

**Partisan Goals and Redistricting: Assessing
the Views of the Legislators¹**

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Past research efforts in congressional redistricting have focused on party bias in redistricting plans without ever directly measuring the attitudes of the state legislators. In this study we specifically measure the goals that state legislators would like to achieve as they formulate a congressional redistricting plan. Overall, state legislators possess the party loyalty necessary to produce partisan plans, but a number of conflicting demands placed upon them inhibit the full realization of party objectives.

After the 1990 census, most state legislatures developed congressional redistricting plans that were to be in place for the 1992 elections. This most recent round of congressional redistricting has renewed the debate over the intentions, partisan or otherwise, of the individuals who redraw the congressional districts. Past research efforts sought to discover the intentions of legislators by examining the electoral results produced by the new plans. The research concentrated on two possibilities: legislators would draw congressional districts to effect a partisan gain or they would seek to protect incumbents. Some early studies indicated the existence of gains to the party in control of the redistricting process (Erikson 1972; Tufte 1973). But there was a wide variety of conclusions: there are no partisan gains derived from redistricting; or the partisan gains are limited; or the incumbents from both parties mainly benefit. In any event, the studies all assume that the values held strongest by the state legislators would be incorporated into a congressional redistricting plan (Ayres and Whiteman 1984).

However, these studies have been handicapped by the difficulty of establishing the causal connection between party control and the number of congressional seats one party is able to win. The inference of the intention to produce a partisan outcome is made from the presence of results that

appear to favor, if even marginally, the party that controls the redistricting process or from the voting strength of the party in the newly created districts.² To establish a causal link between control of the redistricting process and partisan outcomes, it is necessary to show that the redistricting plan was actually drafted with partisan goals in mind and that the voters in the new districts will act as the plan intended for them to behave (Born 1985, 306).

This study is concerned with the first step in this causal chain. Few of the studies on congressional redistricting have actually studied the attitudes of the legislators who are responsible for the drawing of the congressional districts. Some studies have sought to measure the attitudes of state legislators.³ However, these studies have not dealt with the topic of congressional reapportionment. The measurement of the attitudes of legislators is needed to determine the extent to which partisanship or some other motivation may influence the legislators. Studies which argue that redistricting will benefit the congressional delegation of a particular party assume that the legislators are motivated by partisan interests and will act on these motivations. But if other, perhaps even conflicting, motivations are also present in the minds of the legislators, partisan gains may never be achieved. Indeed, the presence of conflicting motivations may even account for the ambiguous results that researchers encounter when they examine the effects of redistricting.

Data and Methodology

The data for this study are taken from a survey of state legislators in the state of Pennsylvania. There are several reasons why Pennsylvania offers a unique opportunity to study the motivations of those legislators involved in the congressional redistricting process. First, Pennsylvania is a highly competitive two-party state (Mayhew 1986). At the time of this study, the Democrats controlled the House by a narrow 102-99 margin, while the Republicans held the Senate by a margin of 27-22. A Democrat, Robert Casey, was the governor. Second, the process of redistricting is different for the seats in the state legislature than it is for the seats in Congress. Congressional redistricting is handled by the regular legislative process while the state legislative redistricting is managed by a bipartisan commission composed of the caucus leaders from the State House and Senate. This commission also contains one nonpartisan member. Therefore, the tasks of congressional and legislative redistricting are kept separate. Finally, since Pennsylvania lost two seats in the House of Representatives, the stakes were high for both parties.

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The survey was conducted during the spring of 1990 by delivering 250 questionnaires directly to the mail room in the state legislature, thereby distributing them to the legislators through the legislative mail system.⁴ Eighty responses were received for a response rate of 32 percent. The responses roughly correspond to the numbers in both chambers of the legislature. Over 81 percent of the respondents served in the House, while about 19 percent served in the Senate. The responses also reflected the actual strength of the two parties: forty-eight percent of the respondents were Democrats and 52 percent were Republicans.

General Findings

The frequency distributions indicate that the motivations of legislators are multifarious. While strong support is expressed for achieving partisan goals⁵ through redistricting, interest in obtaining other results is also plainly evident. Some goals, like keeping the redistricting plan out of the courts or creating competitive districts, might even be regarded as "good government" goals (Cain 1984; Butler and Cain 1992). Although partisan goals are clearly important, they are by no means the only goals that legislators seek to attain in a congressional redistricting plan.

To measure support for various redistricting goals, legislators were asked to evaluate the importance of achieving a particular outcome.⁶ Ninety-one percent of the legislators said that it was at least "somewhat important" to try to maximize the opportunities to capture as many congressional seats as possible. Congressional incumbents are specific beneficiaries of the extent to which partisan values are embraced by state legislators. Over 92% of the legislators stated that it was "somewhat important" or "very important" to protect the House incumbents who are members of the same party as the legislators; 51% alone stated that the goal was "very important," and a total of 77% fell in categories 1 and 2. These results suggest two conclusions: first, legislators do possess some of the partisan attitudes necessary to produce partisan redistricting plans; second, the protection of incumbents from the same party may be the most popular method by which partisan goals are achieved.

There is also some evidence that legislators are willing to champion the cause of incumbents regardless of their party affiliation. When asked how important the legislators thought it was to protect all current House incumbents in the delegation from losing their seats, 70.5% said it was "somewhat important" to "very important." While 70.5% seems high, it is not nearly as high as the 92% who stated that the goal of protecting incumbents from the same party was at least "somewhat important."

