EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT REDISTRICTING

(but were too embarrassed to ask)
Every ten years, something momentous happens in U.S. politics: we redraw the lines of our legislative districts.
State legislatures and many local governments work the same way. For instance, each of the 59 members of the Illinois Senate represents about 216,000 residents of the state.
The lines determine who votes where.
The voters decide who represents them.
And the representatives make the laws that govern our states and our country, affecting the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the taxes we pay.
Actually, it's a bit more complicated than that. Since the Voting Rights Act of 1965, those redrawing state and congressional district lines must also maximize any clear opportunity for minority groups, such as African-Americans or Latinos, to elect candidates of their choosing.
In all but 13 states, a select group of state legislators take the lead role in redrawing state and congressional districts.
If the legislators and governor end up in a stalemate over the revised map, the responsibility gets kicked over to the courts or a backup commission of some sort.
In Illinois, this eight-member backup commission is split evenly between Democrats and Republicans.
If they also end up in a stalemate, the Illinois Supreme Court submits two nominees — one Republican and one Democrat — to be the "tiebreaker" commissioner.
The crucial ninth commissioner is chosen when the Secretary of State pulls one of the names out of a stovepipe hat. (Yes, really.)
# The Last Four Legislative Maps & Electoral Advantage

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<tr>
<th>Election Year</th>
<th>Party Drawing Map*</th>
<th>Seats Gained in House &amp; Senate**</th>
<th>Uncontested House &amp; Senate Races</th>
<th>Competitive House &amp; Senate Races***</th>
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<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Democrats (tiebreaker)</td>
<td>13H &amp; 3S</td>
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<td>Democrats</td>
<td>7H &amp; 6S</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>16</td>
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*In the event that both the legislature and an independent commission fail to agree on a new map, a 9th commission member is randomly selected from one of the two main parties.

** Seats gained by the party that drew the map in the election immediately following the redrawing.

*** Competitive elections are defined as elections in which the losing candidate received at least 45% of the vote.
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The Republicans cracked the 103rd into two districts, each of which stretched into the more conservative areas outside of town.

Their plan worked: In the 1992 general election, Republican candidates won both of the newly-drawn districts.
If the outcome of a lawmaker's next election can be pre-determined by the shape of her district, she's less likely to listen to voters. If a lawmaker is corrupt or failing to live up to his campaign promises, voters have less power to hold him accountable.
Meanwhile, the abuse of redistricting can punish communities of interest — minority neighborhoods or other groups of like-minded citizens — by systematically diluting their strength and limiting their ability to select their own representatives.
For instance, the 2001 Illinois House map carved Chicago's Chinatown neighborhood into four districts.
Several states already use independent, nonpartisan redistricting systems, and are having great success. For instance, in 2011, California took the process away from lawmakers and handed it over to a citizens redistricting commission.
Any California resident could apply to join the 14-member commission. Once assembled, they were instructed to draw compact districts containing equal populations, ensure minority representation and try not to split up cities and counties.
In 2011, the group held 34 public hearings, released drafts of their maps, and heard testimony from 2,700 people across the state before finalizing the new districts.
Redistricting
The Good, The Bad, & The Ugly
Who draws the maps in Illinois?

Illinois has some of the most gerrymandered districts in America. *Politico* said that Speaker Madigan “punched his ticket to the partisan hall of fame” with the 2011 mapping process.

Party leaders drew the maps entirely behind closed doors. They packed citizens into districts that punished political foes and rewarded allies in their party—just as Republicans have when they controlled the process. Along the way, communities of color were cracked into pieces, diluting their voting power. They also split towns and neighborhoods throughout the state, and disenfranchised others.
What do the maps look like?

This map is the result. What follows are 3 blatant examples of what “bad” redistricting leads to. Names are removed to emphasize that this is about the systemic problems, not the individuals involved.
1. Creating Apparatchik Legislators

The new map splits Springfield in three, and connects it with rural areas and Decatur to form the 96th district. Under the new map, Springfield residents cannot hold a single representative accountable, and voters in the rural areas are essentially disenfranchised.

The majority party and its allies spend $88,000 to help a political neophyte win the primary on the strength of brutal attacks-by-mail against independent-minded competitors. She avoids candidate forums and media questions, but coasts to general election victory.
2. Avoiding Accountability

A longtime state representative has been in office since 1990. He is a retired City of Chicago Clerk and the brother of a powerful Chicago Alderman. In 2011, he becomes a lobbyist at City Hall but does not step down as an elected official, creating an uproar over conflicts of interest.

