

Student Entry Title: *The Redistricting Process: Where Democracy Lacks*

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Franklin Roosevelt once said, “Let us never forget that government is ourselves and not a power over us. The ultimate rulers of our democracy are not a President and senators and congressmen and government officials, but the voters of this country.”

America is a country founded upon the radical idea that a people can govern themselves. Inspired by the works of philosophers such as John Locke, the Constitution was crafted to be a document by and for the people. Its framers envisioned a nation unmarred by the tyranny of a monarch. But our society now faces challenges. The redistricting process, specifically in Indiana, doesn’t reflect democratic principles. In order to achieve truly democratic election of our state representatives, there must be change.

First, we must define the term “democratic principles.” The Merriam Webster online dictionary defines democracy as “a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation.” Principle is defined as “a rule or code of conduct.” Therefore, we can interpret the term democratic principles as “rules that insure the supreme power of government is still vested in the people.”

With that in mind, here is an overview of the current situation. Districts in Indiana are determined based on the state’s population. Every 10 years, following the US Census, the districts are redefined. Indiana’s districts contain an average of seven hundred thousand people. This regular redistricting ensures Indiana’s congressional and legislative districts are up to date and accurate.

But the current system of determining district borders is not without its flaws. For Indiana, state legislators are in charge: the very same people running for reelection. This is a huge problem because legislators can suggest district borders that encompass large partisan areas. When a district is designed to prominently contain one party, local election results become skewed. This process of determining districts based on an area's voting trends is known as "gerrymandering."

So what is to be done? Many concerned voters' leagues suggest alternative options. The nonpartisan Common Cause Indiana has promoted the idea of a voters' group drawing district borders. Ideally, this would mean a league of unbiased Hoosiers working together for democracy. Another organization, FairVote, champions a system where specially selected civil servants create a plan and submit it to the voters for approval. These are a few of the many viable options for Indiana redistricting.

America is still a nation of liberty. But in an age of ever-changing ideals, it's up to us, the citizens, to preserve democracy. The current system of apportioning electoral and congressional districts doesn't reflect democratic principles because it allows legislators to skew districts to their advantage. As Indiana voters, we must urge elected officials to pursue change. It is our job to ensure our government is truly "by and for the people." John Adams says it best: "Always vote for principle, though you may vote alone. You may cherish the sweetest reflection that your vote is never lost."

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