



Here are some answers to frequently asked questions about redistricting reform

What is redistricting and why should anyone care?

Each state legislative district should have a near equal number of residents. Because of population changes, legislative district boundaries must be redrawn after each 10-year Census. When the redistricting process is finished, each district should have roughly the same number of people within its boundaries.

That sounds simple enough, but there are many different ways to draw those lines for 118 House districts and 59 Senate districts. District lines can keep everyone in a municipality together in the same legislative district and/or keep similar communities together in the same legislative district. Alternatively, district lines can split a municipality apart and divide similar communities into different legislative districts. Sometimes enough minority group members are kept together in the same district to aggregate voting power to influence who wins an election, and sometimes minority voting power is diluted by splitting it apart.

How is redistricting done now in Illinois?

The General Assembly has the power to draw the maps. The legislative leaders of the party in power – no matter which party is in power – have drawn the maps to protect favored incumbents and improve the party's chances of winning as many House and Senate seats as possible. Instead of voters selecting legislators to represent them in Springfield, the legislators choose which voters they will represent.

What if neither party controls the House and Senate? How do they agree on new legislative boundaries?

They could reach a compromise, but this has only happened once.

According to the 1970 Constitution, when legislators and the governor cannot agree on new district boundaries, an 8-member redistricting commission is formed. The members are appointed by leaders of the House and Senate. If they can't reach a compromise, the Illinois Supreme Court provides the names of a Democrat and a Republican, and the one name that is drawn at random becomes the "tiebreaker" – putting the tiebreaker's party in complete control of drawing the map.

What's so bad about letting the political parties draw the map?

As long as political parties draw the map, the parties' primary objective will be to protect the interests of the party in control and its preferred incumbents. As evidence of just how that works, over half of the 2014 legislative races (82 of 137) were uncontested in November.

When there is little competition, there is little debate about issues that matter to voters. And when voters don't have a choice in an election, many don't become engaged in the process at all. Democracy suffers.

Should we ask our legislators to pass a constitutional amendment?

In theory, the General Assembly could propose an amendment and place it before voters in a referendum. But in reality, that's not going to happen. The powers in control of redistricting



are the same ones needed to approve reform in the General Assembly, and they have no interest in doing that.

So, we have to do it ourselves?

Yes. To enact the reform amendment, it will need to receive the approval of a majority of the people voting in the 2016 election or 60 percent of those voting on the amendment question.

If the amendment is approved by voters, the new independent commission will use 2020 Census data to draw new district maps in 2021, and the new legislative boundaries will be in effect for Illinois House and Senate candidates in the 2022 election.

Why do you think this campaign will be successful when the previous two attempts to amend the constitution fell short?

It is clear to us that voters in Illinois want this reform. Opinion polls consistently show support for maps being drawn by an independent commission. Getting that question before voters in a constitutional amendment referendum is not as easy as asking a polling question, of course.

But each successive amendment campaign in Illinois has collected more signatures. Thousands of volunteers from the last campaign remain committed to this initiative, collected 80,000 signatures as part of our petition campaign, and we continue to build an even larger army of volunteers as the campaign progresses.

In 2008, California voters passed a proposition creating an independent redistricting commission, and it is working well. But before it passed in 2008, there were four other failed attempts over two decades. The reform may not be popular with some politicians in Illinois, but its popularity with voters will carry it over the top.

What mistakes were made in the last campaign that you hope to avoid in this one?

The last campaign fell short, but it did a lot of things right, too. We've studied what went right and wrong. We talked in great detail with many people and organizations involved in the previous two campaigns, and most were eager to get started on a 2016 campaign.

We also don't have to start from scratch. There's a good base of volunteers, and we have been building on that.

Independent Maps also got an earlier start. Our petitions were on the street at the beginning of the warm weather months in 2015, providing more opportunity for walking door-to-door and going to farmers' markets and neighborhood festivals.

On Friday, May 6th Independent Maps submitted 563,974 signatures to the Illinois State Board of Elections (ISBE) almost double the required amount of 290,216 valid signatures for a constitutional amendment. After a 5% sample was conducted producing a 73% verification rate, the ISBE concluded overall we submitted a minimum of 382,355 and a maximum of 395,021 valid signatures.



Is the language of the Independent Map Amendment identical to the 2014 proposal?

It is very similar and will lead to the same goal of legislative district boundaries drawn by an independent commission and without regard to partisanship.

Some changes have been made to make it more likely the amendment will withstand legal challenges by opponents who want to keep it off the November 2016 ballot. The Illinois Constitution restricts citizen-initiated amendments to “structural and procedural subjects” contained in Article XIV, the legislative article. In 2014, Cook County Circuit Court Judge Mary Mikva ruled that the previous redistricting initiative included language outside the scope of what is permitted by the Illinois Constitution. She ruled the language could not include provisions establishing commission member eligibility of qualifications, including a prohibition on any commissioner serving as a legislator or in several other offices for 10 years after serving on the commission.

Why doesn't this amendment cover congressional redistricting?

The Illinois Constitution only allows a citizen-initiated redistricting amendment to change the way Illinois General Assembly districts are drawn.

Instead of a commission, why don't you just have the maps drawn by a computer?

The commission will use computers to help it draw fair, representative districts. But even when you use a computer, there are many different ways to draw boundary lines. Illinois is a diverse state, and the amendment will direct that the maps protect minority voting rights and respect political boundaries (like not cutting through a city) as much as possible. The public needs to be involved in the drawing, be able to comment on draft maps, and make suggested changes for the commission to consider.