Gerrymandering: the serpentine art
What is gerrymandering?

- Each state elects a certain number of congressional Reps.
- Process is controlled by the party in power in the state legislature
- Gerrymandering occurs when the map-drawing is deliberately used to benefit one political party over another
Every 10 years, after the national census, congressional boundaries are redrawn.

Provides a numerical advantage in the Congress to particular parties.

In most states, new maps are drawn by the state legislature & approved by the governor.
Strategy is to elect many members to your party
Disadvantage to opposition party by reducing the number of elected members
Named after 19th Century Governor Elbridge Gerry - Massachusetts

- In 1810 his Democratic-Republican party redrew the map of the state's Senate districts in a manner never seen before
- The goal was to weaken his opposition Federalist Party’s chance of winning
His map was widely satirized

One district was compared to the shape of a salamander

Ever since Gov. Gerry has been associated with the term gerrymander.
Satirical Cartoon appeared in Boston Globe
1812
How it works

- Redraw the boundaries of several districts
- Stuff as many of your opponents' supporters into fewer districts
- Place enough of your supporters in many more districts
- The result is that your party wins a majority of districts
The case of North Carolina:

After 2012 election, the house ended up with more than twice as many Republicans as Democrats

- Although a majority of the electorate voted for Representatives from the Democratic party
2012 Gerrymandered districts in NC
Look at the long, snakelike districts the 12th, in pink & the 4th, in purple

These districts cut through large sections of the state & contain large urban centers that are not close to each other

Large numbers of Democratic-voting population are contained in these two districts
NC Republicans created 3 very large Democratic districts

Several larger number of districts where Republicans constituents ended up in smaller, but multiple districts
Gerrymander in NC 2010/2012

N.C. U.S. House vote, 2012

- Democrat: 50.5%
- Republican: 48.7%
- Other: 0.8%


- Republican: 9
- Democrat: 4
How Gerrymandering helped the Republicans’ recent control of Congress

- 2014 mid-term elections Republicans won massive victories in the House of Reps.
- They control the House after garnering 5 million more votes than Democrats
- 2012 general elections Democratic candidates won 1.4 million more votes than Republicans did
- Yet the Republicans ended up with a 234 to 201 seats in the House. Many liberals blamed gerrymandering for the results.
- They won the House despite losing the popular vote
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Power of Incumbency

- Why are incumbents usually re-elected?
Racial Gerrymandering

- 1 rep. per congressional district elected
- Difficult for minority groups to gain representation
- Ex., Spread out African Americans throughout a state
- They are then unlikely to have the numbers to elect a rep of their choice
Voting Rights Act of 1965;
*made gerrymandering illegal*

- Not allowed to reduce the voting power of a racial minority
- Courts tend to assess whether a district is drawn so as to disenfranchise minority voters
All sides engage in this practice

- Both Republicans & Democrats frequently engaged in gerrymandering practices over the decades
- Redistricting occurs under the elected governors & their legislatures
- In 2010 the Republicans won major states in the courts
Hence the Republicans were in a good position to gerrymander their states
39 states were controlled by Republican governors and legislatures
Of the remaining 11 states led by Democrats, keep in mind that Washington State & California assign redistricting to independent commissions
Gerrymandering in swing states

- After 2010 election, several “swing” states fell under the gerrymandering process by the GOP
- What is a swing State?
- States whose voters are evenly divided between the parties
- Ex., Ohio, Virginia, North Carolina, Florida, Michigan, & Pennsylvania
Swing states are vulnerable to partisan redistricting opportunities

Permits winning political party to gerrymander swing states over to its side
Gerrymandering in Florida
2016 Florida's state Supreme Court

- Florida Supreme Court determined that 8 districts were gerrymandered to favor Republican candidates.
- In 2010, Florida passed a constitutional amendment by 62% that bans redistricting to favor parties or incumbents who recently won their seats.
Need for “fair districts”

- It was uncertain that the courts would have ruled on this case
- But this ruling rejected maps that they considered done with partisan intent
- Legislature ordered to draw a new map to be submitted to the court for approval
- Called for more transparency
In 2012 Republicans won 51 percent of the US House votes – but they ended up with 63 percent of the seats, 17 out of 27.

But the League of Women Voters levied charges that the redistricting process was a sham.

That the Rick Scott’s governorship was engaged in partisan Republican redistricting.
8 districts circled in red to be redrawn
Look at district Corrine Brown’s 5
Observe how “bizarre” & contorted this district is
Court Stipulated;

- All meetings about decisions re redistricting have to be open to the public
- All non-public meetings about the maps have to be recorded for the record
- That citizens are able to submit alternative maps, & can offer feedback
- All emails & documents re: drawing of maps have to be preserved because many such documents were deleted the last time
Video of Brown’s district

How other countries/jurisdictions deal with redistricting?

- Elections Commissions: Poland, Mexico & Kenya
- Independent Redistricting Commissions: Canada, Australia, Bahamas & UK
- Some are non-partisan, others are appointed by legislatures
- Commissions are instructed to create compact, geometric districts
Exercise 7 Project

- [http://www.xfinity.com/?dfaid=4053494&cmp=0&cid=4053494](http://www.xfinity.com/?dfaid=4053494&cmp=0&cid=4053494)
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florida%27s_congressional_districts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florida%27s_congressional_districts)
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zD9A9GHoHKcdistricts](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zD9A9GHoHKcdistricts)