



WISCONSIN:

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.

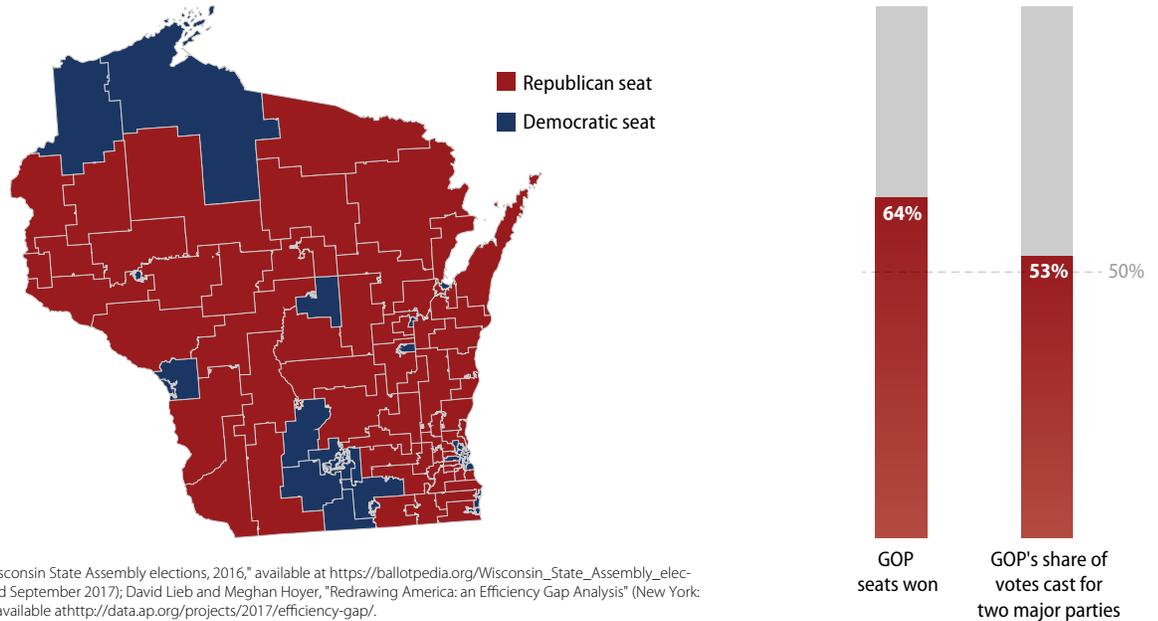
The U.S. Supreme Court is considering *Gill v. Whitford*, a case challenging extreme partisan gerrymandering in Wisconsin.³ In 2012, Republican legislators in Wisconsin gained a supermajority—60 out of 90 seats—despite losing the statewide popular vote. When a lower court struck down Wisconsin’s distorted maps, it pointed out that “in any likely electoral scenario, the number of Republican seats would not drop below 50%.”⁴

Shielded from accountability to their voters, the Wisconsin Legislature enacted an agenda that defied the preferences of most of its constituents. To stop frustrated citizens from turning to their local governments, the Legislature passed unpopular laws preventing local governments from setting their own rules in a variety of areas.

- **Minimum wage:** In 2014, cities and counties across the state put minimum wage referenda on the ballot, and the referenda won in all 13 jurisdictions—with two-thirds of all voters in favor—but could not go into effect because of a new state law preventing local minimum wage increases.⁵
- **Medicaid expansion:** The Legislature’s refusal to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act—a decision opposed by 56 percent of voters from both parties—caused 85,000 Wisconsinites to lose out on access to affordable and quality health care.⁶
- **Tax fairness:** Two-thirds of Wisconsinites think the rich should pay higher taxes, yet the Legislature has passed a series of tax cuts overwhelmingly favoring the state’s wealthiest residents.⁷
- **Student debt:** The Legislature has repeatedly blocked bills to help student loan borrowers refinance their loans—a move supported by more than two-thirds of Wisconsinites in a recent poll.⁸ More than 750,000 people in the state have federal student loan debt.⁹

FIGURE 1
Distorted districts in Wisconsin

Slightly more than half of voters chose Republican candidates for the Wisconsin State Assembly in 2016, but the GOP secured a supermajority of seats



Sources: Ballotpedia, "Wisconsin State Assembly elections, 2016," available at https://ballotpedia.org/Wisconsin_State_Assembly_elections_2016 (last accessed September 2017); David Lieb and Meghan Hoyer, "Redrawing America: an Efficiency Gap Analysis" (New York: Associated Press, 2017), available at <http://data.ap.org/projects/2017/efficiency-gap/>.

Endnotes

- 1 *Reynolds v. Sims*, 377 U.S. 533 (1964). XX ENDNOTES #2, 6, AND 7 HAVE DISAPPEARED XX
- 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 SCOTUSblog, "Gill v. Whitford," available at <http://www.scotusblog.com/case-files/cases/gill-v-whitford/> (last accessed September 2017).
- 4 *Gill v. Whitford*, 218 F. Supp. 3d 837, p. 898.
- 5 Tamarine Cornelius, "Election Results Show Broad Support for increasing Minimum Wage, in Wisconsin and Elsewhere," Wisconsin Budget Project Blog, November 6, 2014, available at <http://www.wisconsinbudgetproject.org/election-results-show-broad-support-for-increasing-minimum-wage-in-wisconsin-and-elsewhere>.
- 6 Tom Kertscher, "Wisconsin not leaving any federal funds on the table by rejecting Obamacare expansion of Medicaid, Scott Walker administration official says," PolitiFact, June 15, 2013, available at <http://www.politifact.com/wisconsin/statements/2013/jun/15/kitty-rhoades/wisconsin-not-leaving-any-federal-funds-table-reje/>; Marquette University Law School Poll, "Marquette Law School Poll, October 21-24, 2013," available at <https://law.marquette.edu/poll/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/MLSP18Toplines.pdf> (last accessed September 2017).
- 7 Marquette University Law School Poll, "New Marquette Law School Poll Finds Clinton, Feingold Leading: Majorities Have Negative Views of Presidential Candidates," June 15, 2016, available at <https://law.marquette.edu/poll/2016/06/15/new-marquette-law-school-poll-finds-clinton-feingold-leading-majorities-have-negative-views-of-presidential-candidates/>; Mike Ivey, "Report: Upper 1 percent got biggest savings from Wisconsin tax cuts," *The Capital Times*, June 5, 2014, available at http://host.madison.com/ct/news/local/writers/mike_ivey/report-upper-percent-got-biggest-savings-from-wisconsin-tax-cuts/article_67382fc8-ecd2-11e3-adc1-001a4bcf887a.html.
- 8 One Wisconsin Now, "New Poll Finds Strong Support for Reforms to Help Wisconsin Student Loan Borrowers," Press release, September 11, 2017, available at <http://onewisconsinnow.org/institute/press/new-poll-finds-strong-support-for-reforms-to-help-wisconsin-student-loan-borrowers/>.
- 9 Jessica Vanegeren, "Wisconsin Democrats pitch 'Higher Ed, Lower Debt' student loan relief bill," *The Capital Times*, October 17, 2013, available at http://host.madison.com/ct/news/local/writers/jessica_vanegeren/wisconsin-democrats-pitch-higher-ed-lower-debt-student-loan-relief/article_74d65956-36b7-11e3-a93e-0019bb2963f4.html.