LINCOLN PARK STRATEGIES

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TO: Interested Parties
FR: Lincoln Park Strategies
RE: Nonpartisan Redistricting Will Not Save You
DATE: October 30, 2013

The issue of gerrymandering has returned to the forefront with the recent government shutdown and near federal debt default, and many are arguing that gerrymandering has created the current era of extremist members of Congress who have nothing to fear from general election opponents. They are pushed to the fringe of their party because the only way to lose their seat is to lose in a primary election. The popular panacea to this problem is to take redistricting out of the hands of partisans and charge nonpartisan technocrats with the task of designing congressional districts.

It is an appealing idea. If partisans are not allowed to draw districts that best suit their own interests, we could finally have enough competitive districts to force members of the House to be concerned about general election battles, not just primaries.

We just had an opportunity to test out this hypothesis in California, as prior to the 2012 election, California switched from electoral districts drawn by its legislature to ones created by a nonpartisan redistricting commission. The results show both the good (better maps, less blowouts) and the not-so-good (still not competitive) that come with nonpartisan redistricting efforts.

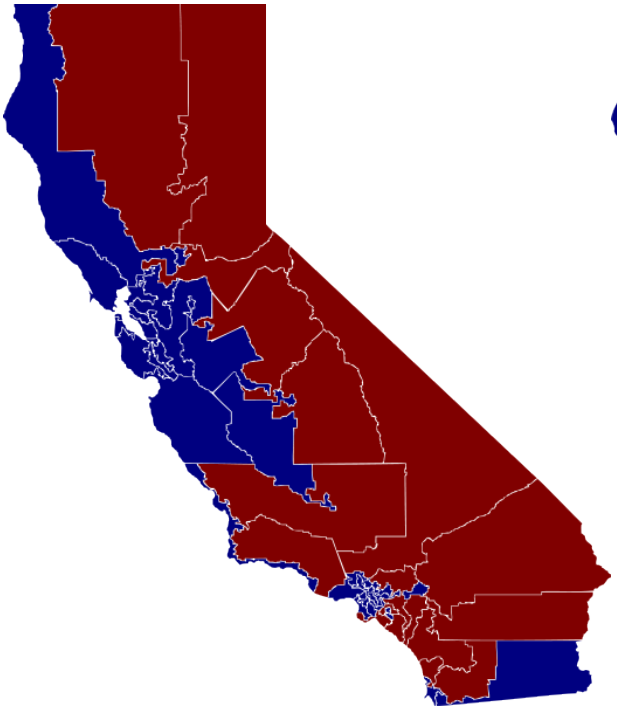
CALIFORNIA'S EXPERIENCE

When the California Citizens Redistricting Commission was created, it inspired a great deal of hope. The state, which was famous both for its extreme members of Congress on both sides of the aisle and its incredible incumbent retention rate (only one incumbent lost with the previous decade's maps), seemed certain to improve competitiveness.

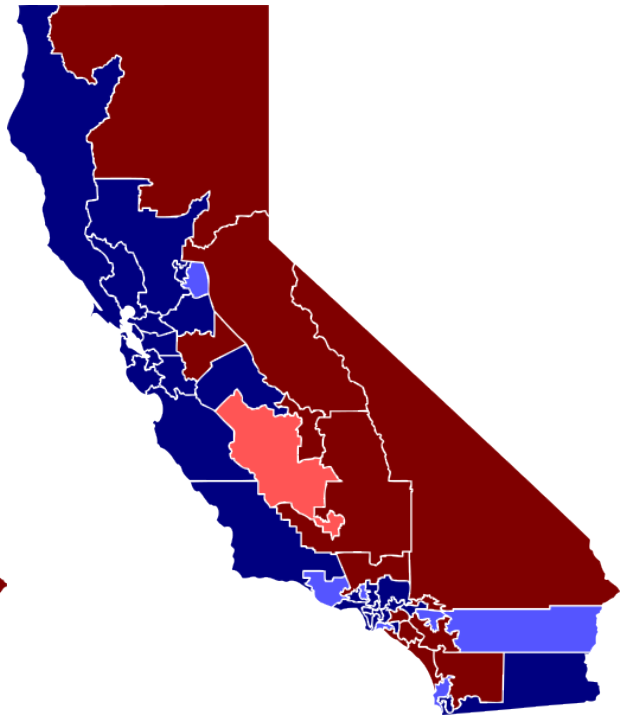
The first way to judge the success of the Commission is to see if the maps are visually less gerrymandered than they previously were. By this measure, the Commission was mostly a success (see next page for maps). Gone are the most egregious districts, such as the thin Democratic district snaking along the coast in the lower third of the state. The districts around the Bay Area are also substantially more compact.

