
The American Bypass: Gerrymandering and its Effect on Politics

Gerrymandering: the political practice of redistricting boundaries in order to manipulate the outcome or favor of one's own party and/or group. The implementation of the term gerrymandering had been first established through the enactments of American politician Elbridge Gerry whose actions within his terms as Governor of Massachusetts led to one of the first recorded instances of redistricting for political advantage. Holding the title of being a Democratic-Republican Governor within Massachusetts for one term already, Gerry was aware of his competition within the area and the strongholds he would encounter of rival political factions. In order to combat said factions (in this particular instance, the Federalist Party) Gerry would move to manipulate and redraw the state senate district of Essex County within the region in order to remove a Federalist leaning district and instead replace them with one friendlier towards his party. This instance of redistricting would become something of popularity as Gerry's particularly oddly shaped district would be discussed within the confines of The Boston Gazette's editorial staff. One editor would distinguish this new district as something reminiscent of a salamander. A fellow editor would ascend upon this idea further and declare the practice of the creation of said new district as gerrymandering: the product of a portmanteau between the names of Elbridge Gerry and a salamander (an animal whose resemblance to the district was uncanny).

Since this nineteenth century example of gerrymandering, the techniques of the practice have evolved and amalgamated with various other notions in order to suit the user's needs and effectively push them along within their status. Eventually, various forms of gerrymandering would be used, those to fit specific situations and allow for flexibility within others. One such example of these new techniques used would be the practice of "packing" together districts. Packing is a form of gerrymandering which in essence places particular supporters of an opposing party within single or lesser districts in order to lessen their power to influence any end results, tipping the scales of power towards the ruling party. A second form of the practice, separates supporters within an area of a district, "cracking" their effect. Through cracking, the breaking off of particular supporters is applied within a district and the same aforementioned supporters are placed into new district lines apart from their surrounding party advocates, watering down their overall impact upon an end result. Stacking is another form of gerrymandering which focuses upon another form of population. An opposing party, in this case the minority population, is focused upon. The ruling party will then apply a greater number of the majority population within the same area, leaving the majority with a higher rule upon the seat of the district. Though stacking, cracking and packing have had the most impactful instances of gerrymandering and are the most widely known, there have been an abundance of commonly found variations upon the subject of gerrymandering that are widely practiced as well. The first is found to be a bipartisan decision, regardless of voter action. This is known as sweetheart gerrymandering, where neither of both parties have full control over redistricting and the action is notably known for protecting powerful incumbents within the favor of both sides. Another such type of gerrymandering takes advantage of prisons and the abundance of individuals found within the tightly packed confined walls. This is due to prisoners being identified as residents within a district despite not being able to vote. The legislators with districts found to have a large prison population have more power over the election process than those who are found to have

none, essentially establishing prisons as four-walled trump cards.

Gerrymandering is a complex subject with many instances of complex outcomes. Due to such an overwhelming amount of information needed to understand political gerrymandering and the effects it holds upon American citizens, many are unaware of the repercussions of such actions made by political parties in order to further their own agendas and many others are unaware of the topic's current settlement within today's atmosphere. Unaware that The Supreme Court has still allowed for the redistricting of boundaries and has even conversed over the topic this very year and has come to the conclusion that,

"...partisan gerrymandering claims present political questions beyond the reach of the federal courts, [and that] Federal judges have no license to reallocate political power between the two major political parties, with no plausible grant of authority in the Constitution, and no legal standards to limit and direct their decisions.'" (Chief Justice John Roberts).

The Supreme Court ruled that the concept of gerrymandering is a political issue, which can not be evaluated by the courts and that the same courts can not control whether the rule of law is in force. This response is simply not the case as gerrymandering, though it can be used within bipartisan context and can be used for instances of the greater good, is in disillusionment in regards to the hopes and notions found within the Constitution. In order to prevent further denial of the Constitution and the unalienable rights found within, the Supreme Court must acknowledge that the rules regarding gerrymandering within the country need to be refined and at the most extreme, repeal previous cases and acknowledge the practice of gerrymandering to be unconstitutional.