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APRIL 4, 2015

## Will gerrymandering go south or go viral?

 March 29, 2015 by [stevenyoder](#)  [Leave a Comment](#)



### FEATURED VIDEO

**Dr. Nadine Burke Harris: How childhood trauma affects health across a lifetime**

Original cartoon of “The Gerry-Mander”, this is the political cartoon that led to the coining of the term Gerrymander. The district depicted in the cartoon was created by Massachusetts legislature to favor the incumbent Democratic-Republican party candidates of Governor Elbridge Gerry over the Federalists in 1812. Courtesy – Wikimedia Commons

By most accounts, in the 2014 midterm elections for the House of Representatives, Republicans rolled over their Democratic opposition. They now control 58 percent of the seats. In reality, the total vote count in Houses races nationwide hardly looked like a landslide—the GOP got all of 52 percent.

In the previous election, the skewed total seat/total vote ratio actually handed control to a minority. In 2012, Republicans got just 49 percent of total House votes but controlled 54 percent of seats. It was only the second time in 70 years that the House majority didn’t represent a majority of the nationwide House vote count.

Those outcomes flow directly from the ever-more wildly drawn congressional districts approved by state legislatures, a majority of which now are controlled by Republicans. The gerrymandering distortion could worsen or improve this year depending on decisions by state legislatures and the Supreme Court.

Drawing voting-district lines for political advantage dates to before the start of the American Republic. Virginia governor Patrick Henry used it 1788 to try to oust political enemy James Madison, putting him in the same district as the popular James Monroe. (It didn’t work– Madison won.) Massachusetts Governor Elbridge Gerry took the practice mainstream and gave it a name in 1812 when he drew a salamander-like district to benefit his Democrat-Republican party.

Today, both sides use advanced software to turn the warped relationship between votes and seats into an increasingly exact science. In 2012 Pennsylvania House races, for example, Democrats outvoted Republicans 51 percent to 49 percent in House races statewide. Yet Pennsylvania’s congressional delegation sent 13 Republicans and

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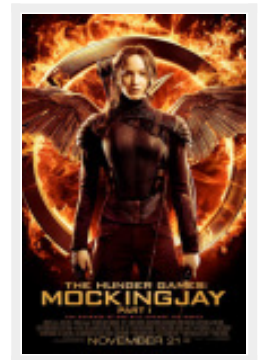
### Commentary: For Hunger Games – Mockingjay, teens are doing the marketing

December 4, 2014

By Joan Oleck – The Hunger Games:

Mockingjay—Part 1

is, for its teen fan base, a powerful lesson in marketing manipulation. For anyone not living in a cave, this third film in the series of four is based on the über-successful book series by Suzanne Collins and weaves a



only 5 Democrats to Congress. That year, Maryland Democrats drew districts that allowed them to win 88 percent of the state's congressional districts with only 62 percent of the votes. In Illinois, Democrats took 66 percent of the state's congressional districts with only 54 percent of the votes.

Over the years, Federal courts have mostly refused to intervene, interpreting the Constitution to say that redistricting is the sole province of the legislative branch.

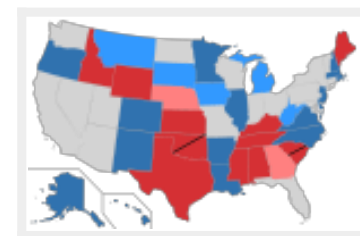
Nearly every reform that matters is smothered at birth on Capitol Hill in large part because of the gerrymander. The practice has fueled the extreme wings of both parties, more noticeably in the GOP. "Look, everyone knows we have a structural deficit, and the only way out of it is to raise revenues and cut entitlements," now-retired Blue Dog Democrat John Tanner told *The Atlantic* in 2012. "No one who's reasonable thinks otherwise. But what happens? The Democrats look over their left shoulder, and if someone suggests cutting a single clerk out of the Department of Agriculture, they go crazy. Republicans look over their right shoulder, and if someone proposes raising taxes on Donald Trump's income by \$10, they say it'll be the end of the world. So these poor members come to Washington paralyzed, unable to do what they all know must be done to keep the country from going adrift, for fear that they'll get primaried."

Several developments this year could either inoculate the electoral system against the distortionary power of the gerrymander or spread it further.

