



VIRGINIA:

How Distorted Districts Lead to Distorted Laws

By Liz Kennedy and Billy Corriher

October 2, 2017

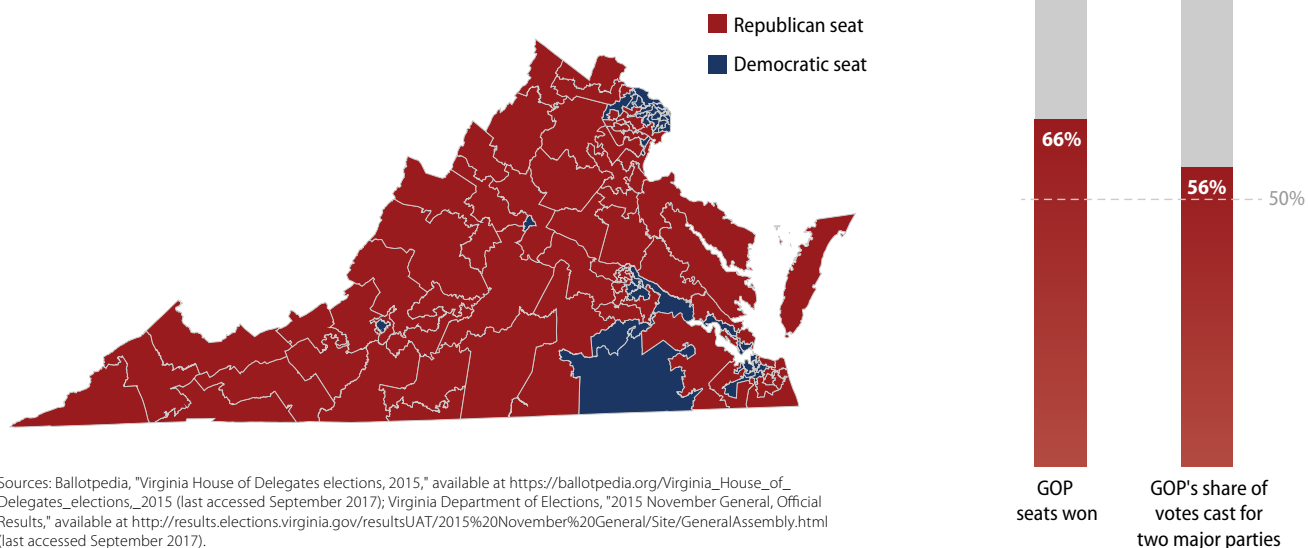
The principle of “one person, one vote” requires states to redraw their election districts every 10 years in order to account for changes in population.¹ In most states, legislators can manipulate district boundaries to benefit their own political party.² This manipulation, called gerrymandering, weakens 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 2013, Virginia Democrats won all statewide elections, but Republicans won a supermajority in the Virginia House of Delegates.³ Gerrymandering by Virginia legislators who are not responsive to their constituents’ preferences has harmed voters in the following ways:

- **Minimum wage:** In 2016, the Republican-controlled Virginia Legislature passed a law barring local governments from increasing the minimum wage; the law was later vetoed by Gov. Terry McAuliffe (D).⁴ A 2014 poll found that two-thirds of Virginians support a higher minimum wage.⁵
- **Medicaid expansion:** A recent poll found that 69 percent of voters support the expansion of Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act,⁶ but the Virginia Legislature rejected the expansion, even though the federal government would initially cover almost all of the cost.⁷
- **Civil rights:** A similar percentage of voters polled supported a law preventing discrimination against LGBT people.⁸ However, LGBT nondiscrimination bills have failed in the past three sessions.⁹ Wide majorities of Virginians also support same-sex adoption and oppose businesses discriminating against LGBT people,¹⁰ yet the Legislature has passed laws allowing discrimination against same-sex couples in the name of religious freedom.¹¹
- **Education funding:** The Legislature has slashed education funding, despite 72 percent of Virginia voters opposing cuts to K-12 education.¹²

