

Teacher Background for Redrawing Democracy – 9th–12th Honors/AP Level

(This is simply just for a refresher and to hopefully save you some Google-ing!)

Redistricting and Gerrymandering: What Teachers Should Know

Redistricting Overview

Every 10 years after the U.S. Census, states redraw voting district lines to adjust for population changes. The Constitution requires this to uphold equal representation.

What is Gerrymandering?

Gerrymandering is the manipulation of those district boundaries for political advantage.

- **Cracking:** Breaking up voter groups to dilute their power.
- **Packing:** Concentrating voters into a few districts to limit their influence.
- **Legal Focus:** While racial gerrymandering is illegal under the Voting Rights Act, the Supreme Court has ruled that **partisan** gerrymandering is generally beyond federal courts' reach, though some states are addressing it with reforms.

Georgia-Specific Background

- After the 2020 Census, Georgia's Republican-led legislature drew maps challenged in federal court for reducing Black voter influence.
- In 2023, a federal court ruled that Georgia's maps violated the Voting Rights Act, requiring new maps.
- Georgia's 2024 elections operated under the new, court-approved maps, adding one majority-Black congressional district.
- Georgia remains under scrutiny from national voting rights groups.

National Context and Developments

- **Allen v. Milligan (Alabama, 2023):** The Supreme Court upheld Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, requiring fairer representation for Black voters.
- **Wisconsin (2023):** The State Supreme Court ordered redrawing of legislative maps due to unconstitutional district shapes.
- Several states (California, Arizona, Michigan) have implemented independent redistricting commissions to create less partisan, fairer maps.
- Gerrymandering has been estimated to provide Republicans a ~16-seat advantage in the U.S. House (Brennan Center, 2024).

Where to Use This in Class

Topic	Useful Activities
Legal Precedents	Assign case briefs (Baker v. Carr, Shaw v. Reno, Allen v. Milligan); have students present cases or write short responses.
Georgia Case Study	Analyze Georgia’s redistricting history using current maps, demographic data, and court summaries.
Quantitative Tools	Teach compactness measures (Polsby-Popper, efficiency gap) and apply them using mapping software (e.g., Dave’s Redistricting Tool, ArcGIS).
Comparative National Trends	Research suggests that independent commissions are debated in terms of their effectiveness; students are assigned argument essays on reform measures.
Civic Action	Have students create policy proposals, public service announcements, or presentations connecting their redesigns to real-world reform.