OAS Electoral Observation Mission to the United States

Electoral Boundaries

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1. Intro

Redistricting is the process of partitioning a territory into electoral constituencies from which representatives are elected. Electoral boundary delimitation has been, and remains, a hotly contested issue throughout American history. The term gerrymandering, in fact, was coined in 1812 in the state of Massachussets.

Consequences

Redistricting is technical but touches fundamental aspect of democracy: representation.

- plot seats-votes

Some contend that maps intentionlly distort votes to seats convertion, vs representation. Others retort that geographical considerations plays a large role, people who live together vote together. Separating these effects is no small task.

2. Authority

In the U.S., redistricting is legally-mandated after each decenial census. 2010 and 2020.

2. Models of election boundary delimitation

Different democracies draw electoral constituencies differently. Key features are whether or not the process is centralized and whether or not it is politicized.

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|  | politicized | independent commission |
| centralized | France | Australia, Germany, Mexico, United Kingdom |
| decentralized | 34 U.S. states | 9 U.S. states 10 Canadian provinces |

3. Models coexist in the US

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| Congressional redisticting process | States |
| No redistricting (elects one House Representative only) | Alaska, Delaware, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming. |
| Politicized  (process follows the legislative process) | Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, Mississippi, North Carolina, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin, and West Virginia. |
| Independent commission | Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Michigan, Missouri, Minnesota, and Washington. |

4. Further reading

- Grofman and Handley