



State redistricting, representation, and competition

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Drawing electoral boundaries that favor a particular party, class, or politician - infamously resembling a salamander



What is Gerrymandering?

You know it when you see it?

Even compact, unintentional, normal looking districts can be a gerrymander (Groffman and King 2007; Chen and Rodden 2013) in terms of either:

1. Incumbency protection
2. Partisan/Class/Ethnic advantages
 - **Splitting** party, class, or ethnic communities into a less sizable block across separate districts
 - **Jamming** party, class, or ethnic communities into select districts to lessen their influence in other districts (i.e., like-minded clustering)

Should commissions be politically neutral, balanced, or agnostic?



What's the problem we're trying to solve by removing legislature from redistricting?

1. **Party Polarization** - little to no effect
2. **Electoral Competition** - can improve *general election* competition
3. **Better Representation** - evidence either bad or good depending on definition



If it is polarization

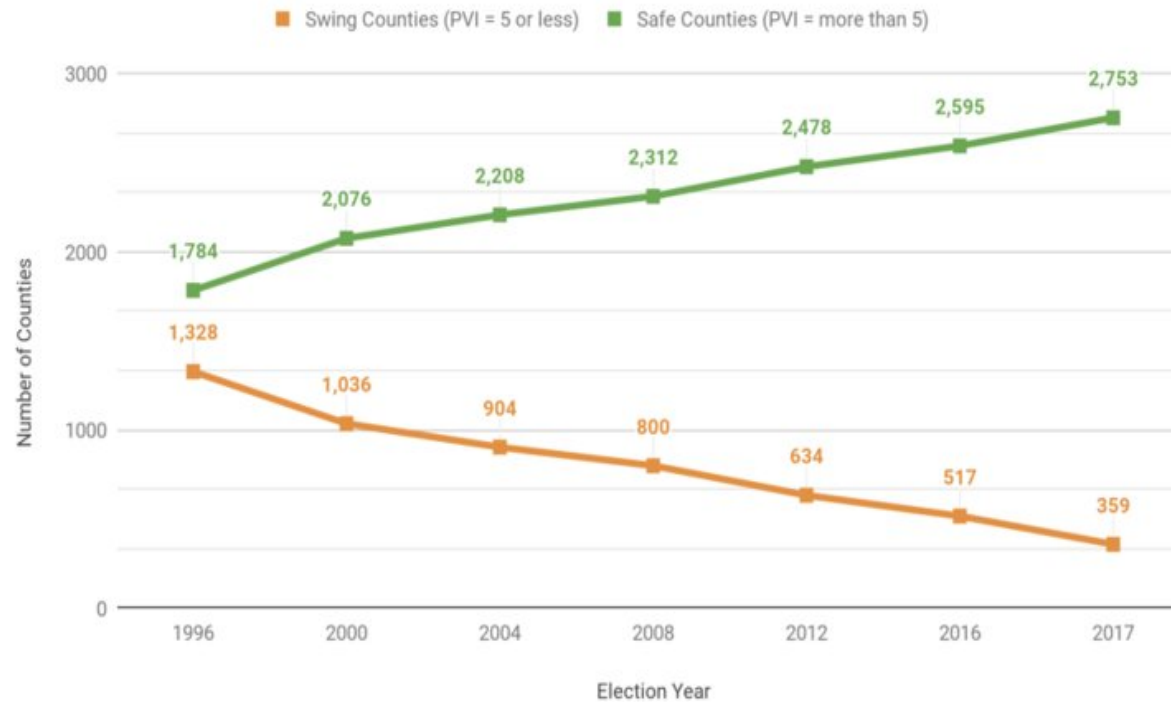
Let's look somewhere else: Gerrymandering has little to do with polarization.

