

Artifact #1

ICE Agents Storm My Porch

by Maria Melendez Kelson.

The Indiscriminate Citizenry of Earth
are out to arrest my sense of being a misfit.
“Open up!” they bellow,
hands quiet before my door
that’s only wind and juniper needles, anyway.

You can’t do it, I squeak from inside.
You can’t make me feel at home here
in this time of siege for me and mine, *mi raza*.
Legalized suspicion of my legitimacy
is now a permanent resident in my gut.

“Fruit of the prickly pear!” they swear,
striding up to my table
to juice me a glass of pink nectar.
They’ve brought welcome baskets
stuffed with proof I’m earthling.

From under a gingham cover,
I tug a dark feather
iridescent green — cohering
to “magpie” thought,
to memory’s chatter,
to mind. Mine.

And here they have my mind translated
into a slate-surfaced pond, which
vibrates in the shape
of a cottonwood’s autumn molt,
which trees me to dirt, which soils me
heat & freeze —

But you’ll always be
one definitive document short! I complain.
Doubts can forever outstrip
your geo-logic.

For which they produce
a lock of my natal dust,
bronzed
to the fluttering fiber

of lacebark pine.

Where'd they get that stuff?

The baskets are bottomless,
and it's useless for me to insist
on being distinct.

Undergoing re-portation,
I'm awakened to a Center,

where walls
between all beings
are dreamt to dissolve.

Source: *Poetry* (March 2014)

1. How does the speaker's point of view shape the reader's understanding of state power and vulnerability, and what narrative choices amplify the imbalance between the agents and the family inside the home?
2. What role do domestic objects or sensory details play in symbolizing safety, threat, resistance, or identity? How do these symbols complicate the poem's emotional landscape?
3. The poem blends fear, defiance, and reflection. How effective is this tonal blend in communicating the lived experience of immigration enforcement, and what alternative tones might shift the poem's impact?
4. What larger ethical or political questions about citizenship, immigration policy, or civil liberties does the poem raise? How might these questions change depending on the reader's own socio-political context?
5. How does this poem converse with other literary or historical narratives of forced entry, surveillance, or state authority? In what ways does it reinforce, challenge, or reimagine those narratives?

Artifact #2

The World Keeps Ending, and the World Goes On

Play Audio [by Franny Choi](#)

Before the apocalypse, there was the apocalypse of boats:
boats of prisoners, boats cracking under sky-iron, boats making corpses
bloom like algae on the shore. Before the apocalypse, there was the apocalypse
of the bombed mosque. There was the apocalypse of the taxi driver warped
by flame. There was the apocalypse of the leaving, and the having left—
of my mother unsticking herself from her mother's grave as the plane
barreled down the runway. Before the apocalypse, there was the apocalypse
of planes. There was the apocalypse of pipelines legislating their way
through sacred water, and the apocalypse of the dogs. Before which was
the apocalypse of the dogs and the hoses. Before which, the apocalypse
of dogs and slave catchers whose faces glowed by lantern-light.
Before the apocalypse, the apocalypse of bees. The apocalypse of buses.
Border fence apocalypse. Coat hanger apocalypse. Apocalypse in
the textbooks' selective silences. There was the apocalypse of the settlement
and the soda machine; the apocalypse of the settlement and
the jars of scalps; there was the bedlam of the cannery; the radioactive rain;
the chairless martyr demanding a name. I was born from an apocalypse
and have come to tell you what I know—which is that the apocalypse began
when Columbus praised God and lowered his anchor. It began when a continent
was drawn into cutlets. It began when Kublai Khan told Marco, *Begin
at the beginning*. By the time the apocalypse began, the world had already
ended. It ended every day for a century or two. It ended, and another ending
world spun in its place. It ended, and we woke up and ordered Greek coffees,
drew the hot liquid through our teeth, as everywhere, the apocalypse rumbled,
the apocalypse remembered, our dear, beloved apocalypse—it drifted
slowly from the trees all around us, so loud we stopped hearing it.

Notes:

“Bedlam of the cannery” is borrowed from Martín Espada.

