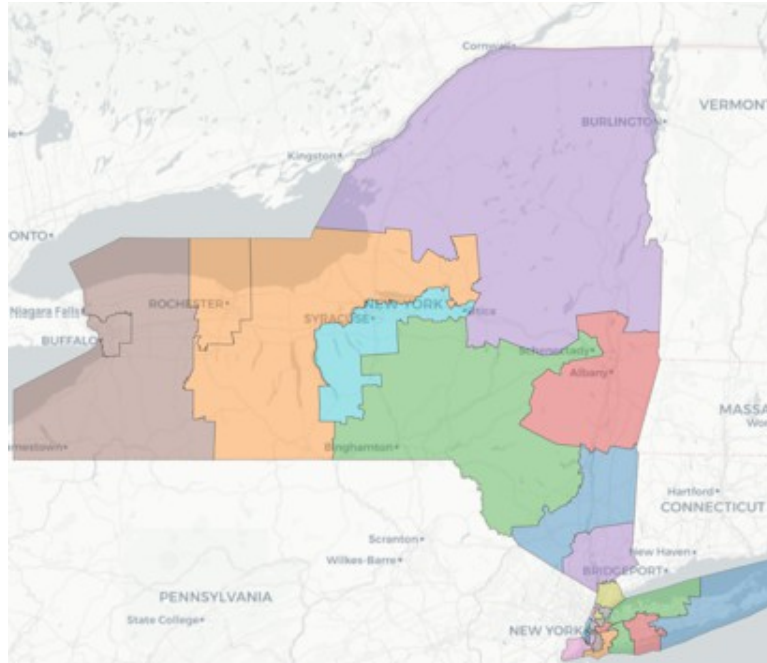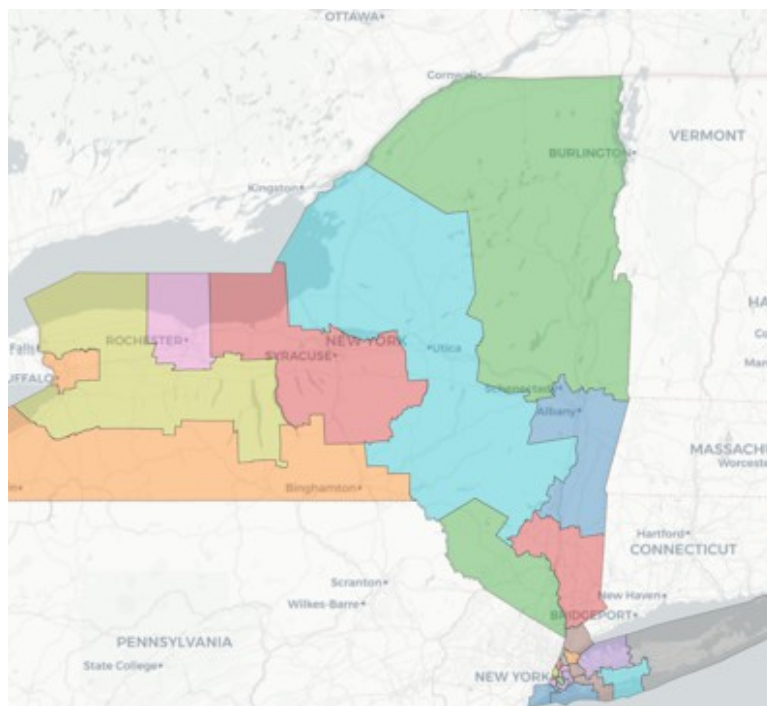# Redistricting: The Commissioners Propose Competing Maps

On September 15, New York's Independent Redistricting Commission, after failing to reach bipartisan agreement, released two sets of draft maps. The Democratic commissioners proposed one set, while the Republicans proposed a different set. Both sides claimed that neither set was drawn to favor one party or the other. The draft maps are far from final, with the Commission scheduling 14 hearings across the state to gain input from New Yorkers about the plans.

Here is the Congressional redistricting map proposed by Democratic Commission members.

Here is the Congressional redistricting map proposed by Republican commission members.