1. States and the U.S. Senate polarize at same rate as U.S. House
2. House districts polarize more so within cycles than between
3. Counties are polarizing at the same rate



County graph

Figure 2: Cook Partisan Voter Index - Swing vs. Safe Counties, 1996-2017



(Charles Hunt, University of Maryland; legbranch.com)



Two competing views:

- *Elitist*: greater competition makes parties more attentive to voters
- *Retrospective/Relational*: greater competition represents failure of representation

What about competition?

Legislative maps are often less competitive

Court-drawn and commission drawn districts produce **more competitive** districts than legislatively drawn districts in **general** elections (Carson, Crespin, and Williamson 2014).

- Commission more competitive than Court
- But more competition also means more turnover and less experienced representatives (sort of like term limits)

Circumstantial evidence that state Republican gerrymanders have created their growing rates of ideological primary challengers.

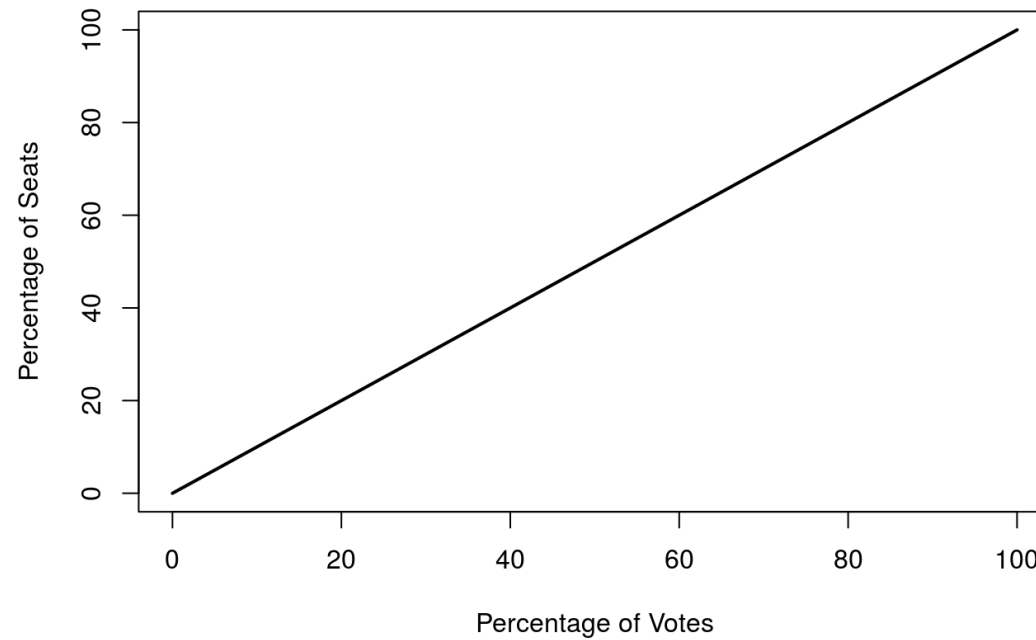


How do we fairly translate votes into seats?

Are voters better or worse off when represented by gerrymandered districts?

Does Gerrymandering Harm Representation?