Source: *Poetry* (December 2019)

1. How does the poem redefine the concept of an “ending,”?
2. Define apocalypse. Connect its definition with a sense of history and memory within the poem?
3. What commentary is the poet making about visibility and empathy when it comes to natural disasters and global catastrophes?
4. What role does the poet’s perspective (culture, demographics, inherited history, etc.) shape the poem’s argument about resilience, survival, and collective trauma? How is *your* perspective different?
5. How does the poem encourage readers to reconsider their survival for the future: through passive endurance or as an active form of resistance?

Artifact #3:

‘Students First’: What Indiana’s school funding really looks like”

[Indiana Capital Chronicle](#)

November 12, 2025

Six Hoosier school communities sought to pass referendums in the most recent election. Five succeeded, and one fell short. Yet just a few weeks earlier, postcards went out to constituents all across Indiana in which state representatives touted the 5% increase in K-12 funding last session as the “highest funding level to date for Hoosier students.”

In addition, the postcards claimed that the latest educational results prove that Indiana is leading the way by “putting students first.” To be clear, adding even one penny to last year’s budget would also produce “the highest funding level to date.” While we at the Indiana Coalition for Public Education celebrate the successes of our public schools and the hard work of educators and students, we urge Hoosiers to look beyond the glossy postcard for a fuller picture.

While the highest dollar amount for K-12 education funding may have emerged from last session, it is *not* the highest level of funding we have seen. Ball State University Economist Michael Hicks has written that currently, when adjusted for inflation, “in K-12 we are spending \$100 less per student each year today than in 2010.” Also, in 2024, the Education Data Initiative reported that Indiana ranks 37th of 50 states in education spending per pupil.

Fewer Resources, more subsidies

Alongside the lack of budget support for public schools, bills passed last session are poised to reduce public education funding. A property tax overhaul, SEA1, will cut the revenue that public schools rely upon for transportation, capital projects, and referendums. Another new law will require public school districts to share their property taxes with charter schools — publicly funded, privately run entities — further draining resources. While Indiana struggles to pay teachers a competitive salary during a teacher shortage, these priorities do not add up.

Last session, lawmakers lifted the income cap on Indiana’s largest voucher program, making millionaires and billionaires eligible to receive taxpayer-funded subsidies for their private school tuition payments. More students are now getting a smaller piece of a shrinking education pie. Last school year alone, nearly a half billion dollars went to voucher schools, which legally don’t have to account for where the money goes.

Literacy is foundational to all learning, and early childhood education is foundational to all educational outcomes. Yet, while our legislature gave K-12 vouchers to the wealthiest Hoosier children for their private school tuition, they simultaneously took away vouchers for child care and slashed access to state-funded preschool for many of our most vulnerable kids.

Accountability for public school funding

While we celebrate the progress of Hoosier students and the dedication that got them back to pre-pandemic-level scores on the IREAD test, we should recognize the impact of outside dollars poured into improving reading. Much of the touted gains in literacy were made possible thanks to the \$2.9 billion distributed to Indiana by the federal government to help in recovery from the pandemic and learning “loss.” Additionally, students benefited from generous private funds from the Lilly Endowment for literacy. Money does matter.

The aforementioned postcard also highlighted Indiana as ranking third in a Parent Power category by an organization promoting “school choice.” Hoosier parents overwhelmingly choose to send their children to public schools. Parents know the value of strong public schools. It is time for them to use their voices, their power, to ensure that the state funds and supports the public schools every child deserves. It is time to ask why we must vote locally to tax ourselves through referendums when the state fails to meet its constitutional obligation to ensure our public schools have what they need—while opportunity gaps widen for Hoosier kids.

We celebrate the recent rise in test scores, as well as the magic that happens every day in our public schools. Yet, we also look to the future with concern and hope. Public schools are the heart of our communities — places that unite us across all backgrounds, accept all students, and empower our kids to become contributing members of our society. True commitment to “putting students first” means fully investing in our public schools so that every Hoosier child can thrive.

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1. How do we ensure that school funding (specifically in Indiana) is shared with equity across school districts within the same county/city?
 2. What are the implications of diverting previously allotted public school funds toward voucher and charter programs?
 3. How should “student success” be measured: through test scores, school structures, courses/opportunities offered, or something else?
 4. What accountability platforms should exist to ensure that increased education funding actually benefits students?
 5. Taking several facets of daily life into consideration, do you believe that parents in many parts of the state (or nation) *really* have a choice (beyond online schooling) of where to send their children to school?

