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ACTIVITY - Voting Rights and Gerrymandering for College Students/Youth Voters

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ACTIVITY

Voting Rights and Gerrymandering for College Students/Youth Voters

Learning Outcomes

- Assess the political uses of gerrymandering as it relates to electoral districts on local college campuses.
- Document three ways that student access to the ballot might be limited at these institutions.
- Discuss the intended consequences of gerrymandering and limiting college student voter rights.

Context

In 2023, Marianne Magjuka published “The Struggle Continues: Civic Deserts, Ballot Access, and Challenges to College Student Voting” in *Power to the Polls: A Guide to Developing Civic Learning, Election Engagement, and Political Action in Higher Education*. Several narratives of gerrymandering on college campuses emerge. One focuses on North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University because the campus was divided into two congressional districts. Another narrative recounts the gerrymandering that occurred around Berea College in Kentucky. It was divided into four voting districts; it also had two polling locations. These are two instances of many such manipulations of voting districts so politicians can select their voters. Read this article: (Carrasco, Maria. 2021. [“Partisan Gerrymandering Targets Campuses.”](#) *Inside Higher Ed.*).

Additionally, Bertrall L. Ross II, Professor of Law at UVA, articulates the threat gerrymandering poses to principles of democracy. You can access the article here: (Ross II, Bertrall L. 2022. [“Partisan Gerrymandering as a Threat to Multiracial Democracy.”](#) *Southwestern Law Review* 50.).

Attempts to take the politics out of drawing these political lines remain flawed. Virginia, for example, serves as a recent cautionary tale on gerrymandering. Read the following articles: ([“Virginia’s redistricting commission’s failure to transcend partisanship has lessons for other states, critics say.”](#) 2021. This article requires a subscription; check with your campus library.) and ([“Supreme Court of Virginia Redistricting Final Order and Approved Maps.”](#) 2021.).

There are proposed solutions, which can be reviewed in these articles: (Silva, Katelyn. 2022. [“Philip Gressman Thinks Mathematics Can Make for Fairer Elections.”](#) *Penn Today.*) and ([“All About Redistricting.”](#) Loyola Law School.).

Gerrymandering also connects to voting rights. Specifically, voting rights groups such as Campus Vote Project work to combat these attempts to manipulate electoral districts. One way to protect voters on a college campus is to ensure that the Youth Voting Rights

Act passes and receives funding; read that article here: ([“Senator Warren Reintroduces Youth Voting Rights Act to Empower Young People, Expand Access to Ballot Box.”](#) 2023. Elizabeth Warren website.).

Additional watchfulness and awareness are necessary as banning polling places on colleges is a threat. (Fogel, Becky. 2023. [“A Texas Republican Says Banning College Polling Places Is about Safety. Students Don’t Buy It.”](#) *Kut News*.).

If it feels like the voting rights of young voters are being threatened, that feeling might be justified. Tufts University noted in its summary of 2020 voting rates that 66% of students voted. That level of voting receives attention from politicians. New rules about college students and voting could be in place.

Today, you will discuss gerrymandering and voting rights as they relate to college students and college campuses, specifically within your local community. Next, you will compose a short response to one of the questions listed below (200 words). Post your response to the discussion forum.

1. Why is gerrymandering a threat to college students and their access to polls? Is it fair that college campuses (and their voters) are subject to this manipulation of voting rights and gerrymandering?
2. Should college campuses receive funding so they can host a single polling site for all its students?
3. Should college campuses be exempt from division as part of congressional redistricting?
4. What voting power do students hold?
5. List four strategies college students can utilize to combat gerrymandering and to protect voting rights. Explain why each strategy can be effective.