

Gerrymandering: the serpentine art



VCW State & Local

What is gerrymandering?

- ▶ Each state elects a certain number of congressional Reps.
- ▶ Process is controlled by the party in power in the state legislature
- ▶ Gerrymandering occurs when the map-drawing is deliberately used to benefit one political party over another

- ▶ Every 10 years, after the national census congressional boundaries are redrawn
- ▶ Provides a numerical advantage in the Congress to particular parties
- ▶ In most states new maps are drawn by the state legislature & approved by the governor

- ▶ Strategy is to elect many members to your party
- ▶ Disadvantage to opposition party by reducing the number of elected members

Named after 19 th. Century Governor Elbridge Gerry- Massachusetts

- ▶ In 1810 his Democratic-Republican party redrew the map of the state's Senate districts in a manner never seen before
- ▶ The goal was to weaken his opposition Federalist Party's chance of winning

- ▶ His map was widely satirized
- ▶ One district was compared to the shape of a salamander
- ▶ Ever since Gov. Gerry has been associated with the term gerrymander.

Satirical Cartoon appeared in Boston Globe 1812



How it works

- ▶ Redraw the boundaries of several districts
- ▶ Stuff as many of your opponents' supporters into fewer districts
- ▶ Place enough of your supporters in many more districts
- ▶ The result is that your party wins a majority of districts

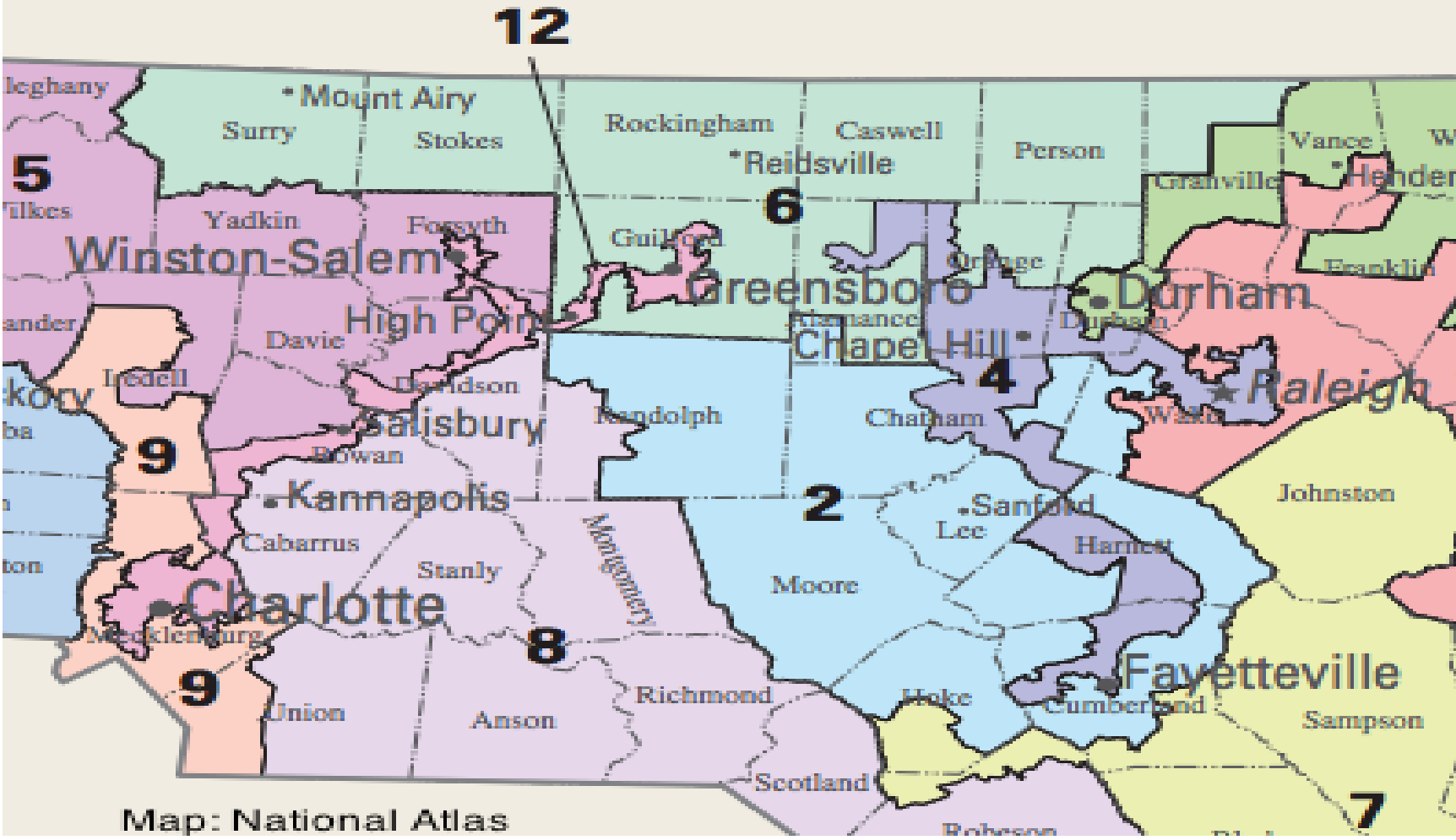
The case of North Carolina:

After 2012 election, the house ended up with more than twice as many Republicans as Democrats

- ▶ Although a majority of the electorate voted for Representatives from the Democratic party

2012 Gerrymandered districts in NC

Central North Carolina's gerrymandered districts, 2012

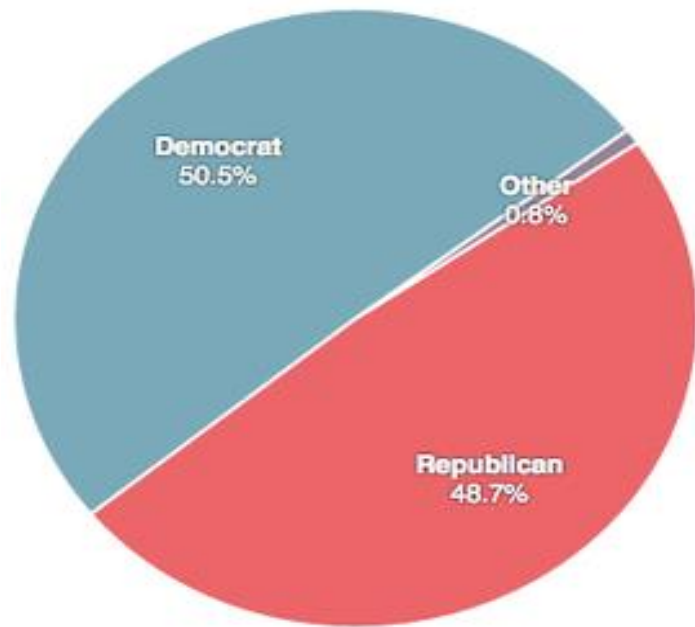


- ▶ Look at the long, snakelike districts the 12th, in pink & the 4th, in purple
- ▶ These districts cut through large sections of the state & contain large urban centers that are not close to each other
- ▶ Large numbers of Democratic-voting population are contained in these two districts

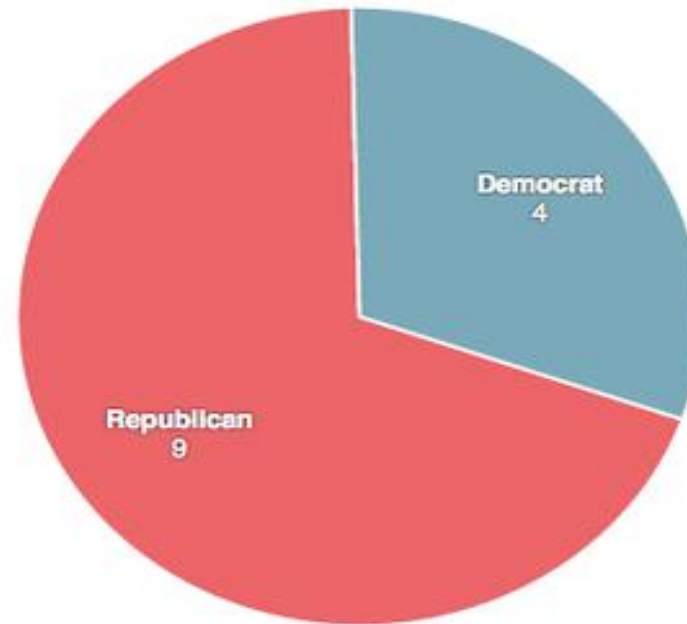
- ▶ NC Republicans created 3 very large Democratic districts
- ▶ Several larger number of districts where Republicans constituents ended up in smaller , but multiple districts

Gerrymander in NC 2010/2012

N.C. U.S. House vote, 2012



N.C. U.S. House results, 2012



V

How Gerrymandering helped the Republicans' recent control of Congress

- ▶ 2014 mid-term elections Republicans won massive victories in the House of Reps.
- ▶ They control the House after garnering 5 million more votes than Democrats
- ▶ 2012 general elections Democratic candidates won 1.4 million more votes than Republicans did
- ▶ Yet the Republicans ended up with a 234 to 201 seats in the House . Many liberals blamed gerrymandering for the results.
- ▶ They won the House despite losing the popular vote

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Power of Incumbency

- ▶ Why are incumbents are usually re-elected ?

Racial Gerrymandering

- ▶ 1 rep. per congressional district elected
- ▶ Difficult for minority groups to gain representation
- ▶ Ex., Spread out African Americans throughout a state
- ▶ They are then unlikely to have the numbers to elect a rep of their choice

Voting Rights Act of 1965; *made gerrymandering illegal*

- ▶ Not allowed to reduce the voting power of a racial minority
- ▶ Courts tend to assess whether a district is drawn so as to disenfranchise minority voters

All sides engage in this practice

- ▶ Both Republicans & Democrats frequently engaged in gerrymandering practices over the decades
- ▶ Redistricting occurs under the elected governors & their legislatures
- ▶ In 2010 the Republicans won major states in the courts

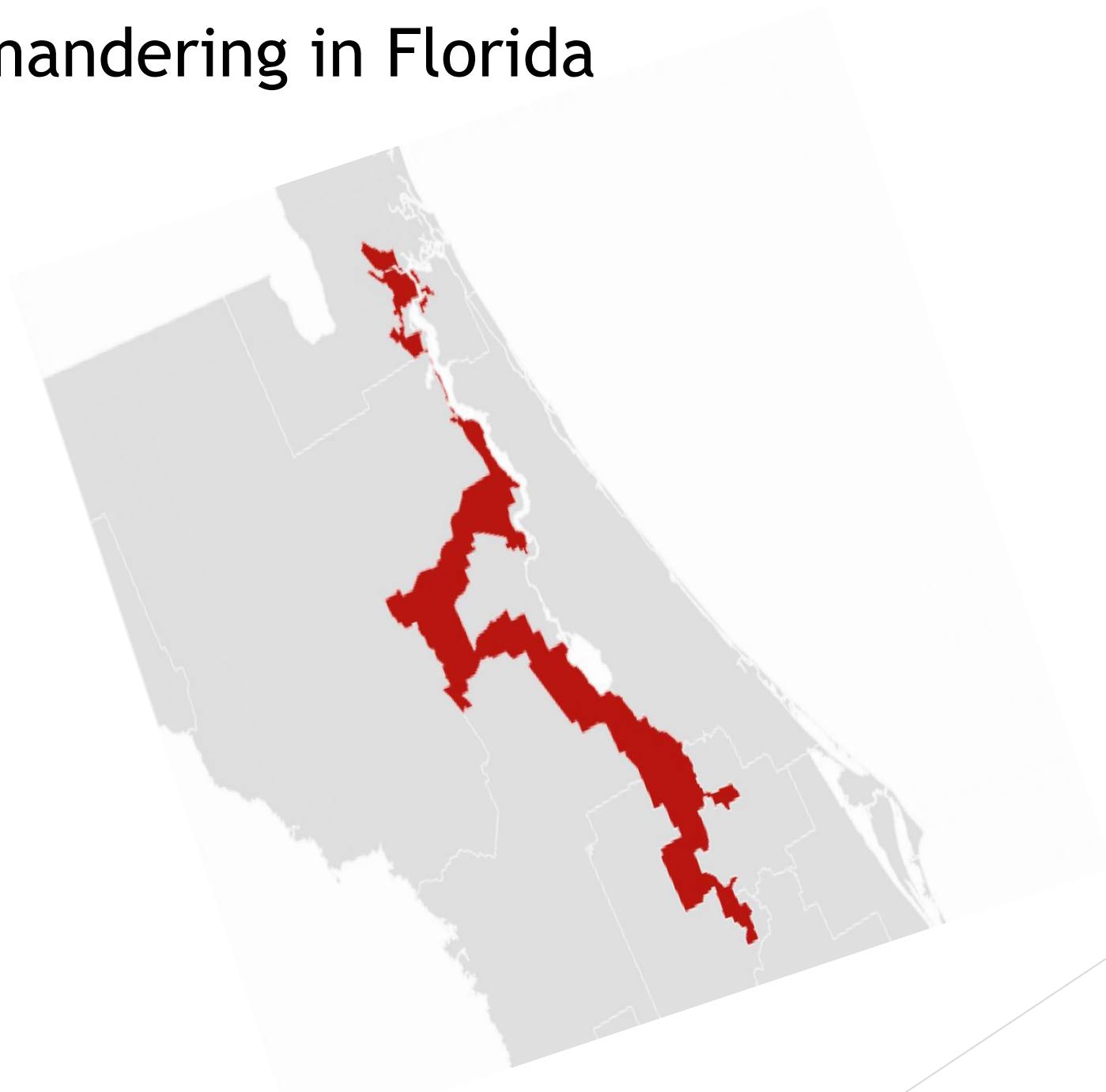
- ▶ Hence the Republicans were in a good position to gerrymander their states
- ▶ 39 states were controlled by Republican governors and legislatures
- ▶ Of the remaining 11 states led by Democrats, keep in mind that Washington State & California assign redistricting to independent commissions

Gerrymandering in swing states

- ▶ After 2010 election, several “swing” states fell under the gerrymandering process by the GOP
- ▶ What is a swing State?
- ▶ States whose voters are evenly divided between the parties
- ▶ Ex., Ohio, Virginia, North Carolina, Florida, Michigan, & Pennsylvania

- ▶ Swing states are vulnerable to partisan redistricting opportunities
- ▶ Permits winning political party to gerrymander swing states over to its side

Gerrymandering in Florida



- ▶ <http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/politics/state/os-interactive-corrine-brown-district-changing-map-htmlstory.html>

2016 Florida's state Supreme Court

- ▶ Fl Supreme Court determined that 8 districts were gerrymandered to favor Republican candidates
- ▶ 2010 FL passed constitutional amendment by 62% that bans redistricting to favor parties or incumbents who recently won their seats

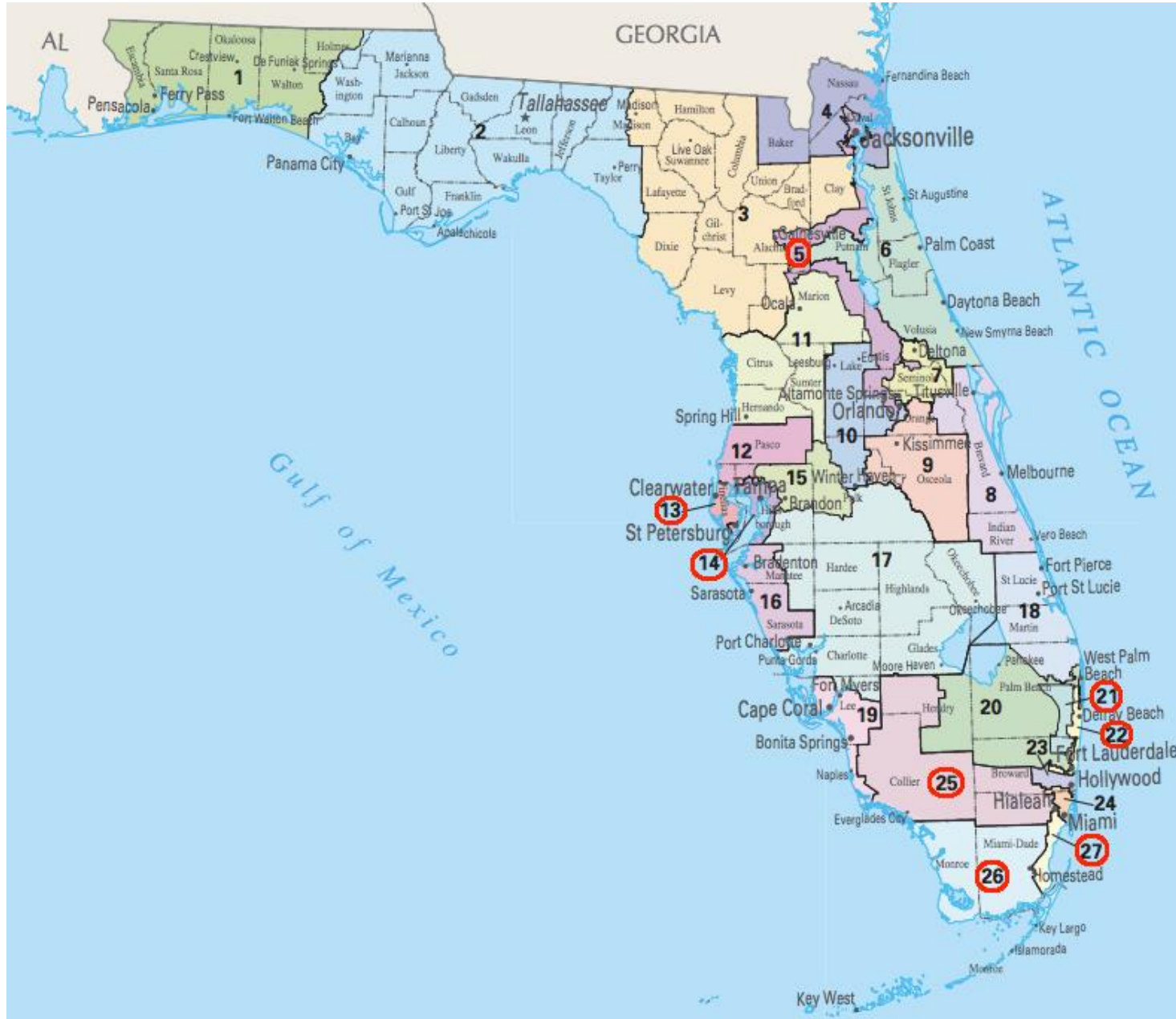
Need for “fair districts”

- ▶ It was uncertain that the courts would have ruled on this case
- ▶ But this ruling rejected maps that they considered done with partisan intent
- ▶ Legislature ordered to draw a new map to be submitted to the court for approval
- ▶ Called for more transparency

5-2 majority Court's ruling

- ▶ In 2012 Republicans won 51 percent of the US House votes – but they ended up with 63 percent of the seats, 17 out of 27
- ▶ But the League of Women Voters levied charges that the redistricting process was a sham
- ▶ That the Rick Scott's governorship was engaged in partisan Republican redistricting

8 districts circled in red to be redrawn



Look at district Corrine Brown's 5





► Observe how “bizarre” & contorted this district is

Court Stipulated;

- ▶ All meetings about decisions re redistricting have to be open to the public
- ▶ All non-public meetings about the maps have to be recorded for the record
- ▶ That citizens are able to submit alternative maps, & can offer feedback
- ▶ All emails & documents re: drawing of maps have to be preserved because many such documents were deleted the last time

Video of Brown's district

- ▶ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/video/2014/oct/29/gerrymander-florida-redistricting-gary-young-video>

How other countries/jurisdictions deal with redistricting ?

- ▶ Elections Commissions: Poland , Mexico & Kenya
- ▶ Independent Redistricting Commissions: Canada , Australia, Bahamas & UK
- ▶ Some are non-partisan, others are appointed by legislatures
- ▶ Commissions are instructed to create compact, geometric districts

Exercise 7 Project

- ▶ <http://www.xfinity.com/?dfaid=4053494&cmp=0&cid=4053494>
- ▶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florida%27s_congressional
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zD9A9GHoHKcdistricts>