

Why Wisconsin Needs Fair Maps:

A Primer for County Boards on Gerrymandering and Redistricting

1. What is redistricting?

After the U.S. Census is completed at the start of each decade, the legislature in Wisconsin has the responsibility to redraw the political district maps so that there are roughly equal numbers of people in each district to ensure equal representation.

2. What is partisan gerrymandering?

Partisan gerrymandering is the rigging of political maps to serve a partisan purpose: to solidify the power of the political party that is in the majority. They do this by consciously and [cleverly](#) drawing district maps so that their voters will dominate more districts, thus giving them more seats.

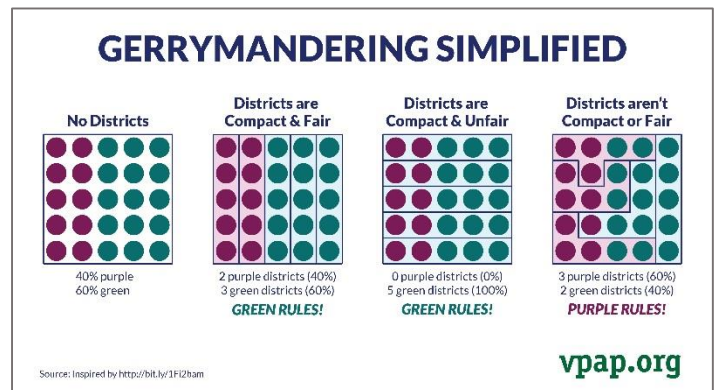
3. Is this a problem in Wisconsin?

Over the years, parties in Wisconsin have tried to draw maps that increase their representation. So this is a bipartisan problem that requires a nonpartisan solution.

The latest and most egregious example of gerrymandering in Wisconsin was the 2011 redrawing by the Republican leadership. A panel of federal judges ruled it unconstitutional after the plaintiffs demonstrated that it was one of the worst examples of gerrymandering in recent American history. With sophisticated computer modeling based on past voting patterns and other demographic data, the leadership, in secret, prepared several different maps by moving some lines here and some lines there, and each successive map predicted an increase in the GOP's seats. The final map chosen was one that predicted one of the largest increases. It also tore apart already existing political boundaries and communities of interest. For example, 58 counties were split among legislative and Congressional districts in the 2011 process—the most in Wisconsin history. Wisconsin's [redistricting case](#) was rendered moot by the U.S. Supreme Court in June 2019, which ruled that the judiciary had no role to play in such cases.

4. Is there a better way?

Actually, Iowa solved the problem of partisan map rigging more than 35 years ago. Rather than have the dominant party in the legislature come up with the maps, Iowa has nonpartisan career civil servants draw the maps, with specific criteria prohibiting them from including any demographic data related to voting and requiring them to keep political maps as compact as possible and to hold public hearings across the state about the new maps. Ultimately, the legislator still has the authority to approve maps, so we can make this change without a constitutional amendment. The so-called [Iowa Model](#) is supported by good government groups

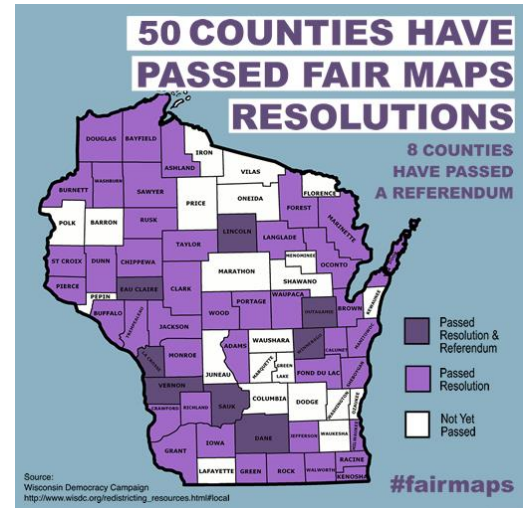


like the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin. And bipartisan legislation has been introduced in Madison for Wisconsin to adopt the Iowa Model. It's been introduced this session by Sen. Dave Hansen and Rep. Robyn Vining ([Senate Bill 288](#) and [Assembly Bill 303](#)).

5. What are Wisconsin counties doing about this?

Already, [50](#) Wisconsin County Boards have passed resolutions calling on the State of Wisconsin to adopt a process of nonpartisan redistricting along the lines of the Iowa Model. There is a lot of momentum on this issue: Most of these county boards came on board in the last three years.

At the 2017 annual conference of the Wisconsin Counties Association, 57 county representatives voted in support of a resolution to have the Wisconsin Counties Association endorse nonpartisan redistricting for Wisconsin. Seventeen of the 24 remaining county boards are thus on record in support of reform and should formally pass a resolution.



Also, [eight counties](#) – Dane, Eau Claire, La Crosse, Lincoln, Outagamie, Sauk, Vernon and Winnebago -- have passed a voter advisory referendum in favor of banning gerrymandering. A Marquette Law School poll earlier this year showed that 72 percent of Wisconsinites want to ban gerrymandering, and that includes 63 percent of Republicans and 76 percent of Independents.

6. Why is this so important?

It's about fair play. It's about being above board and transparent. It's about democracy, with everyone having an equal voice and a meaningful vote. It's about lessening the partisanship that is crippling our government and poisoning our political climate. It's about having real political competition instead of having so many "safe" seats that elected officials don't have to listen to some voters in their district or even compete for their votes. Voters should choose who represents them; representatives shouldn't choose their voters.

7. Who do I call for more information about this?

Lincoln County Board Supervisor Hans Breitenmoser has helped spearhead this movement in Wisconsin for fair maps and nonpartisan redistricting. He can be reached at 715.218.1398.

“This isn’t a one party sin. It happens on both sides, and that’s why we introduced [in 2013] our bipartisan bill to change how we redistrict in Wisconsin.”

Former State Senator Dale Schultz (R-Richland Center). He and fellow retired State Senator Tim Cullen (D-Janesville) tour the state educating the public on the need for fair and impartial legislative redistricting reform.