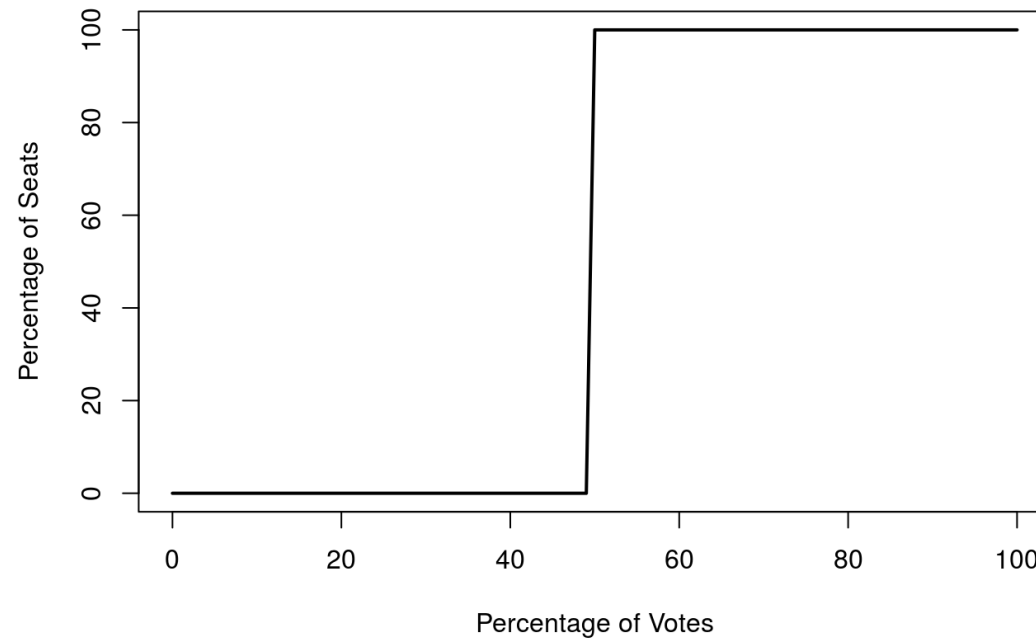
Proportionality



Proportional representation, but perhaps less responsive/decisive



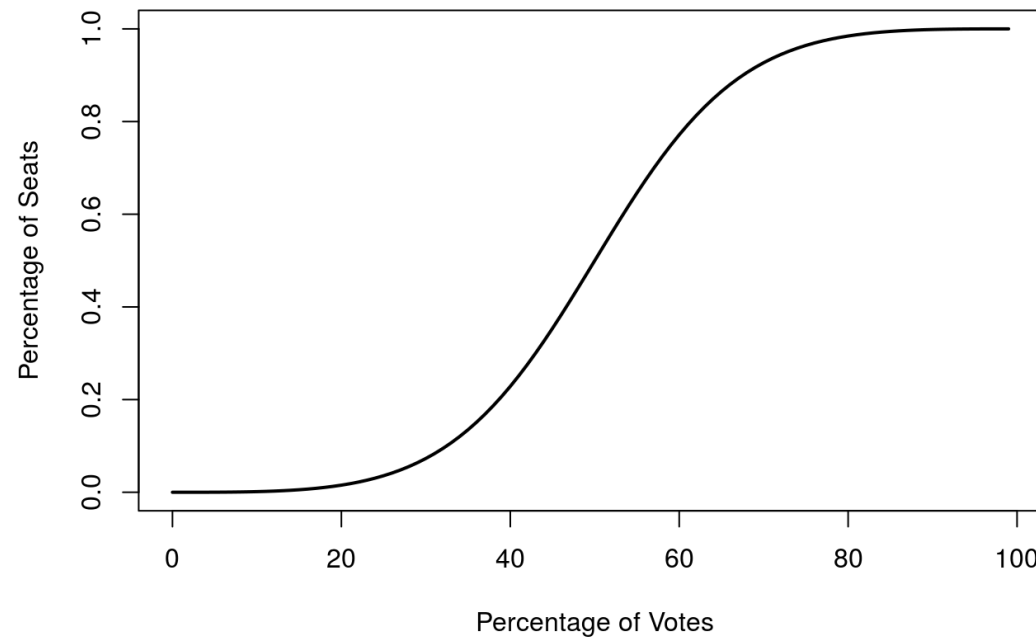
Winner-take-all



Non-proportional representation, but very responsive/decisive



What is typical? Majoritarianism



A cube function, which is a mix of both



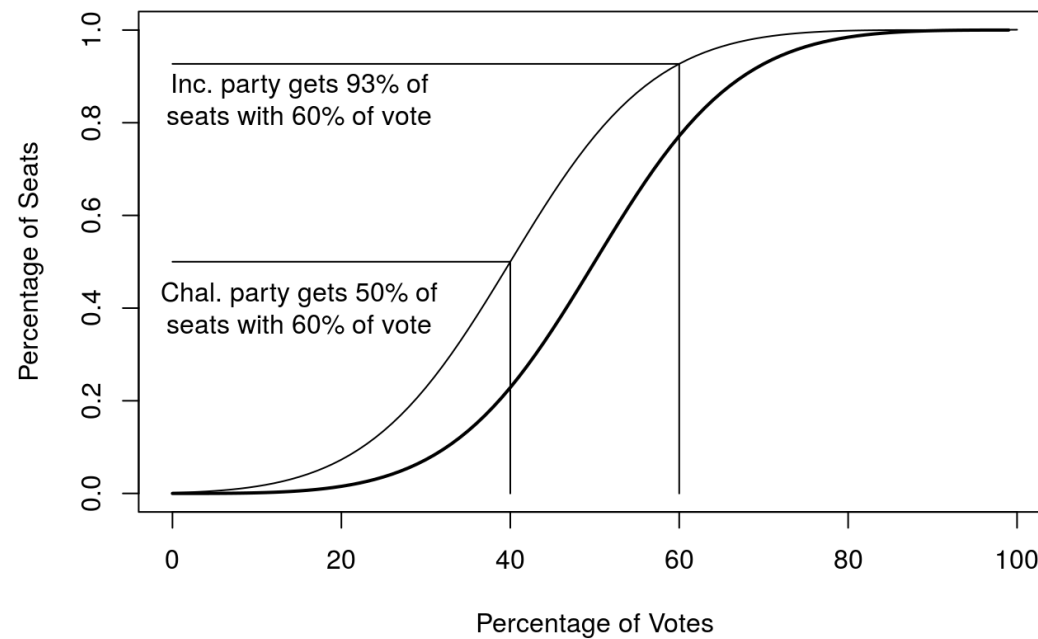
Scholars emphasize partisan symmetry concept of fairness

Each one of these relationships fit a **partisan symmetry** standard of fairness

