

PROGRESS MICHIGAN PRESENTS A SPECIAL REPORT:



THE
RIGHT'S FIGHT
AGAINST
FAIR MAPS

*How Michigan Republicans and right-wing groups
have opposed independent redistricting, nonpartisan maps,
and an equal voice for all voters.*

Introduction

For 20 years, Michigan Republicans and right-wing groups have benefitted from gerrymandered legislative election maps drawn in secret by Republicans in 2001 and 2011 to give their party an advantage and disproportionate political power. In 2018, Michiganders voted to create Michigan's Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission, a group of 13 ordinary citizens who are now working to draw new electoral maps.

Every step of the way, Michigan's Republicans and right-wing groups have fought this historic effort to bring transparency and fairness to our state. Time and again, they have demonstrated a complete lack of understanding or a purposeful disregard for the truth regarding the old redistricting process and the maps it produced, the Commission and their new redistricting process, and—when all else fails—the individual commissioners themselves.

They fought to prevent the Commission from being created; they fought to get it thrown out in court after millions of Michiganders had voiced support for it at the polls; and now they continue to use distortions of the truth, willful disregard for common sense, and outright lies to undermine the public's faith in the process and prevent the Commission from producing fair, nonpartisan maps that give all Michiganders an equal voice in our democracy.



■ Let's Back Up: The Background on Redistricting

Every 10 years, following the United States census, a process called reapportionment or redistricting occurs across the country. During redistricting, electoral districts, which determine who represents you in Congress and the state legislature, are redrawn based on population changes.

Every state conducts their own redistricting process, which varies from state to state. In Michigan, before 2018, the political party that controlled the state legislature and the governorship drew the new electoral maps with zero transparency or accountability. When a single political party controls the redistricting process, it often results in gerrymandering. Gerrymandering is when the redistricting process is used to create maps that give a particular political party an unfair advantage.

Because Republicans controlled Michigan's state legislature and governorship in 2001 and 2011, the Michigan Republican Party—along with special interest groups who often provide financial support and political input during this process—have been drawing Michigan's electoral maps in secret for the last two redistricting cycles.

During the 2018 election cycle, the nonpartisan group Voters Not Politicians introduced a ballot initiative to put an end to partisan gerrymandering in Michigan. Michiganders overwhelmingly voted to pass Proposal 2, establishing Michigan's new Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission. The Commission—made up of four Democrats, four Republicans, and five Independents who are all regular citizens selected at random—is currently working to draw new maps based on community input and 2020 Census data.

For the first time in Michigan's history, political partisans won't be drawing maps behind closed doors to give their own party an unfair advantage. But rather than celebrate this step forward in restoring Michiganders' faith in our political system and giving every voter an equal voice, Republicans have been fighting progress with every tool at their disposal.

Show Me the Money

To ensure Michigan Republicans could continue disenfranchising voters to keep their party's political power, Republicans and right-wing special interest groups came together in force to oppose Proposal 2 during the 2018 election cycle, spending millions through two main groups.

1) Citizens Protecting Michigan's Constitution

This ballot committee primarily supported the legal fight to keep Proposal 2 off the ballot, ensuring voters would never even have the chance to decide for ourselves how we want our districts drawn. It shared an address, 600 S. Walnut St., Lansing, with the Michigan Chamber of Commerce PAC II. It raised \$393,180.

