

Ohio Fair Districts Initiative and the May 8th Primary Voter Fact Sheet

Primary elections are always important, offering voters their chance to choose candidates for the November ballot. But Ohio's [May 8 primary](#) is even more important, because voters will also decide whether or not to change how the state's Congressional districts are created, with the opportunity to make the selection less partisan. Ohio Issue 1, the Congressional Redistricting Procedures Amendment, was placed by the legislature on the May primary ballot. If voters approve it, it will create a new procedure for creating Congressional districts, beginning with the next election after the 2020 census.

Current Situation

Every 10 years, the United States Census counts America's population. After each census, Congressional districts are adjusted to account for population shifts and to ensure each district in a state has roughly the same number of people. This redrawing of district lines is called "redistricting."

The manipulation of district lines for purposes other than population shifts is called [gerrymandering](#). Gerrymandering has been done to favor a particular political party, like the one that controls the redistricting process, to support or hinder incumbent candidates, or to disenfranchise racial minorities. In recent years, gerrymandering has become more sophisticated and impactful. Those who've carried it out have combined advanced map drawing technology with more precise techniques to include or exclude demographics likely to support or oppose their favored candidates, in part by packing supporters of their opponent's parties into a handful of districts which they'll win by overwhelming margins, while setting up their own party to win by say 10 percentage points in a far larger number of districts. Primary ballot Initiative 1 is an attempt to remedy this.

In Ohio, new district lines are currently approved by a majority vote of the General Assembly. Whichever party has the majority in the state legislature therefore totally controls the redistricting process and can ensure

its political advantage. This gerrymandering results in strangely shaped district lines, the unnecessary splitting of cities and counties into separate Congressional districts, and a map where the party disadvantaged by a gerrymander can end up with barely a quarter of the Congressional seats even in a state like Ohio that's fairly evenly divided politically. Both Republicans and Democrats have engaged in gerrymandering when they've had post-census legislative majorities.

Recent History

In 2015 voters approved an Ohio constitutional amendment that reformed the process for drawing state General Assembly districts. The amendment created a bi-partisan commission to draw the maps starting with the 2020 census. However, this amendment did not include Congressional districts, which can still be gerrymandered by whichever party controls the Assembly.

To address this, in 2017, a coalition of civic groups began collecting petition signatures to put a constitutional redistricting reform amendment on Ohio's ballot. The campaign was called Fair Districts=Fair Elections. When the General Assembly members saw the strong state-wide support for this campaign, they negotiated and adopted a bi-partisan reform proposal that's now Issue 1 on the May 2018 ballot and that will be implemented if approved by a majority of participating voters.

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Key Arguments for Supporting Issue 1

- The proposal is a significant reform. It provides checks and balances against the type of partisan gerrymandering that has created the current unfair and convoluted district maps.
- The proposed new redistricting process provides transparency and public participation, and requires bi-partisan agreement. If the parties cannot agree, it sets strict criteria to prevent political gerrymandering.
- The proposal has bi-partisan support from both Democrats and Republicans and is supported by the Fair Districts=Fair Elections coalition of civic groups that organized the petition drive for reform.



Key Arguments in Opposition to Issue 1

- Some believe the current process for drawing new congressional districts is adequate. Although the current system allows for one-party control, the voters can hold their state legislators responsible and vote against them if they believe those legislators are too partisan.
- Others say the compromise proposal does not go far enough to totally prevent gerrymandering and ensure competitive elections.
- The proposed process for redrawing the district maps after the census is too complicated. It has three different processes triggered successively if the relevant committees deadlock at earlier stages.

For Primary Voting Rules and Logistics, see [Campus Election Engagement Project's Ohio Primary Guide](#)

Additional Resources

Fairdistrictsohio.org

[Ballotpedia summary: Ohio Issue 1, Congressional Redistricting Procedures Amendment](#)

Vote411.org

The constitutional amendment's full language can be found on the Ohio Secretary of State's website [here](#).



Created by the [Campus Election Engagement Project](#) with help from the [League of Women Voters of Ohio](#). See Campuselect.org and My.lwv.org/ohio