- it treats both parties equally when they perform equally.
- i.e., winning 100% of the seats with 55% of the vote is not evidence of partisan bias



Assymetry as evidence of bias



The Efficiency Gap

Advocacy groups and Supreme Court have promoted the **efficiency gap**, based on the unclear idea of "wasted vote" (any vote not contributing toward victory)

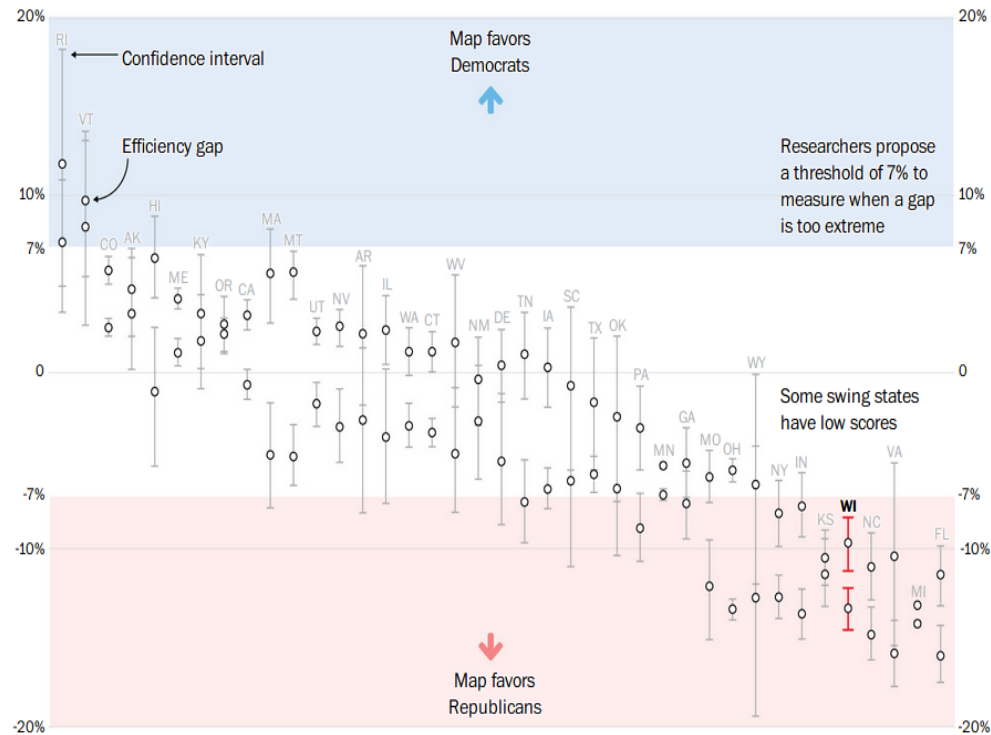
$$\text{EfficiencyGap} = \frac{\text{WastedVoteParty}_A - \text{WastedVoteParty}_B}{\text{TotalVotes}}$$

