

Gerrymandering and the Industry of Politics

... an unhealthy alliance that undermines accountability, disenfranchises voters and erodes business competitiveness

When party leaders draw electoral districts to maintain power and protect incumbents, accountable government is undermined and our economy suffers.

Michael Porter of the Harvard Business School's U. S. Competitiveness Project has been tracking the impact of unresponsive government on our national economy for years. In a Spring 2017 Fortune article, he and colleague Katherine Gehl, former CEO of Gehl Foods, summarized what they've been learning:

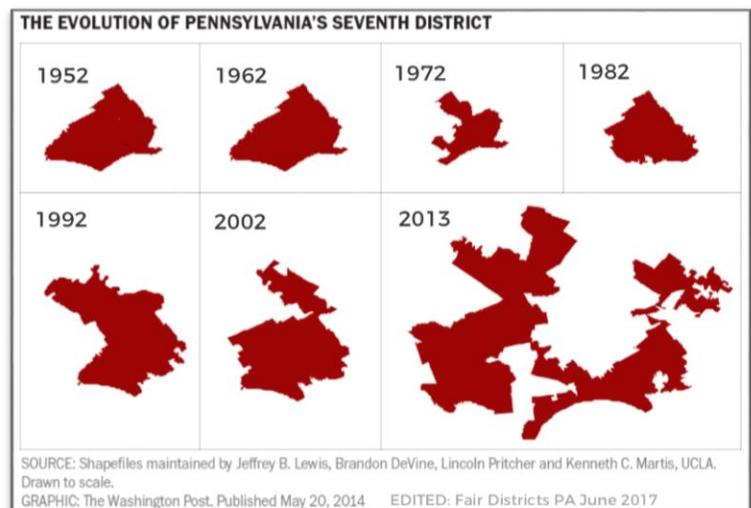
U.S. politics is an industry—a duopoly [a two-party monopoly] that's about as anticompetitive as you're likely to find these days. The result . . . is that the preferences of the average voter have a near-zero impact on public policy.

It wasn't always that way. America's political system was long the envy of the world. The system advanced the public interest and gave rise to a grand history of policy innovations. Today, however, it serves as only a barrier to solving nearly every important challenge our nation needs to address. . . .

Washington has made virtually no progress on any of the essential policy steps needed to restore prosperity and growth. A broken political system has suddenly become the greatest threat to our nation's future.¹

If this is true for the nation, it's even more the case in Pennsylvania. By a variety of measures Pennsylvania is one of three states most impacted by extreme gerrymandering and the resultant loss of competitive elections.² New mapping and data-mining technologies and a redistricting process controlled by party leaders have resulted in maps that divide counties and communities and lock in electoral results long before a vote is cast.

Despite record low voter approval, incumbents face little challenge at the polls. As a result, they have little incentive to address deep deficits, crumbling infrastructure or lagging workforce development.



¹ Katherine M. Gehl and Michael E. Porter, "Why Politics Is Failing America," Fortune, March 9, 2017.

² Laura Royden and Michael Li, "Extreme Maps," Brennan Center for Justice, May 9, 2017.

Redistricting reform must be a priority among business leaders

Porter and colleagues recommend reform of the redistricting process as an essential step toward a stronger economy. In “Problems Unsolved and a Nation Divided” (September 2016), Porter et al. shared results from extensive polling of Harvard Business School alumni on solutions to a stagnant economy. ***The HBS alumni identified partisan redistricting as a top target for reform, with 54% strongly agreeing and another 22% somewhat agreeing with the need for gerrymandering reform.***³

A 2014 poll of small business owners found that many believe our current partisan redistricting process contributes to the unfair influence of outside money. ***83% would support or strongly support a nonpartisan, independent citizens redistricting commission.***⁴

The Pennsylvania business community is joining the effort

Pennsylvania business leaders have long recognized that our economy depends on a well-educated work force, predictable regulatory frameworks, modern infrastructure and timely passage of a balanced state budget. None of these are possible with the current partisan gridlock promoted in large part by gerrymandered districts.

PA business owners, chambers of commerce and industry associations have begun conversations with Fair Districts PA about ways to support redistricting reform efforts. These discussions are drawing inspiration from efforts in other states.

In California, the LA Chamber of Commerce was a key contributor to passage of an amendment creating an independent redistricting commission.⁵ Elsewhere, state and local chambers have recognized the importance of government that puts problem-solving ahead of partisan posturing. Small business alliances, manufacturing associations, even farmers unions are leading the push for redistricting reform.⁶

Fair Districts PA is a nonpartisan coalition of citizens and organizations formed in January 2016 to address extreme gerrymandering and advocate for reform of our redistricting process. We support a constitutional amendment (PA Senate Bill 22 and House Bill 722) that would end gerrymandering in PA and create an independent citizens redistricting commission.

Taking back our political system will require a large-scale, sustained effort, including significant political philanthropy.

We call on the business community - which understands how fundamentally important competition is - to help restore healthy competition to advance the public interest in American politics.

Katherine Gehl, Michael Porter
Fortune, May 2017

What You Can Do:

Visit www.FairDistrictsPA.com to learn more or email info@FairDistrictsPA.com

³ Michael E. Porter et al., “Problems Unsolved and a Nation Divided, The State of U. S. Competitiveness,” Harvard Business School, September 2016.

⁴ Small Business Majority, Scientific Opinion Poll, October 30, 2014.

⁵ <http://www.lachamber.com/news/2008/12/09/press-release/l.a.-area-chamber-helps-usher-in-historic-redistricting-reform-in-california/>.

⁶ Jane Porter, “Local Small Businesses Demand an End to North Carolina Gerrymandering,” Raleigh Agenda, Oct. 4, 2016; Eric Burkland, “Press Release: Ohio Manufacturers’ Association Endorses Issue 1,” YES ON ISSUE 1! FAIR DISTRICTS = FAIR ELECTIONS (blog), September 16, 2015; Cory Allen Heidelberger, “End Gerrymandering: Farmers Union Proposes Independent Redistricting Commission,” Dakota Free Press (blog), July 15, 2015.