

**Effects of Gerrymandering  
American Government  
Mr. Krieger**

## **Effects of Gerrymandering on Democracy**

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*Instructions:* Read the following excerpt of a speech by former U.S. Senator George Mitchell and answer the questions below. The remarks below are from a 2013 lecture during which Senator Mitchell discussed what he sees as threats to democracy in the United States.

*Senator George Mitchell, in a speech called "The Importance of Listening," as part of the Fall 2013 Speaker Series "Politics Then and Now, In Maine and the Nation," September 26, 2013.*

"[L]ook at some of the maps of districts in the U.S. House of Representatives today. There you will see the fruits of highly computerized and partisan redistricting. It has now developed to a degree that most of those who serve today in the House of Representatives do not run in competitive districts. Most estimates are that, of the 435 House seats, fewer than 50 are genuinely competitive.

"Most members now sitting in House seats know that the outcome of the next election in their district will be in the favor of their party or the other. In other words, you can predict the party outcome now because of the manner in which redistricting has occurred. The Republicans have been most successful at this, the last time around for redistricting, because they controlled more State legislatures after the 2010 election, the last Census year. Democrats, there in the past, did much the same.

"What we have to do is to adopt a process whereby we take political partisanship out of the redistricting that occurs every 10 years after the Census, as much as humanly possible. We must because, at this pivotal moment in American history and particularly in the House of Representatives, it is the nominating process, the party primary, and not the general election that matters most! It no longer matters who was nominated in most districts: the Republican will win in some, and the Democrat will win in others.

"We all know that in our country we have an embarrassingly low level of participation in elections. In a hotly contested presidential election, it is between 50 and 60%. In the mid-term congressional elections, far fewer than that; and in the nominating primary process, only a tiny fraction of the American people participate. This gives hugely disproportionate influence to the most activist, the most ideological, the most rigid, and the most uncompromising persons in their parties, on both sides...."

**Answer the three (3) questions on the following page**

1. What arguments does Senator Mitchell make about the influence of gerrymandering on U.S. politics?
2. Do you agree or disagree with Senator Mitchell's viewpoint? Please explain.
3. What questions do you have about gerrymandering? Please write at least three (3) questions that we can discuss when we explore gerrymandering during our Zoom virtual class session.