COLLECTION IV — ELECTORAL REFORM

Gerrymandering and Redistricting

What gerrymandering is, how redistricting works, and how citizens can advocate for fair maps.

By Daniel P. Devine · Civest Sphere · November 2026

Redistricting

After each census, every ten years, district lines for Congress, state legislatures, and many county and local bodies are redrawn so each district has roughly equal population. How those lines are drawn can decide elections before a single vote is cast.

Gerrymandering

Gerrymandering is drawing district lines to give one party or group an unfair advantage. Common techniques:

- **Packing:** concentrating a group's voters into a few districts so they win those by huge margins and lose everywhere else.
- **Cracking:** splitting a group's voters across many districts so they're a minority in each.

Gerrymandering can be partisan (favoring a party) or racial. Racial gerrymandering that dilutes minority voting power can violate the federal Voting Rights Act and the Constitution.

How New York does it

In 2014, New York voters approved a constitutional amendment creating an **Independent Redistricting Commission** to propose maps for Congress and the State Legislature. The

Legislature votes on the commission's maps and can draw its own if it rejects them twice. The state constitution also prohibits drawing districts to favor or disfavor a party or incumbent.

After the 2020 census, the process ended up in court. In 2022, the state's highest court threw out the Legislature's congressional and State Senate maps, and a court-appointed expert drew new ones for that year. After further litigation, the Legislature adopted new congressional maps in 2024.

Counties and towns draw their own legislative and council districts under local rules.

How to tell if a map is fair

- Are districts compact and contiguous?
- Do they keep communities, towns and neighborhoods together?
- Does the share of seats roughly reflect the share of votes over several elections?
- Was the process open, with public hearings and published data?

What you can do

1. Testify at redistricting hearings. Commissions hold them after each census.
2. Draw your own map with free online tools, and submit it.
3. Explain your community of interest: the shared ties that make your neighborhood belong together.
4. Ask candidates where they stand on independent redistricting.

Last reviewed November 2026. This guide is general information, not legal advice. Laws, deadlines and procedures change, so confirm details with the official source before you act.

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