



MICHIGAN:

How Distorted Districts Lead to Distorted Laws

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October 2, 2017

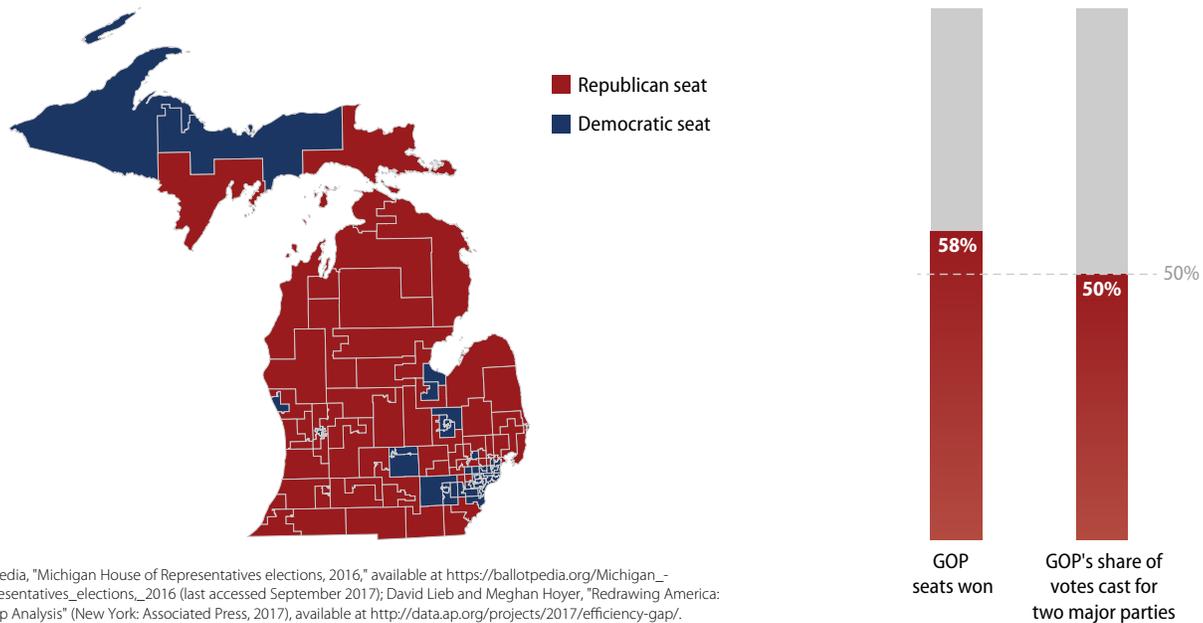
The principle of “one person, one vote” requires states to redraw their election districts every 10 years in order to account for changes in population.¹ In most states, legislators can manipulate district boundaries to benefit their own political party.² This manipulation, called gerrymandering, weakens voters’ ability to affect election outcomes and exercise accountability over government. Distorted election districts lead to skewed representation and legislators who are less responsive to the will of the voters.

In 2012, 54 percent of Michigan voters cast their ballots for Democratic candidates for the Michigan House of Representatives, but Republicans still ended up with eight more seats than Democrats.³ The next election, which occurred in 2014, saw Republican House candidates again lose the total statewide vote but pick up several more seats.⁴ This gerrymandered Republican majority has defied the will of Michigan voters, with tragic consequences.

- **Safe drinking water:** In 2012, voters overturned the state’s emergency manager law, which allowed the state to take over local governments that it decided faced a fiscal emergency.⁵ But the Legislature passed a new version of the law.⁶ Gov. Rick Snyder (R) appointed emergency managers to take over the local government of Flint, Michigan.⁷ In 2014, these managers switched the source of the city’s water, leading to widespread lead poisoning and an outbreak of Legionnaires’ disease.⁸ Toxic levels of lead poisoned children throughout the city.⁹
- **Tax fairness:** The Legislature did not approve a bill that would have given voters the chance to replace the state’s flat income tax with a progressive tax that would lower rates for lower-income taxpayers and raise rates on the wealthy—a move supported by two-thirds of voters, according to a 2015 poll.¹⁰
- **Civil rights:** A 2013 poll found that the vast majority of Michiganders support adoption rights for same-sex couples, and more than 75 percent support laws banning discrimination against LGBT people.¹¹ However, in 2015, the state Legislature passed a law that allows adoption agencies to discriminate against same-sex couples in the name of religious freedom.¹²

FIGURE 6
Distorted districts in Michigan

Half of voters chose Republican candidates for the Michigan House of Representatives in 2016, but the GOP secured 58 percent of the seats



Endnotes

- 1 *Reynolds v. Sims*, 377 U.S. 533 (1964).
- 2 Christopher Ingraham, "This is actually what America would look like without gerrymandering," *The Washington Post*, January 13, 2016, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/01/13/this-is-actually-what-america-would-look-like-without-gerrymandering/?utm_term=.8d2318ba5cbf.
- 3 Stephen Wolf, "Emergency managers and gerrymandering: How Republican attacks on democracy led to Flint water crisis," *Daily Kos*, January 26, 2016, available at <https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2016/1/26/1474838/-Emergency-managers-and-gerrymandering-How-Republican-attacks-on-democracy-led-to-Flint-water-crisis>.
- 4 Ted Roelofs, "Gerrymandering in Michigan is among the nation's worst, new test claims," *Bridge Magazine*, April 13, 2017, available at <http://www.bridgemi.com/public-sector/gerrymandering-michigan-among-nations-worst-new-test-claims>.
- 5 Josh Hakala, "How did we get here? A look back at Michigan's emergency manager law," *Michigan Radio*, February 3, 2016, available at <http://michiganradio.org/post/how-did-we-get-here-look-back-michigans-emergency-manager-law>.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Ryan Grimes, "Former Flint mayor on water crisis: 'It's frustrating to me that more has not been done,'" *Michigan Radio*, January 29, 2016, available at <http://michiganradio.org/post/former-flint-mayor-water-crisis-its-frustrating-me-more-has-not-been-done>.
- 8 Scott Atkinson and Monica Davey, "5 Charged With Involuntary Manslaughter in Flint Water Crisis," *The New York Times*, June 14, 2017, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/14/us/flint-water-crisis-manslaughter.html?mcubz=0>.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 Michigan Legislature, "House Joint Resolution K (2015)," available at [http://www.legislature.mi.gov/\(S\(40uq01zaog12dwxg3saau\)\)/?page=GetObject&objectname=2015-HJR-K](http://www.legislature.mi.gov/(S(40uq01zaog12dwxg3saau))/?page=GetObject&objectname=2015-HJR-K) (last accessed September 2017); EPIC-MRA, "EPIC-MRA Press Release on Changing to a Graduated Income Tax," Press release, May 7, 2015, available at <http://files.ctctcdn.com/14694f7d401/eb6d4d0a-60cb-40f8-b628-f472406609ab.pdf>.
- 11 United Press International, "Poll: Most Mich. voters support same-sex marriage, broader gay rights," May 15, 2013, available at https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2013/05/15/Poll-Most-Mich-voters-support-same-sex-marriage-broader-gay-rights/91751368653110/; Jonathan Oosting, "Poll: Majority of Michigan voters support gay marriage, anti-discrimination protections," *MLive*, May 15, 2013, available at http://www.mlive.com/news/index.ssf/2013/05/poll_majority_of_michigan_vote.html.
- 12 Mark Joseph Stern, "Michigan Legislature Passes Bills Allowing Adoption Agencies to Turn Away Gay Couples," *Slate*, June 10, 2015, available at http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2015/06/10/michigan_legislature_passes_anti_gay_adoption_bills.html.