My View Richard Mason

Restrain gerrymandering to improve democracy  
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By Richard Mason – Santa Fe New Mexican, March 4, 2025

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Major institutions that evaluate the status of democracy in the world have cited gerrymandering as a contributing factor to the erosion of democracy in the U.S. *The Economist* publishes an annual report on the status of democracies in the world. It rates the U.S. 17th in the world — calling it a flawed democracy. It cites the Electoral College and gerrymandering as major structural flaws.

New Mexico did its part in addressing the question of the Electoral College by passing a joint resolution in support of the National Popular Vote. New Mexico can do its part in addressing the second major flaw by creating an independent redistricting commission to constrain gerrymandering.

The United States is the only developed country that allows legislators to draw their own districts. Those other countries recognize the inherent conflict of interest in allowing legislators to choose their voters.

Despite all the publicity around partisan gerrymandering, most gerrymandering is about incumbency protection — when legislators of major parties collude to protect one another’s seats. So, major party candidates have to worry more about their primary races and much less about the general election. That contributes to the polarization we are experiencing in the United States and in New Mexico.

Incumbency protection leads to the very high number of uncontested legislative races in New Mexico. Potential candidates of an opposing party know that they cannot win a race when the two major parties have colluded to create safe districts for one or the other party.

According to Ballotpedia, in the 2022 election, 45.7% of New Mexico legislative seats were uncontested. Compare this to the percentage of uncontested legislative seats in three states with independent redistricting commissions: California 2%; Colorado 7.3%; and Michigan 0.7%.

New Mexico legislators can make New Mexico a leader in rebuilding democracy in the United States. They can support Senate Joint Resolution 9 that will allow the voters of New Mexico to decide via a constitutional amendment if they want an independent redistricting commission.

*Richard Mason lives in Rio Rancho.*Top of Form

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