

Why Midterm Elections Matter

Get Ready for the 2018 Elections

Midterm elections have historically low voter turnout. According to the **PEW Research Center** in 2008, 57.1% of the voting-age population cast ballots as Barack Obama became the first African American elected president. But in 2010, only 36.9% voted in the midterm election that put the House back in Republican control. For Obama's re-election in 2012, turnout rebounded to 53.7%. This example reflects a broader pattern of voter drop-off in midterm elections. Because state and local elections do not have the level mass media intrigue and resources found in presidential elections-- midterm elections do not inspire the same level of mobilization and turnout.

Despite this, midterm elections--specifically the 2018 elections-- are of vital importance. Midterm elections will impact which party holds a majority in Congress and pave the way for the 2020 presidential elections. **Additionally, the 2018 statewide elections will determine the congressional redistricting process.**

As women continue to run for office in record numbers and mobilize against harmful policies--now is the time to engage in the midterm election process!

Redistricting and Gerrymandering: the Facts

What is Redistricting and Gerrymandering?

Redistricting occurs once a decade--typically in tandem with the national census which occurs every ten years. The next census will be conducted in 2020. **This timing makes the 2018 elections integral to stopping gerrymandering; officials elected in 2018 will be spearheading the redistricting process.**

In the redistricting process, districts are redrawn to factor in population change and to ensure that each district encompasses approximately the same number of people. As populations change, some districts lose potential voters while others gain potential voters.

Gerrymandering is the process of redistricting to favor a political party or agenda. Instead of creating districts based on geographic boundaries and population--gerrymandering creates districts with the goal of weakening or empowering certain voting populations.

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There are two methods used in gerrymandering, colloquially referred to as ‘cracking’ and ‘packing.’ **Cracking** refers to the process of splitting up voters into disparate districts to dilute their vote. **Packing** concentrates the vote of a particular group into a singular district thereby ensuring that they have fewer representatives in office.

How Does Redistricting and Gerrymandering Work?

The process of redistricting varies by state, but typically state legislators draw the map, which the governor has the authority to veto. Some states have independent commissions to ensure that election officials cannot directly draw their own districts.

Regardless of the specific processes, whoever maintains a political majority in a state legislature has vast and --at times-- unchecked power in terms of drawing districts. This unchecked power gives the opportunity to create districts that are advantageous to the party in power’s political agenda. This lack of accountability allows party’s in power to use gerrymandering to maintain political power. When a party in the state legislature has a majority-- they have the ability to draw congressional districts that favor their own party.

This underscores the importance of voting locally in 2018.

Why Does Redistricting Matter?

In short, redistricting matters because when the power of creating fair and equitable districts is abused--it rigs the game and takes away voter’s political power. This creates a cycle that disenfranchises voters and feeds into systemic inequality. As we continue to advocate for progressive causes--we first need to address the constitutional right to vote as the basis for advancing women’s rights.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?



Volunteer on a Campaign



As 2018 Elections ramp up--reach out to local candidates to offer your time. By advancing candidates who want to stop gerrymandering and institute protections for equitable redistricting--you pave the way for feminist policies!



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