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Opinion Editorial on Redistricting

Lerner: Providing a fair alternative

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Across the country, states are in the midst of a massive redefinition of their political landscapes, the result of a constitutionally mandated decennial redrawing of the political districts.

Unfortunately, in [New York](#) [4] the process is fraught with political self-interest. Incumbents frequently seek to gerrymander lines to protect themselves, instead of protecting the interests of the average voter.

And so the call to reform [New York](#) [4]'s legislatively controlled redistricting process has risen in a steady crescendo. Common Cause/NY has a response: alternative reform maps.

Common Cause/NY is committed to showing the public that there are valid alternatives to politically gerrymandered district lines. Through our Mapping Democracy Project, and working with an advisory committee including academics, we have drawn the only set of statewide reform maps for both houses of the State Legislature and the [House of Representatives](#) [5].

Our maps provide one example of what districts could look like if they are designed to eliminate partisan and incumbent bias. We based our maps on the criteria in Gov. [Andrew M. Cuomo](#) [6]'s Redistricting Reform Bill, which was introduced -- but not passed -- in the last legislative session. The result is maps drawn to create districts of relatively equivalent size that provide fair representation for all.

Although we recognize that there is no one perfect district map, our goal has been to show that there is no practical impediment -- only a political one -- to achieving fair, non-politicized district lines.

By providing an alternative, we hope to galvanize and focus the public demand for fairly drawn district lines. By allowing ordinary [New York](#) ^[4]ers to understand and participate in the redistricting process, we provide a rationale and strong basis for the drawing of nonpoliticized districts. And also for the rejection of gerrymandered maps by the public, the governor and ultimately, if necessary, by the courts, even if such maps are adopted by the Legislature.

We know from well-publicized polling results that New Yorkers are eager for redistricting reform. We also know from our Common Cause California colleagues' experience with California's voter-created Citizens Independent Redistricting Commission that ordinary people will turn out in large numbers, in person and online, to participate in drawing their district lines if they are given a meaningful chance to do so.

The current system in [Albany](#) ^[7] is designed to insulate legislators from their constituents and help them protect their jobs; gerrymandering prioritizes the needs of the incumbent rather than the needs of voters.

The public has become increasingly aware of the way drawing district lines has become undemocratic, keeping the ossified status quo in [Albany](#) ^[7] intact. Yet legislative leaders, because their seats are safe, have remained indifferent.

It doesn't have to be this way.

We are excited to work with Newsday to give New Yorkers the chance to participate in the redistricting process, by giving them a starting point to design their own fair, nonpartisan district maps for the Assembly, State [Senate](#) ^[8] and House through the new, interactive UMAPNY website. In the weeks to come, we'll be doing everything we can to educate the public about the better alternatives to corrupt, self-interested, politicized redistricting. Together we can reclaim our democracy and design better maps for this decade -- and meaningful reform of the redistricting process for the decades to come.

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