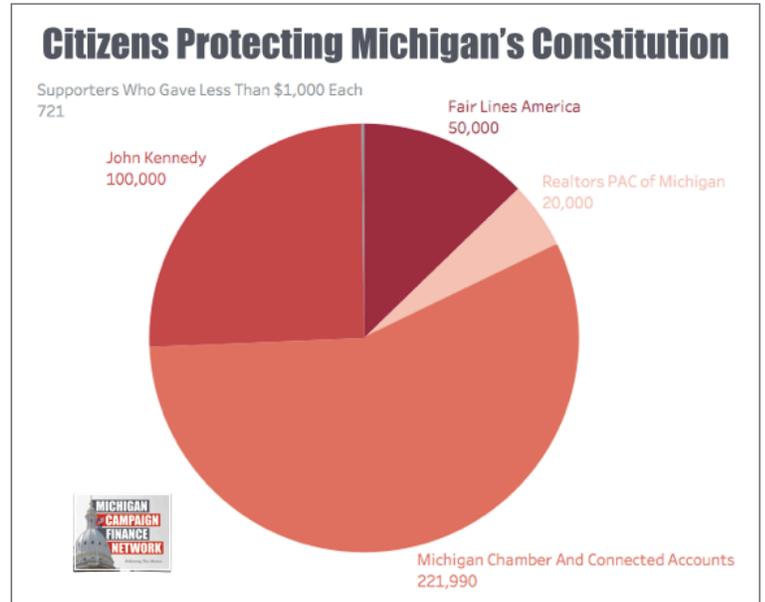


Image Source: [Michigan Campaign Finance Network](#)

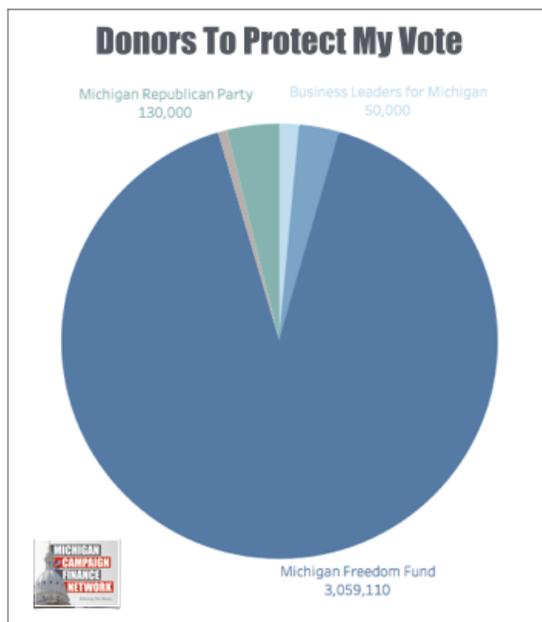


Image Source: [Michigan Campaign Finance Network](#)

2) Protect My Vote

After the legal battle to keep Proposal 2 off the ballot failed, Protect My Vote picked up the torch, leading the fight to get Michiganders to vote against it. They raised \$3.36 million, primarily from the Michigan Freedom Fund, although the Michigan Republican Party donated \$130,000 from their administrative account, a Party account that is prohibited from being used for political purposes.

Show Me the Money

Michigan Freedom Fund

The largest donor opposing redistricting reform has been the Michigan Freedom Fund, spending over \$3 million in the fight against Proposal 2. As a political nonprofit, they are not required to disclose their donors, but they have long been linked to one of Michigan's top right-wing donors: the DeVos family. At the time, Tony Daunt was their executive director.

After they failed to stop Proposal 2 at the polls, Daunt and the GOP filed lawsuits attempting to stop the Commission from being created. Both suits eventually failed.

FAIR Maps

Republicans and right-wing groups failed to stop Proposal 2 from being put on the ballot in 2018. They failed to stop millions of Michiganders from voting it into law. And they failed to get that law overturned by the courts. But they aren't done yet.

FAIR Maps is a so-called conservative “watchdog” group formed to “actively participate” in Michigan's redistricting process. In May of 2021, Tony Daunt left the Michigan Freedom Fund to become executive director of FAIR Maps. As executive director of the Freedom Fund, Daunt spoke freely about being committed to defeating Proposal 2 and as the executive director of FAIR Maps, he's been a regular critic of the Commission.

As of yet, Progress Michigan has not determined the funding sources for FAIR Maps, nor do they appear to have done much outside of Daunt's regular quotations in the media and appearances in the comment section of the livestreamed Commission meetings, but the connection with Daunt and the DeVos political machine is readily apparent. Also of note, a nonprofit named Fair Maps has filed tax documents with the IRS for 2019 and 2020, both times listing their income as below \$50,000. The principal officer is listed as Mary Doster, a longtime DeVos political operative.

Doster was also listed as the treasurer for the nonprofit Michigan Redistricting Resource Institute, a group tied to the Michigan Chamber of Commerce that paid nearly \$1 million to Republican consultants and legal counsel in 2011 and 2012 to draw political districts that favored Republicans.

