

Q&A on Issue 4

► **What is Issue 4?** A proposed constitutional amendment that would change the system of drawing new boundaries every 10 years for Ohio's 18 congressional, 33 state Senate and 99 Ohio House districts.

► **Who draws the district lines now?** The five-member State Apportionment Board, which is composed of two members of the General Assembly from opposite parties, the governor, the secretary of state and the state auditor. The board approves new boundaries for the Ohio House and Senate districts to reflect population shifts at the beginning of each decade. The General Assembly then draws new congressional boundaries.

► **Who would draw the lines under Issue 4?** You would. Residents would be invited to submit their own redistricting plans. An Ohio Independent Redistricting Commission would be created to oversee the process and adopt a plan. The commission would be composed of five members, two of whom would be chosen by sitting judges from opposite parties. Those two members then would select the remaining three members under a set of criteria which, among other things, prohibit politicians or registered lobbyists

from serving on the commission.

► **What are Issue 4's rules for drawing districts?** The commission would have to adopt the plan with the highest "competitiveness number" under a mathematical formula aimed at creating the most number of districts that both political parties have a relatively equal chance of winning. The commission could accept a plan that scores two points lower on the competitiveness scale for congressional districts and four points lower for legislative districts if the plan does a better job of making the districts compact and keeps communities intact.

► **What are the arguments for and against Issue 4?** Supporters say a new process is needed to take politics out of redistricting. They say that the political party controlling the State Apportionment Board and legislature skews districts in its favor so much that competitive legislative and congressional elections are almost nonexistent. Opponents agree that a new process is needed, but say Issue 4 is the wrong answer because, in the interest of competitiveness, it would create a hodgepodge of districts that snake across Ohio and toss together voters who may not have much in common. They also contend that an appointed board would lack accountability to the public.

► **The full text of Issue 4 ran in The Dispatch on Oct. 18 and Oct. 25. It will be run again on Nov. 1.**

REDISTRICTING

FROM PAGE A1

on the Nov. 8 ballot, would transfer responsibility for drawing Ohio's districts every 10 years from a political board controlled by one party or the other to an independent, bipartisan, five-member appointed commission.

If the issue passes, citizens would be invited to submit plans with boundaries for Ohio's 18 congressional, 33 state Senate and 99 state House districts. The commission would be required to adopt the plan that creates the highest number of competitive districts — those that both parties have a reasonable chance of winning.

Proponents of Issue 4 argue that during the past four decades, the political parties controlling the board have skewed the districts so much that competitive districts today are almost nonexistent.

As a result, they contend, moderating general elections has taken a back seat to partisan primaries requiring Democrats to run to the left and Republicans to the right, creating legislative bodies that don't represent the dominant political center.

"Gerrymandering and its partisan approach to drawing district boundaries and developing safe districts leads to polarization in the political process," said Samuel Gresham Jr., director of outreach for Common Cause Ohio.

He and others point to the 2004 elections as proof that districts are a virtual lock for incumbents.

• In Ohio's 18 congressional races, the 12 Republican incumbents were re-elected by an average margin of 29 percentage points; the six Democratic incumbents were re-elected by an average of 59 points.

• In the 16 races for the Ohio Senate, Republicans won 13 seats by an average margin of 39 points; Democrats won three seats by an average of 32 points.

• In the 99 races for Ohio House, Republicans won 57 seats by an average of 34 points and Democrats won 42 seats by an average of 57 points.

Democrats gerrymandered when they controlled the line-drawing process in the 1970s and '80s. Since then, Republi-

cans have created many more current can't-lose districts for their candidates. Thus, the GOP retained lopsided control over the Ohio congressional and legislative delegations even though 49 percent of Ohio voters last year cast ballots for Democratic congressional candidates and 48 percent voted for Democratic Ohio House candidates.

"It's the incumbent politicians who don't want to change the system that got them elected," said Chellie Pingree, national president of Common Cause. "They want to stay in power more than they want to give voters a voice."

GOP opponents of Issue 4 agree that the redistricting process should be reformed but say the proposed amendment is the wrong method. With its requirement that competitiveness supersede other factors in drawing districts — including making them compact and keeping communities intact — the result would be a mishmash of districts snaking from one end of Ohio to the other, they say.

"The real question is whether going to the system proposed under Issue 4 is an improvement, and I would argue that it is not," said state Rep. Kevin DeWine, R-Fairborn. "The commission would not have the discretion to come up with competitive districts that actually look reasonable, because the amendment is so strict."

To illustrate, the Ohio First Voter Education Fund, the group opposing Issue 4, has produced a sample congressional map with districts shaped like string beans. The commission would be required to adopt it, the group says, because of its high competitiveness score, the highest possible score of 36, based on 2 points per congressional district, is theoretically impossible, the group says.