FIGURE 3
Distorted districts in Virginia

Fifty-six percent of voters chose Republican candidates for the Virginia House of Delegates in 2015, but the GOP secured a supermajority of 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 Josh Israel, "How Gerrymandering Gave Virginia Republicans A House Supermajority," *ThinkProgress*, November 14, 2013, available at <https://thinkprogress.org/how-gerrymandering-gave-virginia-republicans-a-house-supermajority-245a1154cb3e/>.
- 4 J.S., "Statehouses try to fend off local minimum wage increases," *The Economist*, April 8, 2016, available at <https://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2016/04/pay-and-pre-emption>.
- 5 Quinnipiac University Poll, "Optimistic Virginia Voters Give McAuliffe Ok Grades, Quinnipiac University Poll Finds; Support For Minimum Wage Hike Tops 2-1," March 26, 2014, available at <https://poll.qu.edu/virginia/release-detail?ReleaseID=2024>.
- 6 Voice of the People and University of Maryland Program for Public Consultation, "Survey on Medicaid Expansion" (2017), available at http://vop.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Medicaid_Expansion.pdf.
- 7 Laura Vozzella and Rachel Weiner, "Va. legislators approve budget deal, reject medicaid expansion," *The Washington Post*, September 18, 2014, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/va-legislators-approve-budget-deal-reject-medicaid-expansion/2014/09/18/f8abde32-3dfe-11e4-b0ea-8141703bb6f_story.html?utm_term=.d8667c3cf698; Eric Bradner, "McAuliffe pushes Virginia Medicaid expansion after GOP's failure to repeal Obamacare," *CNN*, March 24, 2017, available at <http://www.cnn.com/2017/03/27/politics/virginia-terry-mcauliffe-medicaid-obamacare/index.html>.
- 8 Public Religion Research Institute, "The American Values Atlas: Virginia, LGBT Nondiscrimination Laws," available at <http://ava.prrri.org/#lgbt/2015/States/lgbtdis/m/US-VA> (last accessed September 2017).
- 9 Equality Virginia, "2017 General Assembly Recap," available at <http://www.equalityvirginia.org/equality-virginia-at-the-general-assembly/> (last accessed September 2017); Equality Virginia, "2016 General Assembly Recap," available at <http://www.equalityvirginia.org/equality-virginia-at-the-general-assembly-2016/> (last accessed September 2017); Equality Virginia, "2015 General Assembly Recap," available at <http://www.equalityvirginia.org/equality-virginia-at-the-general-assembly-2015/> (last accessed September 2017).
- 10 Rosalind S. Helderman and Jon Cohen, "Virginians are almost evenly split on gay marriage. Post poll finds," *The Washington Post*, May 9, 2011, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/politics/virginians-are-almost-evenly-split-on-gay-marriage-post-poll-finds/2011/05/06/AFFtojcG_story.html?utm_term=.6923f0cb3cdf.
- 11 Jenna Portnoy, "McAuliffe vetoes 'religious freedom' bill, to chagrin of conservatives," *The Washington Post*, March 30, 2016, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/mcauliffe-vetoes-religious-freedom-bill-to-chagrin-of-conservatives/2016/03/30/702a7fe6-f5f4-11e5-8b23-538270a1ca31_story.html?utm_term=.11e526daa466; Michael K. Lavers, "Virginia anti-gay adoption law takes effect," *Washington Blade*, July 18, 2012, available at <http://www.washingtonblade.com/2012/07/18/virginia-anti-gay-adoption-law-takes-effect/>; Michael K. Lavers, "Va. House approves 'Kim Davis' religious freedom bill," *Washington Blade*, February 16, 2016, available at <http://www.washingtonblade.com/2016/02/16/va-house-approves-kim-davis-religious-freedom-bill/>.
- 12 Moriah Balingit, "Report says Virginia is shortchanging public schools \$800 million each year," *The Washington Post*, January 24, 2016, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/report-says-virginia-is-shortchanging-public-schools-800-million-a-year/2016/01/24/11bcda42-c126-11e5-9443-7074c3645405_story.html; Public Policy Polling, "Warner holds a steady lead in Virginia," Press release, September 26, 2014, available at http://www.publicpolicy-polling.com/pdf/2014/PPP_Release_VA_926822.pdf.