During the re-map, the 1st district is drawn tailored to his political base. He runs unopposed in the primary and unopposed in the general election in 2012.
3. Perpetuating Machine Politics

In 2008, a state representative with a questionable ethics record runs unopposed in the primary, then drops out before the general election to become a lobbyist. The party anoints his successor, the 29-year-old son of a powerful Alderman, who spent two years prosecuting traffic cases before joining a clout-heavy law firm. He wins easily in 2008, and faces no challenger in 2010 in the gerrymandered district.

The 2011 map continues to benefit this new representative. He runs unopposed in the primary and faces no challenger in the general election in 2012.
What does good redistricting look like?

- **Independent mappers.** Distance politicians from the map-drawing process by creating an independent redistricting commission.

- **Transparent process.** Open redistricting to the public, with ample opportunity for citizens to have direct input into the maps before *and* after they are drafted.

- **Nonpartisan criteria.** While no list is perfect, there is general consensus among scholars and practitioners about districts:
  
  - Contiguous, substantially equal in population, in compliance with federal laws
  - Not drawn to dilute or diminish the ability of a racial or language minority community to elect the candidates of its choice
  - Respecting the geographic integrity of cities, towns, and other units of local government
  - Respecting the geographic integrity of communities sharing common social and economic interests
  - Not drawn to purposefully or significantly discriminate against or favor any political party or group, and not considering the residence of any person
What happens when you do it right

A number of states have instituted independent, nonpartisan redistricting. The results include:

• Greater public interest in elections
• Increased competition
• New candidates entering the process and winning
• Greater accountability to voters
• Moderating effect on candidates/winners
Partisan redistricting had created an absurd outcropping in District 2, giving Trent Franks, one of the most conservative members of Congress, a virtual lock on elections in his district from 2002-2010.
The independent redistricting commission created a more reasonable, less partisan map in 2011. The outcropping from District 2 disappeared. More competitive districts put a larger number of seats in play. Whereas in 2010, the Republican-Democrat balance was 5 to 3, in 2012 it was 4 to 5 (the state gained one seat due to population growth).
California: The Ribbon of Shame

This is the 23rd District from 2002-2010, called the “ribbon of shame” because it hugged more than 200 miles of coastline. It was created not to represent any community, but to give Democrats a guaranteed seat. (Republicans had a similar district, the 46th, in Orange County.)
In 2011, the California Independent Redistricting Commission created new state and Congressional maps (links to old and new). The Ribbon of Shame was absorbed into the larger, more diverse 24th Congressional District.

It was now evenly split between Democrats and Republicans, with a fifth of voters being unaffiliated. Incumbent Lois Capps faced a strong challenge from a former GOP Lieutenant Governor, and both candidates appealed to a broad voter base. Ultimately, Capps was re-elected.
California: Impressive Results

Under the new system:
• The number of General Assembly races with no challenger dropped from 7 to 2.
• The number of general elections won by more than 50,000 votes dropped from 31 to 17, and the number of races won by less than 10,000 votes rose from 8 to 13.
• The number of majority-minority General Assembly districts increased by more than 50 percent.
• The overall map, based on quantitative measures, includes districts that are far more compact, and decrease the number of cities that are split.
Aren’t open primaries—like in California—a better reform?

California’s system is a “top-two” or “jungle” primary. Candidates affiliate with their party, but the top two primary vote-getters advance to the general election, no matter what their party affiliation. While it seems logical that moderate candidates would advance in top-two primaries, there is little research to back up that claim, and some studies that contradict it.

More important, here are three crucial problems that open primaries don’t address, but redistricting reform can change:

• Diluted voting power of racial minorities and other communities of interest to decide who represents them
• Outsized power of legislative and party leaders to determine who wins and loses, taking power away from citizens
• Virtually guaranteed re-election for incumbents, and the resulting a lack of accountability to voters
88th District
115th District
“...the state’s redistricting process yields gerrymandered legislative maps and deprives Illinois voters of fair representation.”
Gov. Quinn’s Illinois Reform Commission

The current system “...is a protection racket for incumbents. It needs to be fixed now.”
Chicago Tribune

“...our state’s politicized system leads to illogical, gerrymandered districts that all but guarantee re-election for many incumbents, discourage competition, and further voter apathy.”
Chicago Sun-Times

“Map drawing is where it all begins. If our legislators truly are committed to cleansing Illinois of its gamy reputation, they will push for a new mapping process now.”
Daily Herald