Little scholarly support outside Law Review articles:

- Questionable instrumental rationale for definition of "wasted vote"
- Smaller gap is neither a sufficient nor necessary indicator of asymmetry (minimizing gap requires a vote-seat ratio of 2-to-1 under equal turnout)
- Efficiency gaps often are large in at-large district states (WY,DE)



Jackman's State House Estimates



(washingtonpost.com)



Are Michigan districts biased?

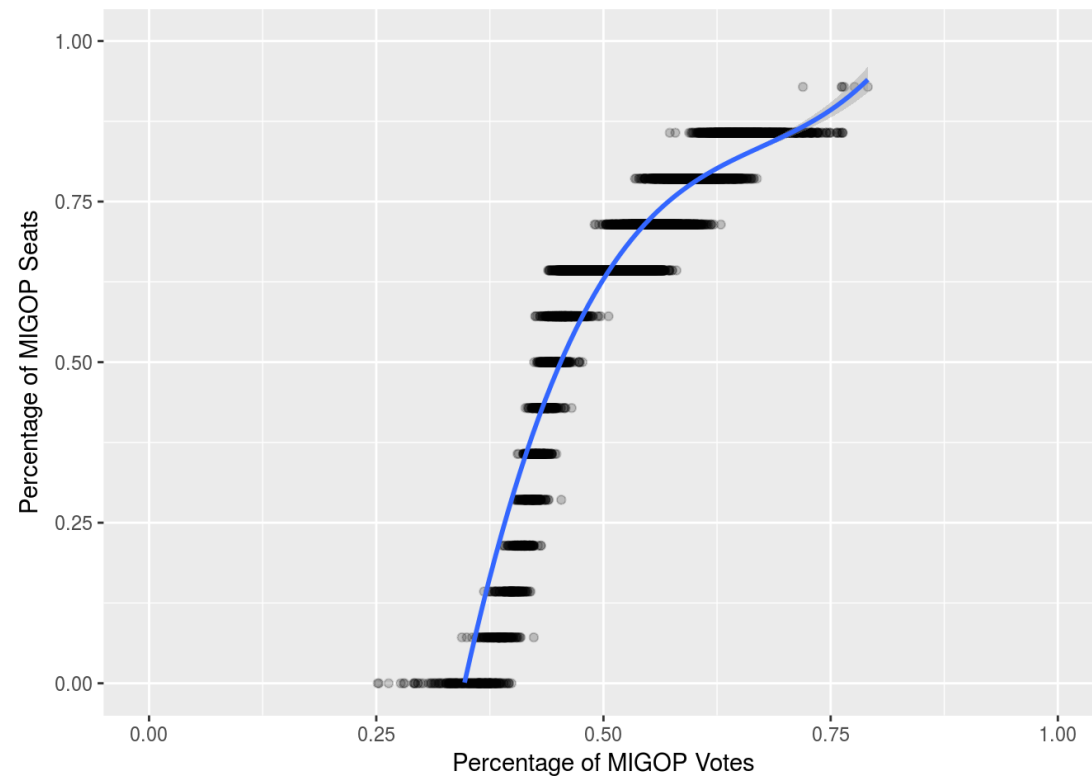
Cannot answer definitively since:

1. Hard to measure with a few election results
2. Hard to use actual State House/Senate votes (non-competitive seats)
3. Hard to use high profile elections as measure of party support (vote for candidate or party?)