See for Yourself: Right-Wing Lies on Redistricting

Republicans and right-wing groups in Michigan have not kept their opinions about our Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission and its purpose a secret, but, as voters proved in 2018 by voting Proposal 2 into law, the GOP is fighting against a nonpartisan process the majority of Michigan supports. So, in an attempt to hang onto their disproportionate and unfair political power, Republicans have spent years distorting the truth about redistricting.

Progress Michigan has collected what is certainly only a handful of the many examples where Michigan Republicans and right-wing groups either revealed a gross misunderstanding of, or willfully lied about, the redistricting process, the Commission, and the commissioners themselves.

Lies About the Old Redistricting Process

Republicans and right-wing groups regularly pretend Michigan's old redistricting process, where the political party that controlled the state legislature and the governorship drew the maps in secret with no public input or transparency, was fair to voters. They said, "the current system works" and claimed under the existing redistricting process, voters could hold lawmakers accountable by voting them out of office if they didn't like the maps.

VNP'S "INDEPENDENT" COMMISSION STEALS POWER FROM MICHIGAN VOTERS

- The proposal removes the right to appeal to the judiciary as well as removes the people's representatives from the process
- The "independent" commission is 100% unaccountable to the people. It will do whatever it wants with no recourse



Source: Michigan Republican Party [Flyer](#)

They regularly decried the idea of unelected, ordinary citizens working to redraw the maps, saying this meant the Commission was unaccountable to voters. This line of thinking willfully disregards the fact that the system at the time allowed lawmakers to choose their own voters, making it all but impossible for voters to hold their representatives accountable by voting them out.



Alcona County Republicans

August 1, 2018 · 🌐



Redistricting without representation. That's what this proposal is all about. Vote NO in November.

"The VNP proposal would affect the 'foundation' power of government by removing altogether from the legislative branch authority over redistricting and consolidating that power instead in an 'independent' commission made up of 13 randomly selected individuals who are not in any way chosen by the people, representative of the people, or accountable to the people," - Chief Justice Stephen Markman

See for Yourself: Right-Wing Lies on Redistricting

The idea that the Commission isn't accountable to voters couldn't be further from the truth. Unlike the old redistricting process, which happened behind closed doors, every action the Commission takes is in full view of the public and they are constitutionally required to take public input into account when drawing the maps. Their maps will also have to pass legal scrutiny before being implemented.

Republicans also claimed and continue to claim the old redistricting process was nonpartisan because, supposedly, lawmakers followed a "standard of keeping counties, townships, and cities intact."



The old redistricting process was anything but nonpartisan. According to federal courts and redistricting experts, in 2011, the Republican-controlled state legislature drew some of the most gerrymandered maps in the country. Emails disclosed through a federal lawsuit demonstrate this gerrymandering was absolutely intentional and even show the GOP bragging about cramming “Dem garbage” into Michigan’s four southeast congressional districts while the Chamber of Commerce, a business special interest group, stated the maps would keep Republicans in power for years. And, as the Commission’s own experts have observed, the 2011 legislative maps were racial gerrymanders as well, packing Black voters into districts to reduce their political power. In a stunning but not at all surprising display of hypocrisy, Republicans even claimed creating an independent commission was an attempt to gerrymander Michigan’s maps.



THE PROPOSAL WILL ACTUALLY INCREASE GERRYMANDERING

- Instead of following county, township, and city lines, VNP groups voters together by “communities of interest”
- VNP removes the current non-partisan standard of keeping counties, townships, and cities intact

Source: Michigan Republican Party Flyer

See for Yourself: Right-Wing Lies on Redistricting

The old redistricting process was always about keeping political power, not about following municipal boundaries, but Republicans are still pretending following those boundaries is of the utmost importance. And in doing so, they regularly pretend that the Commission isn't taking those boundaries into consideration.

Lies About the New Redistricting Process

The Commission is constitutionally required to follow seven mapping criteria in ranked order when drawing our new district maps. Republicans and right-wing groups have regularly distorted the truth or outright lied about these criteria.

