and are allowed to vote for the same person multiple times. The aforementioned voting alternatives are a couple examples of how a district free election could be executed; however, this team wants to emphasize that a specific type of alternative voting along with the technicalities is not our advocacy. We want to focus on just turning away from any form of districts, and its benefits and harms.

## Benefits:

The main benefit from eliminating districts is that there is no possible chance of gerrymandering to occur. No one is drawing lines, so no possible bias can be reflected in this system. The second benefit is increased impact of a citizen's vote. Each vote is treated as equal, and there is no district which the vote falls in, so everyone's vote counts towards the overall election. Finally, with alternative voting, a possible benefit is limiting strategic voting and the "lesser of two evils" mentality. With a plans, such as ranked voting and cumulative voting, voters are more inclined to vote for lesser known candidates and deviate from the two party system.

## Trade-offs:

A system without districts can cause multiple issues in terms of winning the election. First, excessive campaigning could possibly occur as there is no longer one area a candidate must focus on. The effect of this is likely the candidate with the most resources and money reaching more people in the state, and they would have an advantage over a candidate with less resources. The second drawback is urban pandering because the population in cities like Philadelphia and Pittsburgh vastly outnumber rural areas in Pennsylvania. Candidates could focus campaigning efforts in the city and ignore other areas due to the population differences between them which ultimately under-represents rural voters after elections. Finally, the last possible drawback is uninformed voters. If the voting system is one which voters have numerous choices, they will be unable to know the ideologies of all candidates and make an informed decision.



# Sources

## Overview:

"Join the Movement for Redistricting Reform." Fair Districts PA, [www.fairdistrictspa.com/](http://www.fairdistrictspa.com/).

Levitt, Justin. "What Is Redistricting?" All About Redistricting -- Illinois, Loyola, 2019, [redistricting.ils.edu/what.php](http://redistricting.ils.edu/what.php).

Short, John Rennie. "4 Reasons Gerrymandering Is Getting Worse." The Conversation, The Conversation, 11 Dec. 2018, [theconversation.com/4-reasons-gerrymandering-is-getting-worse-105182](http://theconversation.com/4-reasons-gerrymandering-is-getting-worse-105182).

## Approach 1:

Lai, Jonathan, and Liz Navratil. "Pennsylvania, Gerrymandered: A Guide to Pa.'s Congressional Map Redistricting Fight." Philly.com, The Inquirer, 24 Sept. 2018.

Lai, Jonathan. "'This Is a Gerrymandered Map,' West Chester Professor Says in Redistricting Trial." Philly.com, The Inquirer, 13 Dec. 2017.

Kuniholm, Carol. "About Gerrymandering." Fair Districts PA, Jan. 2016,

Lazarski, Lindsay. "Battle over Pa.'s Congressional District Map Begins in Federal Court in Gerrymandering Case." WHYY, WHYY, 5 Dec. 2017,

Crocker, Royce. Congressional Redistricting: An Overview. Congressional Research Service, 2012, pp. 1–26.

"7 Things to Know About Redistricting." Improving Judicial Diversity, Brennan Center for Justice, 28 Oct. 2013.

Rossiter, Kalyn M., et al. "Congressional Redistricting: Keeping Communities Together?" The Professional Geographer, vol. 70, no. 4, 2018, pp. 609–623., doi:10.1080/00330124.2018.1443477.

## Approach 2:

Henderson, John A. Hamel, Brian T. and Goldzimer, Aaron M. "Gerrymandering Incumbency: Does Nonpartisan Redistricting Increase Electoral Competition?," The Journal of Politics 80, no. 3 (July 2018): 1011-1016. <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/697120>

Mann, Thomas E. Party Lines: Competition, Partisanship, and Congressional Redistricting. Washington, D.C.; Brookings Institution Press, 2005.

Yoshinaka, Antoine, and Chad Murphy. "The Paradox of Redistricting: How Partisan Mapmakers Foster Competition but Disrupt Representation." Political Research Quarterly, vol. 64, no. 2, 2011, pp. 435–447. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/23056402](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23056402). [https://www.jstor.org/stable/23056402?pq-origsite=summon&seq=2#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/23056402?pq-origsite=summon&seq=2#metadata_info_tab_contents)

## Approach 3:

Amy, Douglas. "Common Criticisms of PR and Responses to Them ." FairVote, [https://www.fairvote.org/common\\_criticisms\\_of\\_pr\\_and\\_responses\\_to\\_them](https://www.fairvote.org/common_criticisms_of_pr_and_responses_to_them). Accessed 4 Feb. 2019.

Bycoffe, Aaron, et al. "The Atlas of Redistricting ." The Atlas of Redistricting , 25 Jan. 2018, <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/redistricting-maps/#Proportional>.

Martinovich, Milenko. "Americans' Partisan Identities Are Stronger than Race and Ethnicity, Stanford Scholar Finds." Stanford News , Stanford University, 31 Aug. 2017, <https://news.stanford.edu/2017/08/31/political-party-identities-stronger-race-religion/>.

Yglesias, Matthew. "The Real Fix for Gerrymandering Is Proportional Representation." Vox, Vox Media, 6 Nov. 2017, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/10/11/16453512/gerrymandering-proportional-representation>.

## Approach 4:

Electoral Reform Society. "Alternative Vote." Electoral Reform Society, [www.electoral-reform.org.uk/voting-systems/types-of-voting-system/alternative-vote/](http://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/voting-systems/types-of-voting-system/alternative-vote/).

Ballotpedia. "Electoral Systems in Maine." Ballotpedia, [ballotpedia.org/Electoral\\_systems\\_in\\_Maine](http://ballotpedia.org/Electoral_systems_in_Maine).

FairVote.org. "Benefits of Ranked Choice Voting." FairVote, [www.fairvote.org/rcvbenefits](http://www.fairvote.org/rcvbenefits).