The inland portion of the map still leaves room for improvement with the occasional appendage sticking out into the heart of neighboring districts.

2010 MAP



2012 MAP



Source: Wikipedia

Without gerrymandered maps, the hypothesis of those advocating for nonpartisan redistricting is that the 2012 election should have seen more competitive races. However, the results were decidedly mixed. The end result is that the districts are "more competitive" but only by the extremely low bar set by California's previous elections and not by any objective assessment of what a competitive race should look like.

Out of the 53 races in 2012, in just three (5 percent of the districts) were the top two candidates within five percentage points of one another. The argument supporting these changes is not helped by the fact that these numbers are barely better than the previous gerrymandered districts. In both 2010 and 2008, there were two races decided by less than 5 percentage points. Clearly three is more than two, but this is still not exactly the shift many were hoping for.

We should also note that in the 2012 election California instituted a "jungle primary" system where all candidates compete in the same primary, and the top two candidates in the primary,

regardless of party, go onto the general election. For purposes of this discussion, we are not taking this into account in our analysis of nonpartisan redistricting. However, as you can see in the appendix, only one of these eight races was considered competitive, meaning the top-two primary system didn't make much of a difference.

If the percent of competitive races in 2012 in California represented the same percent of competitive races across the country, there would be 25 seats up for grabs nationally in a given election. This would only represent 60 percent of the seats viewed as competitive by Charlie Cook's current House race rating, which has 43 seats either as a toss-up or lean. If the definition of "competitive" is expanded to a far too generous 10 percentage points, nine seats in California would be considered "competitive." This leaves 44 Representatives from California, or 83 percent, without virtually anything to worry about in their re-election fight next November. Again if we use this ratio and apply it nationwide it would only translate to 74 "competitive" seats across the country.

The 2012 redistricting did have some impact on incumbent candidates as five lost their seats this election, not including the two incumbent v. incumbent battles across the state where two more sitting members lost from redistricting. The nonpartisan redistricting did initially help make incumbents more vulnerable, by not creating lines that protecting current incumbents; however, this effect will likely go away next election cycle given the fact that so few races were competitive.

The best compliment you could give the results of the new redistricting process is that the blowouts are less severe. The average margin of victory in California was 28.4 percentage points in 2012, down from 35.2 percentage points in 2010 and an astronomical 44.5 percentage points in 2008. The problem is that an incumbent really doesn't (or at least shouldn't) feel much more threatened by a 28 point margin of victory than a 44 point one.

PARTISAN SEPARATION

If the maps were not gerrymandered, why didn't the reformers' vision of newly competitive races across the state come about? The problem with drawing districts that are close and compact is that they require a mix of differing opinions that results in close races. This mix of heterogeneous political views is increasingly rare.

Indeed, a recent study by Thomas Schelling showed that when asked, people say they prefer to live in an area where only about one-third of the other people have similar ideological outlooks.

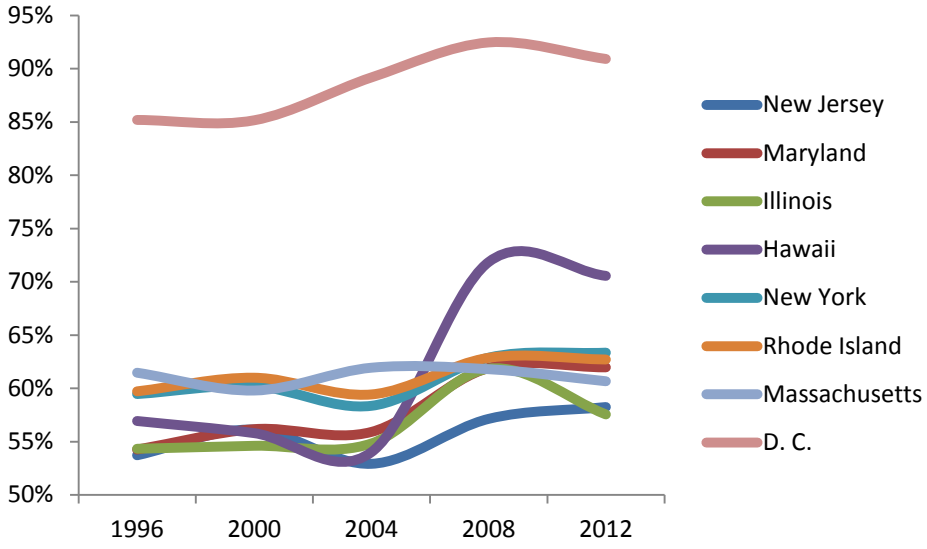
However, the fact is that people typically end up in neighborhoods almost entirely comprised of like-minded individuals.