*The good news.* U.S. Democratic Representative Alan Lowenthal introduced a bill last year to create independent redistricting commissions in all 50 states. Those would consist of five Democrats, five Republicans and four Independents. Members couldn't have ever run for office, couldn't be paid by either party, and couldn't have contributed to either party, according to an [interview](#) that Lowenthal did with *The Washington Post* last summer. The panels would follow established guidelines for drawing redistricting maps and would hold public hearings throughout each state.

compelling tale of teen survival in [...]

### Commentary: The 2014 US Midterms – The democratic election that wasn't



November 11, 2014

Commentary: The 2014 US Midterms – The democratic election that wasn't American democracy is predicated on two critical pillars. The selection of political representatives by the majority via the ballot box, and the availability of timely and accurate information that is vital for voters in their assessment of candidates and policies consistent with their self-interest. [...]

### Commentary: International community must address Myanmar's mistreatment of Rohingya minority at East Asian summit



October 31, 2014

As Myanmar, a country with an incipient democracy and alarming

Most important, the final plans wouldn't need approval from legislatures or governors, removing political manipulation from the system.

*The bad news.* The bill's passage is about as likely as an Elizabeth Warren-Ted Cruz Presidential ticket.

*The bite-your-fingernails news.* A Supreme Court decision this year could kill the very idea of independent redistricting commissions. Four states have established such panels—California, Arizona, Washington, and Idaho.

But Arizona's has been put on trial at the court—in 2000, Arizona's voters overwhelmingly voted to form the panel to draw its voting maps. It's made up of three Republicans, two Democrats, and an independent, who serves as commission chair. In 2011, Republican governor Jan Brewer fired the independent chair with the support of state Senate Republicans, giving no specific reason. The Arizona Supreme Court reversed that decision, ruling that Brewer didn't show cause. So Republicans took the case to the High Court.

If the court rules the GOP's way, it's only a matter of time before the other commissions get legal challenges and fold too.

*The opportunity-knocks news.* A few Republican state legislators propose to take gerrymandering national, using it to decide the apportionment of state Electoral College votes. Under the plan, Republican-controlled legislatures in key states would change how their Electoral College votes are awarded, doling them out to the winner of the popular vote in each congressional district rather than in the state as a whole. (Maine and Nebraska already use variations on that plan.)

Democrats have turned on the air-raid sirens over the proposal. Take the key swing-state of Pennsylvania, which has voted for the Democrat in the last five Presidential elections. Under the plan, Republicans would have won an overwhelming majority of the state's electoral votes in 2012.

human rights record, prepares to host a prestigious regional issues summit in coming weeks, the Southeast Asian nation's galling treatment of its ethnic minority populations is receiving renewed attention. It's an inopportune time for the country's president, Thein Sein, for these issues to be resurfacing in [...]

**Commentary:  
Bandwagon  
outrage over  
Brunei's strict  
Islamic  
criminal  
code all  
but gone**



October 18, 2014

When Brunei became the first Southeast Asian country to nationally adopt a strict Islamic penal code known as Sharia earlier this year, the world was outraged. News and social media told us so in such headlines as “Brunei adopts sharia law amid international outcry” and “Ellen DeGeneres backs boycott of Brunei-owned hotels over ‘stone the [...]

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The same also would have happened in Michigan and Ohio, both of which went for Obama in 2012. Mitt Romney would have won the Electoral College even while losing the popular vote. In Michigan, two Republican state legislators have introduced bills this month to turn the plan into state law.

But smart reformers in state legislatures also could use that plan as an opening—they could go along if Republicans in those states also agreed to create independent commissions to draw congressional maps.

For that to happen, of course, the High Court would need to leave in place Arizona's independent commission.

If it does, reformers could start a state-by-state process of simultaneously fixing two structural problems in American voting: updating the hoary Electoral College system while doing away with gerrymandering, a practice not contemplated in the Constitution to begin with.

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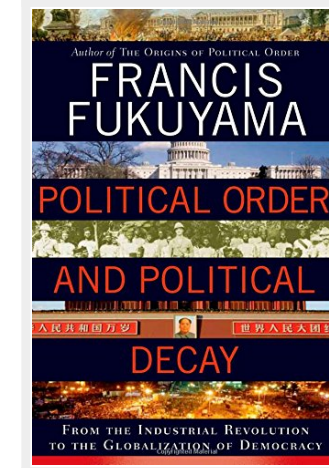
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### Book recommendation: Political Order and Political Decay

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