

Nonpartisan Redistricting

Many states have handed redistricting power to a non-partisan commission to redraw districts every 10 years, but Wisconsin still leaves this task up to the state legislature. Unfortunately, evidence shows redistricting has become a tool for both parties to maximize their legislative representation at the expense of voters. Districts are contorted, do not follow county or municipal lines, and divide cities, resulting in uncompetitive elections.

“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



On January 27, 2017, a Federal court ruled that the Wisconsin state legislature must redraw the state’s gerrymandered legislative districts prior to the 2018 elections. That decision followed the court’s November 2016 ruling that Wisconsin’s most recent district map “constitutes an unconstitutional political gerrymander.”

There are several problems with the current partisan redistricting process:

VOTER DISENFRANCHISEMENT

Wisconsin’s current district maps were struck down because they unfairly dilute the votes of over half of the state’s citizens, in violation of the First Amendment and the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment.

UNCOMPETITIVE RACES

In competitive districts, candidates and elected officials have the extra incentive to respond to the needs of their constituents. In the November 2016 elections, by contrast, 38 of the 99 state Assembly races featured candidates running without any opposition in the general election. On the state Senate side, most of the races were lopsided – only three were decided by less 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.

UNNECESSARY EXPENSE

Partisan political maps regularly result in expensive court battles at taxpayer expense. These dollars could be better used for roads, schools, internet infrastructure, or tax relief.

Despite problems with the current redistricting process, administration and legislative leaders have spent large sums of taxpayer money to defend it. Rather than drawing nonpartisan districts, the state has spent over \$2 million to defend the current politically gerrymandered ones and is poised to spend even more.

Nonpartisan Redistricting: What can the state do?

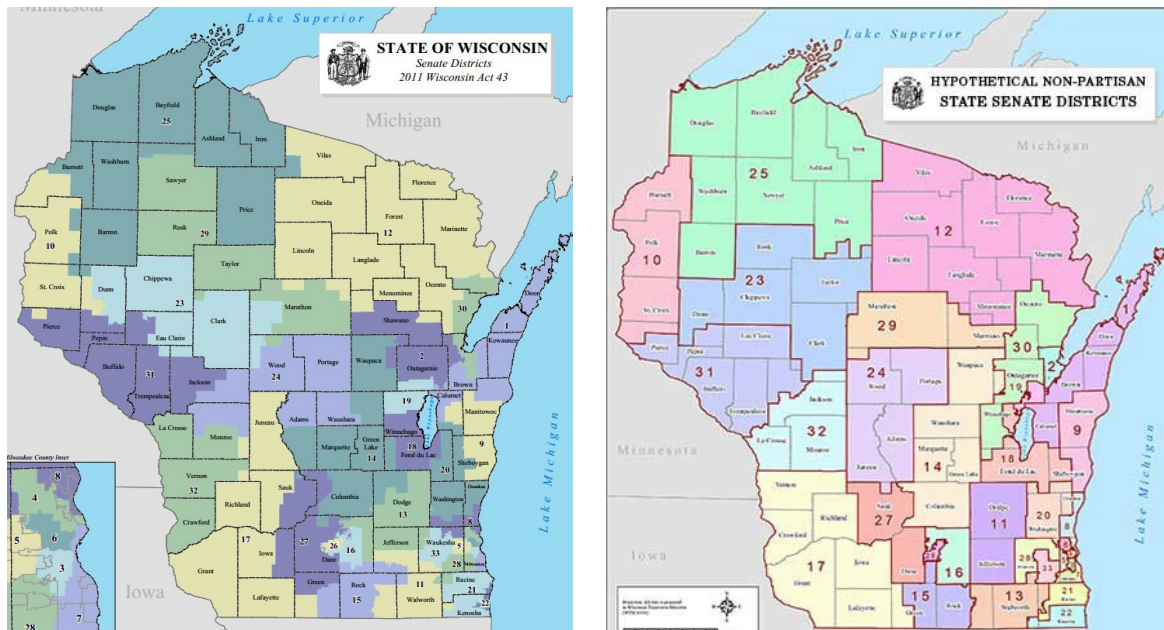
Stop spending taxpayer money to defend Wisconsin's gerrymandered legislative districts.

There is no justification for spending taxpayer money to oppose fair legislative districts. Voters want the legislature to spend tax dollars on roads, schools, internet infrastructure, or tax relief – not costly legal battles over redistricting.

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.



In the maps above, current state Senate districts are on the left and hypothetical nonpartisan ones are on the right. Notice how the non-partisan map follows county lines more closely than our current map. The districts in the non-partisan map also are compact and do not have strange offshoots into parts of the state to avoid or pick up voting blocks.

Don't make this a partisan issue.

Although the Republicans were in power for the previous cycle of redistricting and now Democrats are calling for reform, the opposite is true in Illinois. In their last redistricting effort in 2010-2011, Democrats gerrymandered the state to their own advantage and now Republicans are calling for redistricting to be conducted by an independent commission. In summer 2014, Republican State Senate Leader Christine Radagno stated, "The single most important reform that we could do in this state is one we have not done yet; that is changing the mapping process." Both parties will continue to use this tool to their own advantage until it is given over to a nonpartisan commission, and both parties will eventually suffer unless something is changed.

Wisconsin Farmers Union calls on the legislature to pass a bipartisan bill, such as 2017 SB 13/AB 44 authored by Senator Hansen and Representative Vruwink, to hand redistricting over to a nonpartisan commission.

Wisconsin Farmers Union is a member-driven farm organization committed to enhancing the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities and all people through educational opportunities, cooperative endeavors and civic engagement. Learn more at www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com.

This fact sheet is brought to you by:

