

SWING VOTE SAM EXPLAINS

The Salamander

SAM SAYS

"It's supposed to be voters picking politicians. Not politicians picking voters."

Every ten years the House lines get redrawn, often by the people who hold the seats. The technique has a name: packing and cracking. Pack the other side into a few districts, or crack them across many. Same votes, different outcome. Both parties do it.

The word dates to 1812. Massachusetts Governor Elbridge Gerry signed a map so contorted a Boston paper drew it as a salamander and called it the Gerry-mander. He said his name with a hard G.

FairVote projects that 81 percent of House seats are already safe for one party. A few states hand the pencil to commissions. Most don't. Worth knowing which kind you live in.

The facts

1. The Constitution requires a count of the population every ten years, and House seats are divided among the states by that count.[1]
2. Packing concentrates one side's voters into a few districts; cracking splits them across many so they fall short everywhere.[2]
3. Governor Elbridge Gerry signed the Massachusetts redistricting bill on February 11, 1812. The Boston Gazette printed the salamander cartoon, the "Gerry-mander," on March 26, 1812. Gerry pronounced his name with a hard G.[3,4]
4. FairVote projected in April 2025 that 81 percent of House seats were already safe for one party in 2026, before the 2026 round of mid-decade redistricting.[5]
5. In ten states, commissions have primary responsibility for drawing congressional lines (NCSL). In California, voters approved Proposition 50 in November 2025, which replaces the commission's congressional map with a legislature-drawn one through 2030.[6,7]

What you can do

1. Find out who draws the district lines in your state. Your state or local election office can point you to it. **usa.gov/state-election-office**
2. When your state redraws its maps, go to a public hearing or send a comment.
3. Vote in your primary, where safe seats are really decided.
4. Show up.

Scan to watch Sam explain it

swingvotesam.com/issues/gerrymandering

Sources

1. National Archives, "The Constitution of the United States: A Transcription (Article I)". https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript
2. Brennan Center for Justice, "Gerrymandering Explained", updated May 14, 2026. https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/gerrymandering-explained
3. Library of Congress, In Custodia Legis, "Elbridge Gerry and the Monstrous Gerrymander", February 2017. https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2017/02/elbridge-gerry-and-the-monstrous-gerrymander/
4. Massachusetts Historical Society, "The Birth of the Gerrymander", September 2008. https://www.masshist.org/object-of-the-month/objects/the-birth-of-the-gerrymander-2008-09-01
5. FairVote, "18 Months from Election Day 2026, 81% of House seats are already decided", April 28, 2025. https://fairvote.org/press/house-elections-broken-release-2025/
6. National Conference of State Legislatures, "Creation of Redistricting Commissions", updated September 2026. https://www.ncsl.org/redistricting-and-census/creation-of-redistricting-commissions
7. California Secretary of State, "California Redistricting (Proposition 50)". https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/california-redistricting

Made by Mortimer Singer, swingvotesam.com. Not authorized by any candidate or candidate's committee. Swing Vote Sam is a fictional character created with AI.