

Redistricting Reform Talking Points

Provided by Common Cause Indiana and League of Women Voters

1. Partisan redistricting puts political considerations ahead of community interests

When the General Assembly conducts redistricting it allows the politicians to choose their constituents, rather than the other way around.

Redistricting should encourage community cohesion, rather than division. Done poorly, redistricting often divides communities of interest, making it difficult for them to find representatives to champion their causes and advocate for them. It can also make it difficult for legislators to serve their constituents since it may be difficult for them to travel easily throughout the district.

Unfair redistricting creates “safe districts” which result in uncontested or uncompetitive elections, leading to reduced voter interest and turnout. In 2014, 44 of 100 seats in the Indiana House of Representatives were uncontested in the general election. That same year Indiana had the lowest voter turnout in the country.

2. Independent redistricting increases government legitimacy and public trust

Giving the redistricting responsibilities to a group independent of the legislature eliminates the conflict of interest that occurs when the players are also the umpires.

Using an independent commission for redistricting reduces the chances of legislative deadlock over maps and maps being challenged in court.

Partisan redistricting allows the majority to dominate one or both legislative chambers, marginalizing a significant bloc of voters statewide.

3. Partisan redistricting has a negative impact on representative democracy

The creation of “safe districts” usually results in the elections of candidates who are at the extreme edges of their party. When the only competition is the primary election, candidates are most interested in keeping the party faithful happy and have little reason to compromise for the common good.

A 2014 study published by the University of Chicago Law Review found Indiana’s state House districts to be the 5th most partisan districted in the country when the “efficiency gap” is applied.

The Indiana Bicentennial Visioning Project, led by the respected bipartisan team of former Congressman Lee Hamilton and former Lt. Governor Sue Ellspermann listed redistricting reform as one of our states top policy priorities because of its negative impact on competitive elections in the state.

Rebuttals to Common Arguments Against Redistricting Reform

1. The Washington Post “study” said that Indiana has some of the “best” districts in the country.

There was no study conducted by the Washington Post. They did publish an article that examined the compactness of Congressional districts only (not state legislative districts.) This article did identify Indiana’s Congressional districts as some of the most compactly drawn districts in the country, but compactness is only one criteria to consider. Had this article been looking at competitive districts (like the University of Chicago study) Indiana’s districts do not score well.

2. The Indiana Constitution requires the Indiana General Assembly to conduct redistricting.

Yes, the Indiana Constitution does give responsibility for redistricting Congressional and state legislative districts to the General Assembly. But they have the authority to create a redistricting commission through legislation to take charge of the redistricting process. Under HB1014, the General Assembly will still be involved in redistricting. They will have to vote on the maps that the redistricting commission creates. If they don’t like the first set, they can reject them and send the commission back to the drawing board. If they vote down the second set of maps, responsibility for redistricting will fall back to the legislature.

3. What gerrymandering? I won re-election with almost 70% of the vote. I work hard and represent my constituents well – that’s why I never face any serious opposition.

Hardworking legislators in sync with their voters have nothing to fear from a more independent redistricting process, they will continue to be rewarded by their constituents. But, too many districts in Indiana were drawn to be “safe” districts – tailored to favor the election of a candidate from one party. Competition is good for politics, just as it is good for business and sports. A 2016 study by Common Cause found that states with independent redistricting commissions had more competitive elections than states where legislators control redistricting.

4. Think about the districts where you live. Are there examples of divided communities of interest? It can be helpful to cite these examples of lines separating communities of interest.