I use a sample of Board of Education, President, Secretary of State and other statewide votes to estimate typical partisan split, and then simulate various elections from those estimates.



A rough estimate



(via Gelman and King 1994)



There are concepts of representation that support *Jamming*

Descriptive representation: Gerrymandering can be beneficial (Majority-minority districts)

Utilitarian rationale: Politically homogenous districts somewhat preferable

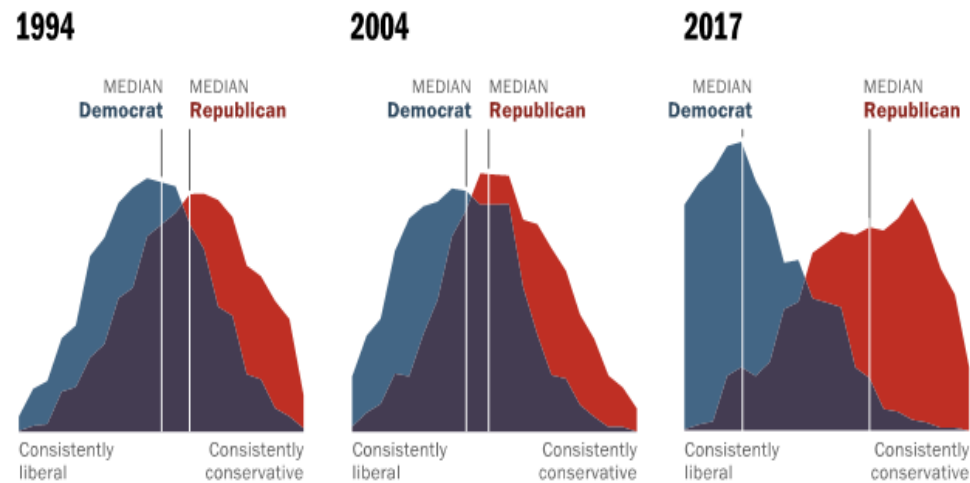
- Evidence suggests voter satisfaction higher in homogenous districts



There's no such thing as an independent

Democrats and Republicans more ideologically divided than in the past

Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values



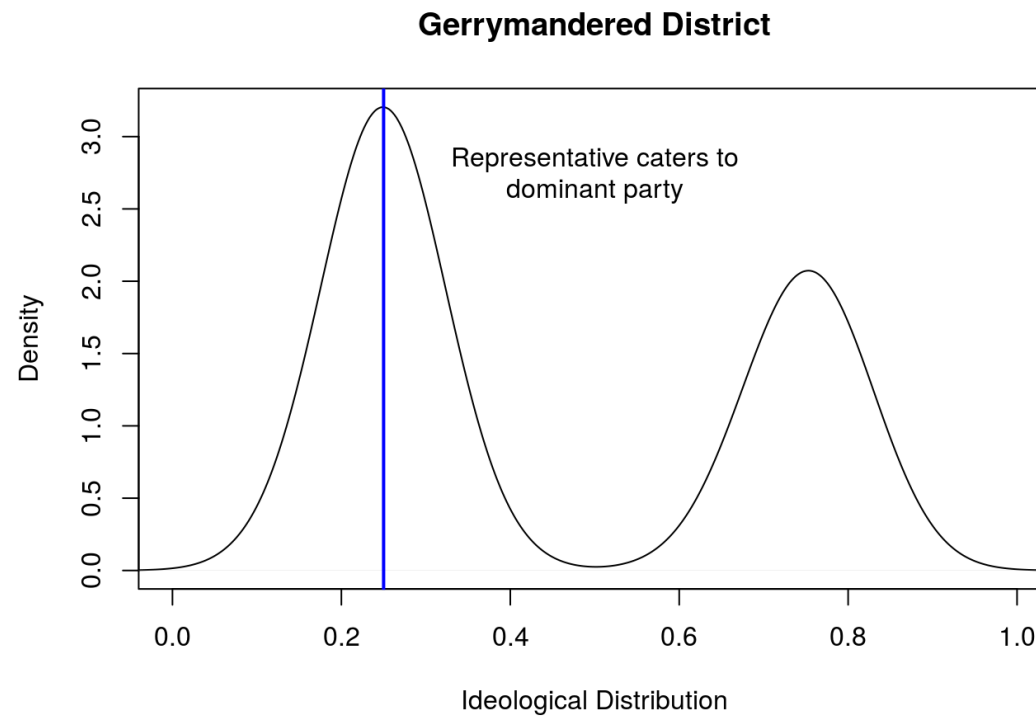
Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see methodology). The blue area in this chart represents the ideological distribution of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents; the red area of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents. The overlap of these two distributions is shaded purple.

