

## **A Teen's Aspirations for Real Democracy in Illinois**

The 2020 census data will soon be used for redistricting Illinois' political map, a process which includes redrawing legislative boundaries of our local, state, and congressional districts. However, this redistricting process that lets politicians decide who votes where, referred to as gerrymandering, jeopardizes the integrity of our system of government. As a teenager who will be of legal age to vote next year, I am astounded by the absurdity of politicians selecting the voters by creating district maps that favor their preferred election outcome before a single vote is cast. Imagine if students made decisions on what questions will be on an exam, or if the result of a sporting game was fixed before the event. Gerrymandering is not a far cry analogy from these scenarios. This is anathema to our deep-rooted value of representative democracy.

The November 2020 Illinois elections data demonstrate the pervasiveness of gerrymandering: 50% of the Illinois Senate, and 44% of the Illinois House of Representatives races were uncontested. Reviewing past Illinois election data reveals a troubling pattern: fully 47% and 63% of the Illinois legislative races in 2018 and 2016 respectively were uncontested. These uncontested races are mostly due to the political party in power using voting pattern data to redraw electoral maps in such a way to assure victory in select districts. In those districts, there is no incentive for candidates from the opposing party to contest. In states where the redistricting authority does not belong to legislators but to an independent commission, the contrast is striking: in 2020 only 8% in Colorado, and 2% in Michigan were uncontested races. Gerrymandering removes accountability for the legislators from the policies, tax levels and budgets they advance in Springfield. The consequences of such unchecked governance impacts everyone regardless of their political stripes and party affiliations with lasting influence on the future well-being of Illinois.

We, the people of Illinois, do not have to let partisan politics hijack our system of governance or be silent spectators of power prevailing over principles. An independent redistricting commission provides a clear path to restore our sacred faith in elections. Illinoisans need to have their voices heard by participating in their district's public hearings and supporting the efforts of Fair Maps Illinois. Web sites such as [www.representable.org](http://www.representable.org) provide tools for voters to provide input. Together, we can make our government truly of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Prashanth Ramachandra  
917 Boardwalk Court  
Palatine IL 60067  
[Ramachandra1468@students.d211.org](mailto:Ramachandra1468@students.d211.org)