The sixth mapping criteria plainly requires the Commission to consider “county, city, and township boundaries.” Despite this, Republicans and right-wing groups pretend the Commission will completely disregard municipal boundaries. In stark contrast to their usual rhetoric regarding the Constitution, Republicans have even encouraged the Commission to outright ignore them.

Republicans have also shown regular confusion about, and even outright scorn for, the third mapping criteria: communities of interest.

When they were still fighting Proposal 2, Republicans claimed that focusing on communities of interest, putting people before their political party, would make “identity politics the law of the land.”

CONSTITUTIONAL MAPPING CRITERIA (IN RANK ORDER)

1. Districts shall be of equal population as mandated by the United States constitution, and shall comply with the voting rights act and other federal laws.
2. Districts shall be geographically contiguous. Island areas are considered to be contiguous by land to the county of which they are a part.
3. Districts shall reflect the state's diverse population and communities of interest. Communities of interest may include, but shall not be limited to, populations that share cultural or historical characteristics or economic interests. Communities of interest do not include relationships with political parties, incumbents, or political candidates.
4. Districts shall not provide a disproportionate advantage to any political party. A disproportionate advantage to a political party shall be determined using accepted measures of partisan fairness.
5. Districts shall not favor or disfavor an incumbent elected official or a candidate.
6. Districts shall reflect consideration of county, city, and township boundaries.
7. Districts shall be reasonably compact.

VNP WOULD MAKE “IDENTITY POLITICS” THE LAW

- Under VNP, political parties & interest groups will lobby that a district be drawn to protect “communities of interest” which is a term undefined under the law
- VNP will likely encourage segregation by defining “communities of interest” based on religious, ethnic, sexual, or racial identities



Source: *Michigan Republican Party Flyer*

This Michigan Republican Party graphic highlights multiple lies about communities of interest and redistricting: 1) it is illegal to lobby the Commission in any way, 2) the term “communities of interest” is, in fact, defined by the very law that would establish the Commission, and 3) VNP, or Voters Not Politicians, is not who defines a community of interest, rather, that is a matter of public input.

Now that the Commission has been established, Republicans continue to misinterpret the criteria requiring Michigan's new districts “reflect the state's diverse population and communities of interest.” As defined by Michigan's Constitution, a community of interest “may include, but shall not be limited to, populations that share cultural or historical characteristics or economic interests. Communities of interest do not include relationships with political parties, incumbents, or political candidates.”

See for Yourself: Right-Wing Lies on Redistricting

But the Livingston County Republican Party seems to have missed that crucial part in an [email they sent out on August 22, 2021](#), attacking maps submitted to the Commission by the AFL-CIO. The AFL-CIO maps, which were submitted for consideration as part of public comment to the Commission, would split Livingston County into three State House seats instead of the two State House seats it is currently divided into.

Livingston Republicans seem to believe this means part of Livingston County will then be represented by Democrats which will leave “a majority of those living in Livingston County being represented in the State house by individuals who do not reflect our goals and values” and encourages readers to contact the Commission about their community of interest.

In doing so, the Livingston County Republican Party has directed their followers to connect a community of interest with a political party, which the Commission is explicitly prohibited from doing. From the beginning, they have been attempting to inject political partisanship into a Commission designed to be nonpartisan.

While Republicans have obviously not been shy about spreading misinformation about redistricting to the public, they also haven’t hesitated to make wildly inaccurate claims to one another in private. Brian Jonckheere, the Republican Livingston County Drain Commissioner, [sent an email](#) in August of 2021 to Meghan Reckling, the chair of the Livingston County GOP and chief of staff to Republican State Senator Lana Theis.

Jonckheere’s email, referencing a Bridge Michigan article about redistricting, demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of the Voting Rights Act, which protects Michigan’s minority voters, and the Act’s impact on redistricting in Michigan. The Commission, and in fact all states, are legally required to comply with the Voting Rights Act to prevent the disenfranchisement of minority voters. With such a gross misunderstanding of the redistricting process, it’s no surprise that in their effort to stop progress, Republicans haven’t hesitated to lie about the commissioners themselves.

Livingston County is currently divided into two State House seats, both represented by Republicans.

