

# **Letter To The Editor: Gerrymanders Invade Your Local Courthouse**

by Jim Nowlan  
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When the political party in power draws new district lines to increase its share of seats and squeeze the other party into near-nothingness, it is called gerrymandering. That is what Illinois Democrats did this past year with congressional and state legislative districts.

To celebrate the New Year, Democrats went further, taking a step way too far, across the line. They invaded your local courthouse to gerrymander the way judges are elected, by creating new subdistricts that will elect more judges from their party and fewer from the Republican side.

Lady Justice, the maiden from ancient Greece who holds the scales of justice in her hand, where the evidence can be weighed fairly and honestly for all to see, would not be happy. You see, the Greeks, the Romans, indeed our nation's founders held the judiciary to be, at least ideally, apart from and independent of the rough and tumble of partisan politics.

Not in Illinois, where Democratic partisanship has dominated the courts for decades, from the Illinois Supreme Court, now all the way down to your local judge.

Let me illustrate with what has been wrought in Madison County (it may be even worse elsewhere in Illinois), where friends there alerted me to the situation. With more than a quarter million residents nestled along the Mississippi River, across from St. Louis, Madison County was long a Democratic stronghold. Indeed, 17 of the present 21 circuit and associate judges in the county are Democrats. But the county has been trending Republican in the past decade. Democrats are worried they may soon lose their slim 5-4 majority of circuit judges, who appoint the associates.

So, in this New Year, without any public hearings or significant discussion in legislative committee, Democrats imposed on Madison and other mid-size counties across Illinois new subcircuits for judges, which will protect and enhance Democrat judgeships.

For Madison County, the Democrats in Springfield (from Chicago and Cook County, actually) added a unique wrinkle, which almost guarantees the first three new judges to be elected to fill retirements will be Democrats. This would guarantee their party's dominance long into what otherwise may well be a Republican future.

Playing politics with the courts is not healthy for democracy. In fact, the chief administrative officer of the Illinois Supreme Court sent a memo to her justices that called the new local court redistricting "an unmitigated disaster."

First, the Democrats reached into the judiciary to play partisan games simply because, giddy with power, they could! Dems holds more than two-thirds of the state senate seats and almost as big a fraction in the House. Indeed, this dominance results largely from gerrymandering a decade ago, which exaggerates statewide political party divisions.

Second, the Illinois Supreme Court itself was gerrymandered in 1962 to all but guarantee a Democratic majority on that court, which has been the case unbroken until 2020. In that year, however, the Democrats lost their elected majority on the state high court. So, what did the legislature do? You're right, they gerrymandered the state high court districts last year, in hopes of regaining their majority.

With shameless duplicity, Democratic leaders say they have created new subcircuits so that judges will represent communities of interest. This flies in the face, of course, of the new gerrymandered congressional and state legislative districts, which are often shaped like slithering snakes, communities be damned. One small Illinois city is shattered into four different state senate districts! Communities of interest—balderdash!

I appreciate that to the average voter, busy with trying to make a buck and rear a family during the disrupting pandemic, this matter is political inside baseball of the highest order, and almost impossible to follow. Yet those of us who know about this travesty must protest. Our courts are too important.

Lady Justice would not be smiling.

Nowlan is a former state legislator, senior aide to three unindicted Illinois governors, newspaper publisher, and professor of American politics. He is a volunteer senior adviser to the Judicial Fairness Project, a group created after the 2016 decision by the Illinois Supreme Court, which knocked off the ballot a citizens' initiative to create an independent redistricting commission.

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