In 2012, President Barack Obama carried Ohio by 2 percentage points and Democratic candidates for the Ohio House received 50,000 more votes than Republicans – yet Republicans won 60 of 99 state House seats and 12 of 16 congressional seats.

In 2014, four winners in the Ohio Senate, 14 in the Ohio House, and one U.S. Congressman, Bob Gibbs, faced no opponent in the election.

How could one party gain such a large majority of seats, with so many of them uncontested, in what many regard as the quintessential swing state? One word: gerrymandering.

After each census conducted every 10 years, Congressional and state legislative districts are redrawn to take population shifts into account. In Ohio, state legislative districts are drawn by the Apportionment Board, composed of the governor, state auditor, secretary of state, and two members of the legislature from each party. Congressional districts are ostensibly drawn by the legislature, but in fact by political consultants appointed by the majority party.

After Republicans swept state elections in 2010, they did what one might expect a political party to do: They drew the legislative districts to benefit themselves. Rather than a swing state, Ohio emerged as one of the most badly gerrymandered states in the country.

Mershon affiliate Richard Gunther, coordinator of the 21-country Comparative National Elections Project, has been involved in efforts to reform redistricting in Ohio for almost a decade.
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All events in 120 Mershon Center unless otherwise noted. For more information, see mershoncenter.osu.edu
Spring 2015 Featured Events

Tuesday, January 20, 2015
Leonard Smith
Frederick B. Arzt Professor of History, Oberlin College
“The Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and the History of Sovereignty”
3:30 p.m., 120 Mershon Center

Thursday, February 26, 2015
Williamson Murray
Adjunct Professor, Marine Corps University
“The Iran-Iraq War: The War No One Knows About”
Noon, 120 Mershon Center

Wednesday, January 21, 2015
Sara Mitchell
Professor of Political Science, University of Iowa
“Cross Border Troubles? Interstate River Conflicts and Intrastate Violence”
3:30 p.m., 120 Mershon Center

Wednesday, March 11, 2015
Richard Zeckhauser
Frank P. Ramsey Professor of Political Economy, Harvard University
“The Wisdom of Crowds and the Stupidity of Herds”
3:30 p.m., 120 Mershon Center

Wednesday, January 28, 2015
Ian Hurd
Associate Professor of Political Science, Northwestern University
“The Politics of the International Rule of Law”
3:30 p.m., 120 Mershon Center

Thursday, March 26, 2015
Kelly Greenhill
Associate Professor of Political Science, Tufts University
“Better than the Truth: Extra-factual Sources of Threat Conception and Proliferation”
3:30 p.m., 120 Mershon Center

Friday, February 6, 2015
Penny Von Eschen
Professor of History, University of Michigan
“Rebooting the Cold War: Cultural Narratives of Triumphalism and Nostalgia”
Noon, 120 Mershon Center

Friday, March 27, 2015
Paul Chamberlin
Associate Professor of History, University of Kentucky
“The Cold War’s Killing Fields”
Noon, 120 Mershon Center

Thursday, February 12, 2015
István Povedák
Visiting Scholar, Mershon Center for International Security Studies
“The Sacralization of Nation: How Neonal­­ationalism Affects Vernacular Culture in Post-Socialist Hungary”
3:30 p.m., 120 Mershon Center

Joseph J. Kruzel Memorial Lecture
Friday April 10, 2015
Henry Nau
Elliott School of International Affairs, The George Washington University
“Is America Returning to Isolationism?”
Noon, 120 Mershon Center

Monday, February 16, 2015
Nils Petter Gleditsch
Research Professor, Peace Research Institute Oslo
“Climate Change: A Threat to the Waning of War”
3:30 p.m., 120 Mershon Center

Wednesday, April 15, 2015
Sarah Kreps
Associate Professor of Government, Cornell University
“Mechanisms of Morality: Why the U.S. Public Supports Humanitarian Interventions”
3:30 p.m., 120 Mershon Center

For more information about each event and to reserve your spot, see mershoncenter.osu.edu
decade. In 2005 he was active in the Reform Ohio Now initiative, and in 2009 and 2010, he worked with the League of Women Voters and Ohio Citizen Action to develop a redistricting proposal.

The 2010 effort identified several objectives for redistricting – representational fairness, competitiveness, geographical compactness, and the preservation of county and municipal borders – that were incorporated into House Joint Resolution 15, which passed the House by a vote of 68-27.

In that same legislative session, the Senate also passed a redistricting reform resolution formulated by then-Sen. Jon Husted. Despite successful negotiations to merge the two proposals into one resolution, the effort did not get enough votes in the legislature.

In 2012, Gunther joined with the League of Women Voters and Common Cause to help formulate another redistricting initiative, which went on the Ohio ballot in 2012 as Issue 2. It, too, was defeated.

In 2012, Gunther joined with the League of Women Voters and Common Cause to help formulate another redistricting initiative, which went on the Ohio ballot in 2012 as Issue 2. It, too, was defeated.

In November, efforts to reform redistricting accelerated again. Rep. Matt Huffman (R-Lima) introduced House Joint Resolution 11, to reform the Congressional redistricting process, and House Joint Resolution 12, to reform state legislative redistricting procedures.

“Both bills were initially unattractive, in so far as they would have perpetuated domination of Ohio politics by one party over at least an additional decade, and would not have reduced the number of ‘safe seats’ that deny the voters the ability to hold their elected officials accountable,” Gunther said.

He and his collaborators in the League of Women Voters and Common Cause, testified against both resolutions before the Constitutional Modernization Commission and the House committee holding hearings on the bills. Strong criticism of these proposals was successful.

First, HJR 11 was shelved, with the promise to return to Congressional redistricting reform this spring after the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling on redistricting in Arizona. Second, a serious bipartisan effort began to improve HJR 12, related to state legislative redistricting.

“Much to my surprise, I was invited to serve as one of the five negotiators who crafted this very complex reform package,” Gunther said. Others included Rep. Vernon Sykes (D-Akron), House Minority Counsel Sarah Cherry, Republican former Sen. Jeff Jacobson, and House Majority Counsel Mike Lenzo.

After the first draft of this resolution passed the House, 80-4, Senate Majority Counsel Frank Strigari and the Senate Minority Counsel Pavan Parikh joined the negotiating team.

“We met behind closed doors for a total of 38 hours in negotiating substantial number of major changes in HJR 12,” Gunther said.

Negotiations often ran late into the night, culminating in a dramatic late night session in which a slightly revised version of the resolution was approved by the Senate, 28-1, at 4 a.m.

As passed, HJR 12 would add two representatives of the legislature – one from each party – to the current Apportionment Board to form a new Ohio Redistricting Commission. Four votes, including at least two from the minority party, would be needed to approve a redistricting map. A map that didn’t get minority support could still go into effect, but only for four years instead of 10, and would then have to be redrawn by the Commission, whose membership would have been altered by intervening statewide elections.

The resolution also establishes clear criteria and procedures to respect geographical boundaries and political subdivisions. Maps could not be drawn primarily to favor one party, and the proportion of districts leaning to each party must resemble the state’s preferences in recent elections.

The plan goes to the ballot for a public vote in November 2015.

Gunther calls HJR 12 a good reform. “We were able to include in the text of this constitutional amendment many important provisions that had been included in our Issue 2 initiative. Foremost among these is the inclusion of a ‘representational fairness’ criterion that had never before been included in the Ohio Constitution,” he said.

“I regard it as a very strong step towards partisan fairness and improving the quality of democracy in Ohio.”