

# UNDERSTANDING REDISTRICTING

## *How does it work and why does it matter?*

### What is Redistricting?

Most of our political representatives, from school boards to Congress, are elected by voters who have been sorted into districts. Redrawing the boundary lines for these districts is called redistricting.

Under the U.S. Constitution, redistricting happens about every ten years, after each decade's Census, to adjust the districts and make them roughly equal in population. In North Carolina, elected representatives are authorized to redraw the district lines for their own governmental body. So, school board members draw the school board lines, City Council members draw the city council lines, state legislators in the General Assembly draw the state legislative and Congressional district lines.

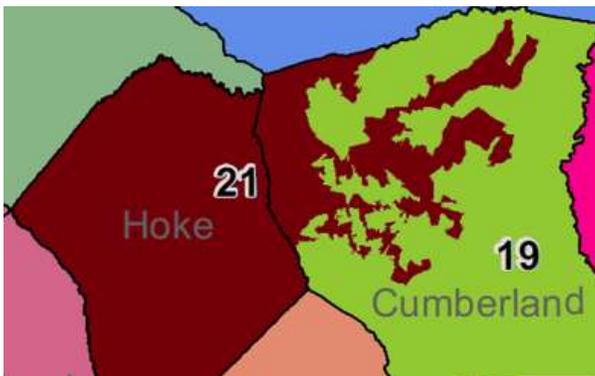
### How Does Redistricting Affect Me?

The way a district's lines are drawn includes or excludes certain people. These decisions are often made based on party affiliation, race, or other factors, and will affect who gets heard, whose interests are most represented, and who can win the next election.

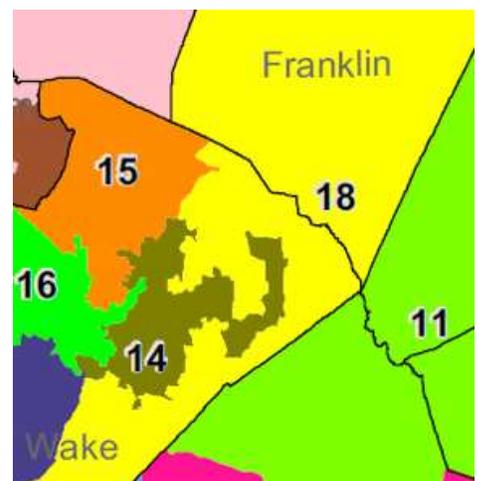
Too often in redrawing districts, elected officials focus on their own re-election rather than the people's interests. Redistricting then becomes a secretive process focused on advancing partisan interests; it becomes a way for politicians to pick their preferred voters and secure their power.

### What is Gerrymandering?

Gerrymandering is the deliberate drawing of districts in a way that maximizes the power of the map drawers. Gerrymandering may result in oddly-shaped districts designed to greatly increase or decrease a certain kind of voter (e.g., Black voters or Republican voters). The illustrations below shows how gerrymandering can undercut the will of voters.



**Left:** Legislators drew Senate District 21 with tentacles that added black voters from Cumberland Co. to make District 19 more white.



**Right:** Legislators drew District 14 to pull in black voters and make District 18 more white.

### How Can We Improve the Redistricting Process?

At Democracy North Carolina, we believe the redistricting process should be open, fair, and participatory. Whether redistricting is conducted by an independent, nonpartisan body or by the state

legislature or by using court-ordered standards, any process should:

- Protect voters of color by drawing districts that reflect the requirements of the Voting Rights Act and Equal Protection Clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment.
- Invite robust debate from community members, academics, and other stakeholders, and incorporate their feedback in the creation of districts.
- Reject partisan or racial gerrymandering of districts.

## What's the Latest on NC's Districts?

- (1) Congressional Districts.** Federal courts have ruled that the 1<sup>st</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Congressional district maps drawn in 2011 were illegally racially gerrymandered. The remedial maps drawn in 2016 by the N.C. General Assembly to “fix” that problem were used in the 2016 election. But they are now being challenged by the League of Women Voters and Common Cause NC for partisan gerrymandering districts, i.e., voters were placed in districts based on their partisan voting patterns to reduce competition and benefit one party. A trial in federal district court on this challenge continues, and will likely be influenced by a partisan gerrymandering case from Wisconsin that the U.S. Supreme Court will decide in the coming months.
- (2) State Legislative Districts.** In August 2016, a panel of federal judges ruled in the *Covington* case that 28 state House and Senate districts were illegal racially gerrymandered. Republican lawmakers appealed the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court; they lost and were ordered by the panel of federal judges to redraw the illegal districts (and neighboring districts) by Sept. 1, 2017. Plaintiffs in the *Covington* case argue that the Republicans’ new maps still include racially gerrymandered districts and have other problems. The plaintiffs also submitted their own maps. The judges could order the General Assembly to “fix” the remaining problems or direct a court-appointed expert to draw maps. A decision is expected in Fall 2017, and could be appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.
- (3) Congressional and State Legislative Districts.** In another case, plaintiffs in *Dickson v. Rucho* asked the state courts to rule that the Congressional and General Assembly districts were illegal racially gerrymandered. The N.C. Supreme Court refused, but the U.S. Supreme Court told the N.C. Supreme Court to review the case in light of its decision in an Alabama case about racial gerrymandering. Unmoved, the N.C. Supreme Court re-affirmed its ruling; but the U.S. Supreme Court again remanded the case. Arguments were heard again at the N.C. Supreme Court in September 2017.

## What Can I Do to Promote Fair Redistricting? Visit the Action Hub: [demnc.co/fairmaps](http://demnc.co/fairmaps)

- ✓ **Sign a petition** asking the General Assembly to adopt a nonpartisan redistricting process that will allow voters to pick their representatives, not the other way around. Go to [demnc.co/fairmaps17](http://demnc.co/fairmaps17).
- ✓ **Talk with your friends, family, and community** about the importance of changing the redistricting process. Use this handout and ask people to sign the petition.
- ✓ **Organize or join a local group** to build support for redistricting reform through canvassing, phone calls, accountability actions with legislators, and showing the film, [“Democracy for Sale.”](#)



Contact Democracy North Carolina for materials and help with actions or a speaker: 919-286-6000 or [info@democracy-nc.org](mailto:info@democracy-nc.org).