It is difficult to show this relationship over time at the congressional level because of the constantly changing boundaries, but it does fit the general pattern of Democrats packing into heavily Democratic cities and Republicans dominating in rural areas.

A look at state results shows that there is increasing homogeneity among the states that generally identify with a particular party. Serving as a beacon to others of similar political views, these states are drawing in increasing number of similar minded individuals.

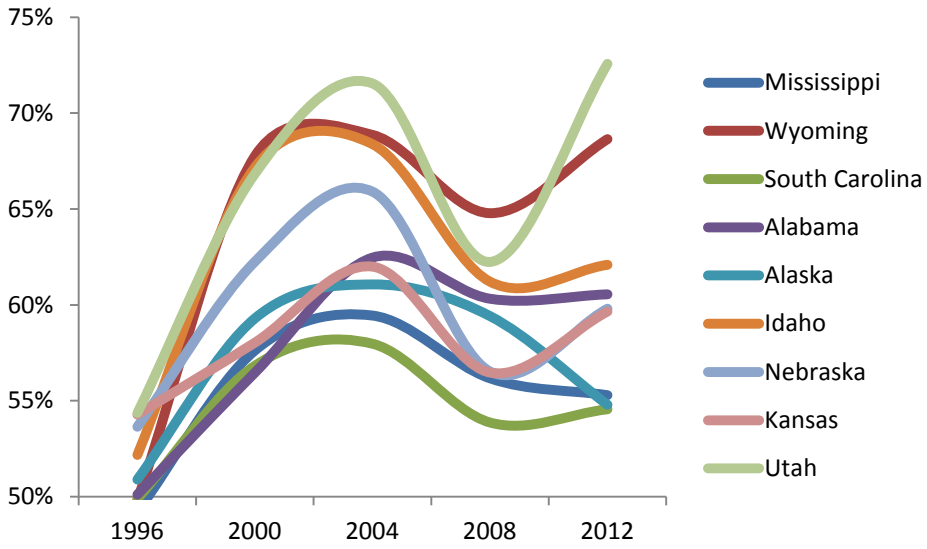
There are numerous examples on the Democratic side. Take California where from 1996 to 2012 the Democratic percentage in presidential elections increased from 51 percent to 60 percent. New York moved from 58 to 63 percent. Maryland grew by eight points to 62 percent.

Using seven of the top eight states for President Clinton in 1996 as the benchmark for a state to have a liberal reputation (Arkansas was excluded because no one would have considered Arkansas a "liberal" state to move to despite President Clinton's performance there), Democrats have improved their performance by an average of 5.1 points. Massachusetts is the only one of the seven to have a gain of less than three percentage points. The mid-1990s are a useful starting point since that is when partisan identities really began to harden and Democrats were swept out of Southern states.



It is not just due to the three-way 1996 race either. Each of the states has also become more Democratic if the 2000 election is used as the baseline.

It is also occurring within Republican states. For example, in Alabama, Republicans went from 50 percent in 1996 to 61 percent. In South Carolina, Republicans jumped from the low 50's to almost three-quarters of voters. Aside from the home state effect of George Bush in Texas, there is a clear pattern from 49 percent in 1996 to 57 percent in 2012.



This trend is also illustrated in our presidential prediction model, which shows an increasing number of "safe" states in the Electoral College over the coming decades.