The new lines won't go to the state legislature for approval until early next year. When that happens, Democratic supermajorities in both the state Senate and the Assembly could overrule the Commission and redraw district lines themselves. Governor Kathy Hochul has said that she favors ensuring the maximum number of Democratic seats. And a few state senators from New York City have already said that they won't commit to the lines drawn by the Commission. Also, a ballot initiative that will likely get approved in November will tweak some of the redistricting laws (*see the article* "Five Ballot Proposals" *in this newsletter*).

The New York maps will have national impact as Democrats try to retain their narrow majority in the U.S. House of Representatives. Republican-dominated state legislatures around the country are redrawing maps to benefit their party, so the question is whether New York State Democrats will change the maps to work in their favor.

Here are some key features of the two competing redistricting plans.

Congressional Districts. Following the 2020 Census, New York State will lose one of its Congressional seats, going from 27 to 26. Beyond that, the new lines shown in the dueling maps would produce different results. The greatest differences would be in the upstate Congressional districts, which are the reddest areas of the state and the areas with the greatest population loss. For example, whereas the Republican map keeps District 23, currently held by the retiring GOP Rep. Tom Reed, mostly intact, the Democratic map splits up the district so as to group more Republicans together. In the Democratic map, Utica and Syracuse, now both represented by Republicans, are combined into one district that favors Democrats, and areas in the conservative Southern Tier are linked to right-leaning parts of the Finger Lakes instead. One exception to this trend is the far northern district now represented Rep. Elise Stefanik, considered a rising star in the GOP. Neither the Democratic map nor the

Republican map changes the borders of her district significantly, so for now her seat appears safe – unless the Democratic majority decides to make changes when the plans are submitted to the legislature for approval.

Downstate, the GOP map would remove one seat from Long Island, leaving Democratic Reps. Kathleen Rice and Tom Suozzi competing for the same seat and extending Democratic Rep. Greg Meeks' district into Nassau County. By contrast, the Democratic map retains all five districts that currently cover Long Island with some slightly different lines.

Within New York City, the Democratic map retains district lines largely as they are now, including the "silk stocking" district on the East Side of Manhattan now held by Rep. Carolyn Maloney. Her district would still include more progressive-leaning areas of North Brooklyn and western Queens, areas that she may have hoped would be assigned elsewhere. The Republican map, on the other

hand, would redraw the lines within the five boroughs almost entirely. The one exception on both draft maps is the lone Republican-held seat, the Staten Island-based district of Rep. Nicole Malliotakis. There had been speculation that the lines for that district might be redrawn to include liberal parts of Lower Manhattan and to exclude conservative areas in South Brooklyn, but on both the Democratic and Republican maps, that district would stay basically the same as it is now.

State Senate Districts. Downstate, the Democratic and Republican plans both aim to simplify and improve some of the highly convoluted state Senate district lines that currently run through Brooklyn. But of course, the Democratic supermajority in the state legislature may yet redraw the lines more to their liking.

Upstate, the city of Rochester is currently divided into three state Senate districts represented by two Democrats and one Republican. The Democratic and Republican plans would both make Rochester into a

single state Senate district. Democrats will likely win the new district, but the new district lines could reduce Democratic advantages in surrounding districts.

Next Steps. Under current rules:
- The Commission has until Jan. 1 to approve and submit maps to the state Legislature. Approval must be by a bipartisan group of seven of the ten commissioners. If the commissioners can't reach that seven-vote threshold, they will send the map with the most votes. If it's a tie, they will send both.
- The Legislature must then approve the maps by a two-thirds vote to send them to the governor.
- If the Legislature does not approve the maps, the Commission has until Feb. 28 to submit new versions. If the Legislature rejects those as well, then lawmakers may draw their own maps.
- A proposed state constitutional amendment on the ballot in

November could change the rules slightly. If it is approved, the Commission would be required to submit plans to lawmakers earlier, and the voting requirements for the Commission to approve the plans would be relaxed. The state Legislature would need only a simple majority to approve the plans. If the Commission failed to produce a consensus by Jan. 1, they would submit all their drafts to the Legislature as starting points.

New York County hearing on the proposed redistricting maps
Wednesday, Nov 10, at 3:00 PM
CUNY Hunter College cafeteria
695 Park Avenue