

People's Maps Commission: Commentary on the Wisconsin Supreme Court decision

Posted on Tuesday, Apr 19, 2022

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Concerned former commissioners of the People's Maps Commission (PMC) of Wisconsin, advocating for nonpartisan redistricting, vehemently opposes the state Supreme Court decision of April 15, 2022 now approving the previously rejected Legislative maps. The result, stemming from the Court's divided 4-3 vote, will be a gerrymander of the state worse than in 2011. Packing the increasing population of black voters in Milwaukee into 5 Assembly districts instead of the current 6 or the more appropriate 7 ultimately worsens a GOP's radicalization with an artificial but near veto-proof majority and a further general erosion of the core values of our democracy.

The PMC, composed of private citizens of multiple ethnicities and backgrounds across the political spectrum, in the fall of 2021 published election maps that reflected statewide opinions. 72% of Wisconsinites, including 63% of Republicans, favored nonpartisan redistricting. The PMC maps, which accomplished simply what the people of Wisconsin asked in polling, eight public hearings, and over 30 county referendums, were given an "A" grade from the nonpartisan Princeton University Gerrymandering Project. In contrast, the legislative maps received "F's" via the same grading scale.

Unsurprisingly, the legislature rejected the nonpartisan and citizen-favored PMC maps. Ultimately, on November 30, 2021, the state Supreme Court declared they would only consider maps that deviated least from the current maps. The People's Map Commission's maps did not meet this "least change" criterion and were subsequently removed from consideration.

A person must wonder why the Justices prioritized “least change.” There is nothing about “least change” in the Wisconsin Constitution, nor the statutes. The legislature certainly didn’t follow “least change” when it redrew maps in 2010. Now, the blatantly politicized state Supreme Court has gone further in ignoring the will of the supermajority of Wisconsin people by approving the current legislative maps.

The PMC encourages Wisconsin voters to be educated about and understand how the April 15 decision by the state Supreme Court is the opposite of what most voters wanted. The ruling is a deep insult to the values most in our state hold and is, furthermore, a greater insult to democracy.

A quote from Abraham Lincoln is as appropriate today as it was at the time of our Civil War- “America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves”.

The April 15 decision by the state Supreme Court is grievously inconsistent with who we are in Wisconsin as a people. Voters need to respond by making this an election issue- in local and statewide races. This fall, choose those candidates that would pledge to reject the state Supreme Court decision and advocate for and vote for legislators who support a nonpartisan redistricting process. The State Supreme Court justices come up for re-election in a staggered 10-year cycle. There is one justice up for re-election in 2023 who voted to worsen the gerrymander and further erode our democracy on April 15. The state supreme court justice election in 2023 would be an appropriate time for the supermajority of voters in Wisconsin who value democracy to demonstrate their power.

-WI Peoples Maps Commission