IMPLICATIONS

Gerrymandering remains a problem in this country. Giving parties the power to pick who gets to elect them inverts the democratic process. It is not, however, the source of all our evils. Gerrymandering is not the main cause of our extremist members of the House of Representatives; our own increasingly partisan tendencies, and moving toward those who think like us has created the perfect breeding ground for extremist candidates.

Nonpartisan redistricting can eliminate some of the problems with gerrymandering, but it simply can't make elections competitive or promote moderate candidates. It is simply not

possible to have districts that are contiguous, compact, and competitive. You would almost have to gerrymander to create the kind of intensely competitive districts that facilitate moderate winners.

Redistricting reforms should be pursued because it does improve the electoral process, but wildly overpromising its benefits will only further disenchant a country that doesn't have an abundance of enthusiasm for its current political system.

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APPENDIX: CALIFORNIA ELECTION RESULTS

2012

District	Candidate 1	Candidate 2	Difference	District	Candidate 1	Candidate 2	Difference
CD-1	57.4%	42.6%	14.8%	CD-28	23.5%	76.5%	53.0%
CD-2	28.8%	71.2%	42.4%	CD-29	25.9%	74.1%	48.2%
CD-3	45.8%	54.2%	8.4%	CD-30	39.7%	60.3%	20.6%
CD-4	61.1%	38.9%	22.2%	CD-31	55.2%	44.8%	10.4%
CD-5	25.5%	74.5%	49.0%	CD-32	34.3%	65.7%	31.4%
CD-6	24.9%	75.1%	50.2%	CD-33	46.0%	54.0%	8.0%
CD-7	48.3%	51.7%	3.4%	CD-34	14.4%	85.6%	71.2%
CD-8	57.4%	42.6%	14.8%	CD-35	44.1%	55.9%	11.8%
CD-9	44.6%	55.6%	11.0%	CD-36	47.1%	52.9%	5.8%
CD-10	52.7%	47.3%	5.4%	CD-37	13.6%	86.4%	72.8%
CD-11	30.3%	69.7%	39.4%	CD-38	32.6%	67.5%	34.9%
CD-12	14.9%	85.1%	70.2%	CD-39	57.8%	42.2%	15.6%
CD-13	13.2%	86.8%	73.6%	CD-40	41.1%	58.9%	17.8%
CD-14	21.1%	78.9%	57.8%	CD-41	41.0%	59.0%	18.0%
CD-15	47.9%	52.1%	4.2%	CD-42	60.6%	39.4%	21.2%
CD-16	42.6%	57.4%	14.8%	CD-43	28.8%	71.2%	42.4%
CD-17	26.5%	73.5%	47.0%	CD-44	39.8%	60.2%	20.4%
CD-18	29.5%	70.5%	41.0%	CD-45	58.5%	41.5%	17.0%
CD-19	26.8%	73.2%	46.4%	CD-46	36.1%	63.9%	27.8%
CD-20	25.9%	74.1%	48.2%	CD-47	43.4%	56.6%	13.2%
CD-21	57.8%	42.2%	15.6%	CD-48	61.0%	39.0%	22.0%
CD-22	38.1%	61.9%	23.8%	CD-49	58.2%	41.8%	16.4%
CD-23	73.2%	26.8%	46.4%	CD-50	67.7%	32.3%	35.4%
CD-24	44.9%	55.1%	10.2%	CD-51	28.5%	71.5%	43.0%
CD-25	54.8%	45.2%	9.6%	CD-52	48.8%	51.2%	2.4%
CD-26	47.3%	52.7%	5.4%	CD-53	38.6%	61.4%	22.8%
CD-27	36.0%	64.0%	28.0%				