Artifact #4

What to Know About Redistricting and Gerrymandering

<https://bipartisanpolicy.org/explainer/redistricting-and-gerrymandering-what-to-know/>

August 8, 2025 Lily Kincannon, J.D. Rackey, Michael Thorning

Redistricting is the process by which the boundaries of electoral districts, such as for Congress and state legislatures, are determined in each state.

Every 10 years, the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau reports to Congress the results of its [Decennial Census of Population and Housing](#), commonly known as the census. This includes population-based reapportionment among states of the 435 seats in the House of Representatives based on the current population distribution. Each state must then redraw boundaries to create districts with roughly equal numbers of constituents for its allotted number of congressional seats. Though the Constitution specifies the process of reapportionment, it provides less guidance on redistricting. Article 1, Section 4 states that:

The Times, Places and Manner of holding Elections for Senators and Representatives, shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof; but the Congress may at any time by Law make or alter such Regulations, except as to the Places of chusing Senators.

The Supreme Court has interpreted this clause to place primary responsibility with the states for redistricting, but it also clearly preserves the ability of Congress to set federal rules as appropriate.

While redistricting generally takes place following the census and reapportionment, that is not the only time it can occur. Numerous states have had to redistrict following judicial rulings that their maps violate principles of the Constitution or other laws around redistricting. Less frequently, states may choose to redistrict “mid-decade,” or between censuses, if their laws or state constitution permit. For example, Texas redistricted in 2003 even after the legislature enacted a map following the 2000 census, and after that map was subsequently replaced by a different court-ordered map.

Redistricting has been highly contentious throughout American history. The United States is relatively unique in that, in most states, line drawing takes place through the regular political process in state legislatures. In many other countries, independent and non-partisan line drawers—comprised of individuals who are not elected officials—oversee apportionment and districting. In the U.S., the explicitly political nature of redistricting has fostered cynicism and acrimony between the parties—and among the public—driven by beliefs that the parties use the line-drawing process to their own advantage and to their opponent’s disadvantage.

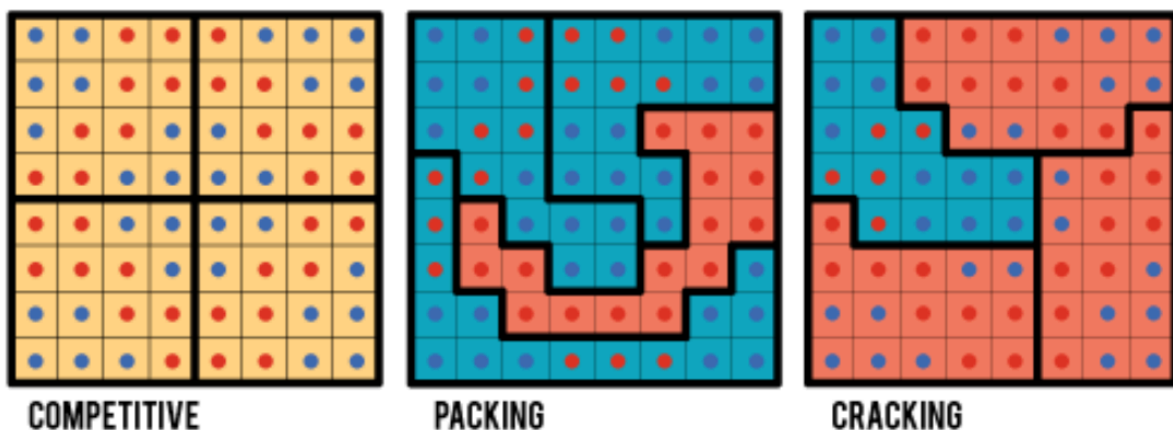
What is Gerrymandering?

Gerrymandering describes the strategic drawing of district boundaries to increase the likelihood of future electoral success for one or more parties. While we typically think of maps being gerrymandered to increase one political party’s advantage, “incumbent protection” gerrymanders also take place, where both parties agree to draw maps to the advantage of current officeholders regardless of party. The United States also has a long history of racial gerrymandering, where maps are drawn to increase or decrease the electoral influence of certain racial groups.

Two well-identified strategies of gerrymandering are:

Packing, where district lines confine voters of a particular party affiliation or identity group into a small number of districts, and

Cracking, when district lines spread voters across many districts to weaken their influence and prevent them from forming a majority.