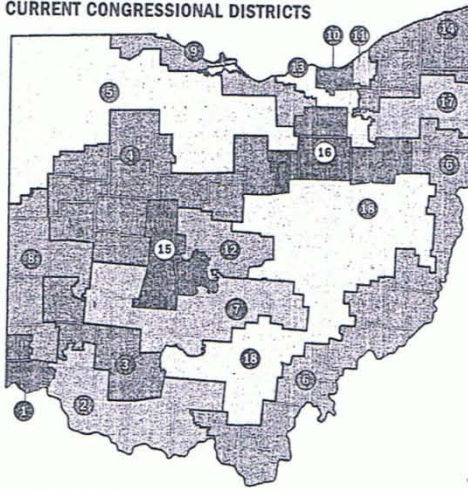
"Unless you want districts that stretch from Lima to Youngstown and from Akron to the Ohio River, you cannot get equal numbers of registered Republicans and registered Democrats in the same district," said David L. Hopcraft, spokesman for Ohio First.

In response, Reform Ohio Now, the pro-Issue 4 group, pro-

Pick a map

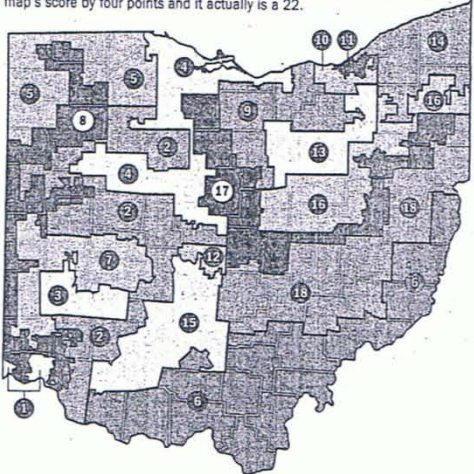
State Issue 4 would create an independent panel to draw legislative and congressional districts based on a formula emphasizing political competitiveness. Much of the debate over the proposal has centered on what kind of map would result.

CURRENT CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS



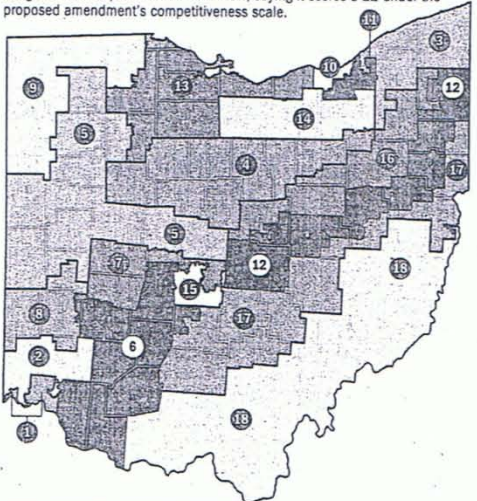
ONE POSSIBILITY

Ohio First, the anti-Issue 4 group, says this map or one similar to it would have to be adopted because it scores a high 26 on the competitiveness scale. Ellen Cyran, an analyst at Cleveland State University — commissioned by Reform Ohio Now, a pro-Issue 4 group — said Ohio First inflated the map's score by four points and it actually is a 22.



ANOTHER POSSIBILITY

Cyran and other analysts at Cleveland State University drew this congressional map for Reform Ohio Now, saying it scores a 22 under the proposed amendment's competitiveness scale.



Sources: Cleveland State University, Dispatch research

TOM BAKER | DISPATCH

duced its own maps, which it says show competitive and more-compact districts.

Bob Dykes, a political consultant who has represented Democrats in past line-drawing battles, said Ohio First put out

its maps to divert attention from the current unfair and contorted district boundaries.

"They're distracting from the fact that there is no competition in the system today," he said. jhallett@dispatch.com

OHIO BALLOT | ISSUE 4

Redistricting comes under scrutiny

By Joe Hallett
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Through Friday, the Dispatch will publish stories about the five proposed constitutional amendments facing Ohio voters Nov. 8. Today, the focus is on Issue 4, which would transform the way congressional and legislative districts are drawn.

by not unduly splitting towns or wards. Carry a political appointment, compared with members of his party to give the Democratic-Republican an upper hand in elections against the Federalists.

Hence, gerrymandering — the drawing of legislative and congressional boundaries to favor one party over the other — was born. It's practiced with a vengeance ever since. State Issue 4 is designed to end the practice in Ohio. The proposed constitutional amendment.

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Come Election Day, when fall yard signs more ubiquitous than spring dandelions have spoiled the Ohio landscape and 30-second television ads have numbed the mind, blame it on Elbridge Gerry.

The Massachusetts governor unkind in 1811 what John Adams had sought to ensure 31 years earlier in the Constitution of Massachusetts — political districts that were compact and contiguous and would protect communities of interest