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2010

District	Candidate 1	Candidate 2	Difference	District	Candidate 1	Candidate 2	Difference
CD-1	31.1%	62.8%	31.7%	CD-28	22.4%	69.6%	47.2%
CD-2	57.2%	42.8%	14.4%	CD-29	32.0%	64.8%	32.8%
CD-3	50.1%	43.2%	6.9%	CD-30	31.9%	64.7%	32.8%
CD-4	61.3%	31.5%	29.8%	CD-31	16.1%	83.8%	67.7%
CD-5	25.3%	72.1%	46.8%	CD-32	28.9%	71.1%	42.2%
CD-6	29.7%	66.0%	36.3%	CD-33	13.9%	86.1%	72.2%
CD-7	31.6%	68.4%	36.8%	CD-34	22.7%	77.3%	54.6%
CD-8	15.2%	80.1%	64.9%	CD-35	20.6%	79.4%	58.8%
CD-9	10.8%	84.3%	73.5%	CD-36	34.7%	59.7%	25.0%
CD-10	37.8%	58.9%	21.1%	CD-37	23.2%	68.4%	45.2%
CD-11	46.9%	48.0%	1.1%	CD-38	26.5%	73.5%	47.0%
CD-12	22.2%	75.6%	53.4%	CD-39	32.6%	63.3%	30.7%
CD-13	27.7%	72.0%	44.3%	CD-40	66.8%	33.2%	33.6%
CD-14	27.9%	69.1%	41.2%	CD-41	63.3%	36.7%	26.6%
CD-15	32.4%	67.6%	35.2%	CD-42	62.3%	31.8%	30.5%
CD-16	24.3%	67.9%	43.6%	CD-43	34.5%	65.5%	31.0%
CD-17	29.9%	66.7%	36.8%	CD-44	55.7%	44.3%	11.4%
CD-18	41.5%	58.5%	17.0%	CD-45	51.5%	42.2%	9.3%
CD-19	64.6%	35.2%	29.4%	CD-46	62.3%	37.7%	24.6%
CD-20	48.2%	51.8%	3.6%	CD-47	39.3%	53.0%	13.7%
CD-21	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	CD-48	60.0%	36.4%	23.6%
CD-22	98.2%	1.2%	97.0%	CD-49	62.8%	31.5%	31.3%
CD-23	37.6%	57.8%	20.2%	CD-50	56.7%	39.0%	17.7%
CD-24	60.0%	40.0%	20.0%	CD-51	39.9%	60.1%	20.2%
CD-25	61.9%	38.1%	23.8%	CD-52	63.1%	32.1%	31.0%
CD-26	54.2%	36.5%	17.7%	CD-53	34.0%	62.3%	28.3%
CD-27	34.8%	65.2%	30.4%				

LINCOLN PARK STRATEGIES

2008

District	Candidate 1	Candidate 2	Difference	District	Candidate 1	Candidate 2	Difference
CD-1	23.4%	68.1%	44.7%	CD-28	0.0%	99.9%	99.9%
CD-2	57.9%	42.1%	15.8%	CD-29	26.7%	68.9%	42.2%
CD-3	49.5%	43.9%	5.6%	CD-30	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
CD-4	50.2%	49.8%	0.5%	CD-31	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
CD-5	20.8%	74.3%	53.5%	CD-32	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
CD-6	24.1%	71.7%	47.6%	CD-33	12.4%	87.6%	75.1%
CD-7	21.8%	72.8%	51.0%	CD-34	22.9%	77.1%	54.2%
CD-8	16.2%	71.9%	55.7%	CD-35	13.2%	82.6%	69.4%
CD-9	9.7%	86.1%	76.4%	CD-36	31.4%	68.6%	37.3%
CD-10	31.1%	65.1%	34.0%	CD-37	24.4%	74.9%	50.5%
CD-11	44.7%	55.3%	10.6%	CD-38	18.3%	81.7%	63.5%
CD-12	18.5%	75.1%	56.7%	CD-39	30.3%	69.7%	39.3%
CD-13	23.6%	76.4%	52.9%	CD-40	62.6%	37.5%	25.1%
CD-14	22.2%	69.8%	47.6%	CD-41	61.7%	38.4%	23.3%
CD-15	23.3%	71.7%	48.4%	CD-42	39.8%	60.2%	20.3%
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CD-19	1.4%	98.4%	97.0%	CD-46	52.5%	43.1%	9.4%
CD-20	25.7%	74.3%	48.7%	CD-47	25.4%	69.5%	44.1%
CD-21	32.6%	68.4%	35.8%	CD-48	55.6%	40.7%	14.9%
CD-22	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	CD-49	58.3%	37.5%	20.9%
CD-23	31.9%	68.1%	36.2%	CD-50	50.2%	45.2%	5.1%
CD-24	58.2%	41.9%	16.3%	CD-51	24.2%	72.8%	48.5%
CD-25	57.7%	42.3%	15.5%	CD-52	56.4%	39.0%	17.4%
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