Under the plan presented by the AFL-CIO, Livingston County would now be divided into three State House seats. Only one seat (the brown district) remains in Livingston County, whereas the other two districts (the purple and aqua districts) contain portions of Washtenaw County. Not only do they have parts of Washtenaw County, ***but residents living in Genoa Township are also split into three different districts, and some are tied into districts with residents down in Ann Arbor.***

In the end, the two districts containing portions of Washtenaw County would overwhelmingly be won by Democrats, leaving a majority of those living in Livingston County being represented in the State House by individuals who do not reflect our goals and values.

The 13 Commissioners on the [Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission](#) (MICRC) must hear from the residents of Livingston County about our Community of Interest! They need to know that the AFL-CIO maps do not reflect the views of those who live here.

From: Brian Jonckheere <BJonckheere@livgov.com>
Sent: Tuesday, August 17, 2021 11:08 AM
To: Meghan Reckling
Subject: Fwd: [EXT] Defund police? Police budgets are rising

Thought you would like to see this. In this redistributing article, they say that they’re basing some of their redistributing efforts on race to preserve the voting rights of minorities??? What??? No way that is legal and the commission just admitted they have a racist agenda.

Sent from my iPad.

Begin forwarded message:

From: Bridge Michigan <info@thecenterformichigan.net>
Date: August 17, 2021 at 8:48:46 AM EDT
To: Brian Jonckheere <BJonckheere@livgov.com>
Subject: [EXT] Defund police? Police budgets are rising

See for Yourself: Right-Wing Lies on Redistricting

Lies About the Commissioners

From the start, Republicans and right-wing groups have lied about the thirteen Michiganders who would make up the Commission. Long before anyone had even applied to be a commissioner—even before Proposal 2 had passed—Republicans and right-wing groups claimed only liberals would be added to the Commission. Protect My Vote led this charge in 2018, producing misleading ads, then echoed by Republicans, that claimed the Commission would be made up of unelected liberals.

In fact, the Commission was specifically designed to bring people of different political affiliations together, with four Democrats, four Republicans, and five Independents serving as commissioners.

Proposal 2 even went so far as to ensure the Commission would be comprised of citizens with little political background, barring those with recent political experience and their family members from serving on the Commission in order to keep partisanship at bay as much as possible. Republicans rebelled against this effort. They called it an invasion of privacy and in a 2019 lawsuit even attempted to get the Commission thrown out in court, citing the provision as discriminatory.

They spread lies about how the commissioners would be selected, saying the applicants were not at all vetted and no one would know if an applicant was “a bigoted social misfit until the first meeting,” when top Senate and House leaders from both parties had the opportunity to remove candidates from consideration before the final selection.

Gladwin County Republican Party
October 23, 2018 · 🌐

Don't believe the smooth words and pretty lies of its supporters. Watch this video, share it with your family and friends, and VOTE NOT ON 2!

YOUTUBE.COM
The Truth Behind VNP's Proposal 2
Proposal 2, from the Democrat front-group Voters Not Politicians, is a liberal Trojan Horse ...

MichiganFreedomFund
@MichiganFreedom

“The so-called Michigan Citizens Redistricting Commission is both unconstitutional and disenfranchises more than a half-million Michigan residents,” said MFF Senior Advisor Angela Meyers.

GAN:ED Freedom Fund Applauds Lawsuit Seeking to Stop Commission from Disenfranchising Michiganders
michiganfreedomfund.com

10:10 AM · Jul 30, 2019 · Twitter Web App

See for Yourself: Right-Wing Lies on Redistricting

They claimed "a single politician appoints" the commissioners when in fact the commissioners were selected at random using statistical methods to ensure they accurately represented Michigan's demographics. This rhetoric—which has since been deleted— alluding to Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, feeds into a current conservative attack on the Commission: the claim that Secretary Benson is really the one in charge.

In an email sent August 26, 2021, Calhoun County Republicans claimed Secretary Benson is "directing the Commission." Saying Benson is "arguably the most partisan in Michigan history" and "all [Commission] staff members report to Ms. Benson and therefore, the Democrat party."