Source: Daniel McGlone, Packing and Cracking: Exploring Pennsylvania’s Gerrymandered Congressional Districts (Jan. 23, 2018).

Gerrymandering can greatly affect a district's competitiveness, creating more "safe" seats for a particular party. This adds pressure to primary elections, where winning can depend on appealing to a small but passionate faction within the dominant party.

Gerrymandering has been a contested issue in federal courts for decades, particularly distinguishing between partisan and racial gerrymandering. Prohibitions on racial gerrymandering have been directly addressed and restricted by the [Voting Rights Act of 1965](#) and reinforced in subsequent court rulings. Partisan gerrymandering, on the other hand, remains far more legally complex. In *Rucho v Common Cause* (2019), the Supreme Court held that claims of partisan gerrymandering present political questions beyond the reach of federal courts, effectively leaving it up to plaintiffs to prove that any redistricting harm stems from something beyond party affiliation. Some states, however, explicitly prohibit partisan gerrymandering, and their state courts have struck down maps considered as partisan gerrymanders.

How is Redistricting Conducted?

Redistricting is a state process but is also governed by the U.S. Constitution, federal law, and judicial precedent. This results in variation between states as to who draws lines, when lines are drawn, and what the criteria are for drawing lines.^{[1](#)}

Basic criteria commonly used by states for drawing districts include:

- Contiguity, which ensures that all parts of a district are physically connected.

- Compactness, which while harder to quantify, generally calls for tightly drawn districts rather than irregular or elongated shapes.

- Preservation of communities of interests, which seeks to keep together groups of individuals due to social, cultural, racial, economic, or other common attributes.

- Preservation of other political subdivisions, which avoids projecting a district across county, city, or municipality lines.

As noted above, the Voting Rights Act sets statutory restrictions for redistricting meant to prohibit racial gerrymandering. Numerous Supreme Court rulings have also shaped the redistricting process. For example, in *Reynolds v. Simms* (1964), the Supreme Court held that the equal protection guarantees of the 14th Amendment requires that legislative districts must be made up of equal numbers of people.

In [LULAC v Perry](#) (2006), the Supreme Court upheld Texas's 2003 mid-decade redistricting. Writing separate from the opinion of the Court, Justice Anthony Kennedy noted that neither the U.S. Constitution nor federal law prohibit mid-decade redistricting. However, several states' constitutions, statutes, or legal precedents prohibit this practice. For example, Colorado's constitution specifies that redistricting must happen in tandem with reapportionment, which was reinforced by the Colorado Supreme Court in *People Ex Rel. Salazar v Davidson* (2003).²

Who Determines District Boundaries?

Who draws district lines varies by state. In most states, the legislature is responsible for drawing both their congressional and legislative district lines, typically through the standard lawmaking process and often subject to gubernatorial veto. Some states, such as Iowa and Maine, rely on independent advisory commissions that help draft maps, though approval rests with the state legislature. In some states, including Connecticut and Texas, a backup commission steps in to complete the task if legislators fail to agree on a map by the state-issued deadline. In other states, courts may serve as the backup when the legislature cannot agree.

Some states instead use commissions, typically composed of a bipartisan collection of elected officials or party appointees. A growing number of states have adopted independent commissions that exclude current officeholders to reduce partisan influence and are composed of citizens.³

Two states, New York and Virginia, use a hybrid approach where a commission and the legislature share responsibility.

Conclusion

Redistricting plays a critical role in determining political representation, with rules and processes that vary widely by state. While it is required following the decennial census, some states can and do redraw maps more frequently. BPC's Commission on Political Reform made several recommendations for improving the redistricting process, including ones related to line-drawing criteria and the use of commissions to draw lines.

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1. How might some see gerrymandering as ‘fair and appropriate’?
 2. In what ways can gerrymandering undermine—or in some cases enhance—minority representation?
 3. How do technological advances in data analytics and mapping software amplify the effects of gerrymandering, and what ethical considerations arise from their use?
 4. To what extent is gerrymandering a symptom of deeper political polarization amongst parties, and how might reforms address polarization and division between parties?
 5. If you were tasked with designing a fair redistricting system for a diverse state, what criteria would you prioritize (e.g., compactness, diversity, demographics, special interests), and how would you justify those choices in terms of democratic principles?