Source: Survey conducted June 8-18, 2017.

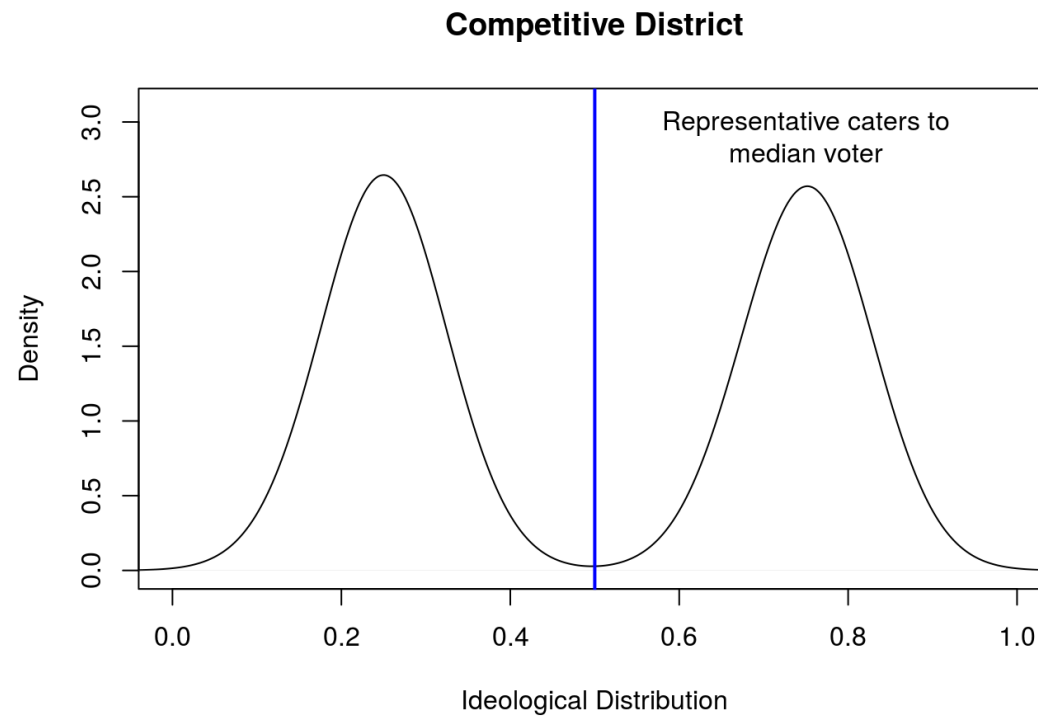
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Some happy partisans



No happy partisans



Conclusion

There is room for improvement: Michigan districts are not pure

But fears about gerrymandering and lack of competition obscure the many different (and somewhat oppositional) qualities we seek from our representatives.