This is categorically untrue. The constitutional amendment establishing the Commission states: "The Secretary of State shall be secretary of the Commission without vote, and in that capacity shall furnish, under the direction of the Commission, all technical services that the Commission deems necessary."

The Secretary of State's office's participation in the redistricting process is entirely "under the direction of the Commission." It provides logistical and administrative support, and the Commission's budget is part of the Secretary of State's budget, but the Commission controls how their own funds are spent. They also hire their own staff, who report to the commissioners, not Benson.

Now that the commissioners have been selected, Republicans and right-wing groups have changed tactics, instead choosing to attack the individual commissioners. Hit pieces have started appearing on Anthony Eid and Rebecca Szetela, two of the Independent commissioners, ostensibly for voting for Democratic candidates and being involved with groups traditionally supported by Democrats. Despite what Republicans seem to believe, being an Independent does not mean you cannot support Democrats or any other political party for that matter.

Calhoun County Republican Committee

Greetings, Fellow Calhoun County Republican!

If you've been getting our emails for any length of time, you know that we don't "do drama." We share content that is timely, relevant, and actionable without fanning the flames of panic by calling everything "urgent."

This is urgent.

As you remember, the Citizens Not Politicians ballot initiative created the Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission, which is anything but independent. Jocelyn Benson's Secretary of State office, arguably the most partisan in Michigan history, is directing the commission, and all staff members report to Ms. Benson and therefore, the Democrat party.

The Calhoun County Republican Party is working to make it easier than ever for area Republicans to learn, network, and grow together.

On the 4th Tuesday of each month, January-November, join us at our headquarters, located at 7100 Tower Road in Battle Creek from 7:00-8:00 to learn from special

Alcona County Republicans
September 11 at 1:59 PM · 🌐

Benson should have followed the money and checked out political donations. These two Democrat leaning "independents" need to resign. This whole redistricting thing is a nightmare. #DemsPlayDirty
CALL TO ACTION: Submit a Public Comment demanding the resignation of Rebecca Szetela and Anthony Eid.
<https://www.michigan-mapping.org/>

DETROITNEWS.COM

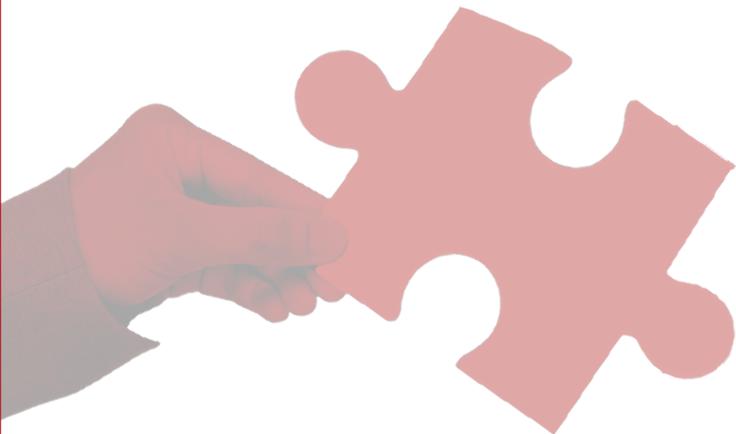
Jacques: Michigan's not so 'independent' redistricting commission

The Lies to Come

As the Commission works, in full public view, to draw new electoral maps, the lies are going to keep coming. From the start, Republicans and right-wing interest groups have fought to keep redistricting under lock and key so they could maintain their stranglehold on political power at the expense of voters.

Thanks to Proposal 2, Michiganders can watch their districts being drawn in real time, hear the reasoning behind the lines, and provide the Commission with feedback. Despite this transparency, Republicans will continue to try and undermine public faith in the Commission and the maps they draw.

As the process continues, it's important to remember that Republicans didn't want this Commission. They spent millions spouting lies to try and prevent it from being created in the first place. It's difficult to see how any criticism they put forth about the Commission or its maps could be considered anything but yet another bad faith attempt to undermine Michiganders' historic effort to put power back in the hands of the people.



The Right's Fight Against Fair Maps
*How Michigan Republicans and right-wing groups have opposed independent redistricting,
nonpartisan maps, and an equal voice for all voters.*

*By Erin Lodes
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