Therefore, legislators do view redistricting as a mainly partisan activity that would produce noticeably partisan outcomes if political and legal conditions permitted. In the case of Pennsylvania, an extremely competitive two-party state and divided party control of the state legislature make the achievement of more overtly partisan goals tremendously difficult, if not impossible.

In addition to the maximization of seats for a particular party and the protection of incumbents, state legislators express some desire to consider other principles. Seventy percent indicated that it is "somewhat important" or "very important" to create competitive districts across the state which reflect the strength of the two parties in the state as a whole. The data indicate that democratic values of responsiveness and representation could be incorporated into a redistricting plan, although not necessarily at the expense of more overtly partisan goals or to the detriment of their own incumbents.

Table 1 displays a ranking of the preferred outcomes of redistricting expressed by the state legislators. The highest ranked preference is the protection of those incumbents who belong to the same party as the legislator. Certainly this ranking helps to explain why partisan and bipartisan gerrymanders look so similar (Glazer, Grofman and Robbins 1987). Under certain conditions, legislators apparently see the protection of incumbents from their own party as the easiest way to achieve partisan ends. A blatantly partisan plan, beyond the protection of incumbents, conflicts with other principles and may precipitate a court challenge. Perhaps because of the many constraints faced by legislators in the creation of redistricting plans, maximizing the opportunity to capture as many congressional seats as possible for the party is ranked second behind the protection of incumbents from the same party. These first two goals unquestionably have a partisan dimension thereby satisfying the preconditions for a partisan gerrymander (Ayres and Whiteman 1984).

The goal ranked third by the legislators is keeping the redistricting plan out of the courts. This ranking is not surprising because legislators lose control over a plan that is to be drawn by the courts. If legislators want to produce a particular outcome, and the incentives to produce certain outcomes are high, then they must retain control over the process to assure its attainment.

As stated above, the consideration of several principles--keeping a plan out of the courts or creating competitive districts--are not always compatible with protecting incumbents or trying to maximize the number of partisan seats. If a particular party attempts to maximize the number of seats it controls, then it clearly increases the risk to incumbents by marginalizing their districts. Thus, the extent to which the legislators maximize one goal may seriously compromise their ability to achieve other

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Table 1

Mean Scores of Goals of State Legislators*

1.83	Protect House Incumbents of Same Party
1.96	Capture Maximum Seats for the Party
2.04	Keep the Redistricting Plan out of the Courts
2.13	Protection of Own Legislative Seat
2.34	Districts that Reflect Strength of Party in Area
2.69	Protect All Incumbents
2.91	Districts that Reflect Strength of Party in State
2.97	Protect Seat of Own Congressman

*The smaller numbers reflect higher priorities of the state legislators.

goals. The preceding data have shown that legislators desire the benefits of a partisan gerrymander, but they also feel pressured to achieve other goals as well. Because of the presence of conflicting values and the need to comply with constitutional requirements,⁸ evidence for a partisan gerrymander will only rarely be unequivocal.

Determinants of Support for Incumbent and Partisan Goals

The importance legislators ascribe to the achievement of particular goals can be examined further by disaggregating the effects that certain variables have on their attitudes. One of the most important variables is party membership. In a competitive two-party state like Pennsylvania, it is reasonable to expect legislators from both parties to pursue similar goals. Because a competitive balance exists in the state legislature and in the congressional delegation, members of the two parties perceive the same strategic opportunities. Conversely, if a party is hopelessly weak in the state legislature and has few seats in the congressional delegation, then it may be inclined to seek protection from the courts because it lacks the resources to wage a serious redistricting battle on the legislative front.⁹ Therefore, the weak party may believe that the federal courts provide the only means for attaining what it believes is an equitable outcome. These observations lead to the formulation of the first hypothesis:¹⁰

Hypothesis 1 -- Congressional redistricting is a partisan activity through which legislators will want to benefit members of Congress from their own party. Therefore, there will be no difference between the goals that Republicans and Democrats want to achieve in Pennsylvania given its competitive balance.

This hypothesis is not rejected for all of the variables except one. Table 2 indicates no statistical difference between the mean scores for Republicans and Democrats on the goal of protecting House incumbents from their own party or attempting to maximize the opportunity to capture the largest number of congressional seats for the party.¹¹ The only statistically significant difference occurs for the variable of protecting all incumbents regardless of party identification. Here the Democrats were more likely to rate the protection of all incumbents as a "very important" goal. Such a finding is striking given the small difference between the number of congressional seats held by the two parties. The Democrats maintained a one-seat advantage, a difference that may have been large enough to induce the Democratic legislators to support a plan to preserve the status quo. Furthermore, given the Democratic majority in the House of Representatives and the prominent committee and subcommittee chairmanships held by the Pennsylvania delegation, the Democrats, in this case, may be the most risk averse because their party has the most to lose. In any event, powerful members of Congress can bring a great deal of pressure to bear on state legislators to protect their seats, a factor that may also help to explain the differences between the two parties on this measure.

The lack of differences between the two parties on the rest of the measures suggests the formulation of a second hypothesis, an hypothesis that acknowledges the importance of congressional incumbency in the calculations of the legislators:

Hypothesis 2 -- Congressional redistricting is mainly a bipartisan activity and will favor the incumbents of both parties.

Legislators assign a high priority to the preservation of the seats of incumbents who are members of their own party, but they do not express much support for the incumbents from the other party. The mean score for protecting incumbents from their own party is 1.83, while the mean score for protecting all incumbents is 2.69 ($p < .01$). Furthermore, the goal ranked second by the legislators, after protecting their own incumbents, is the goal of capturing as many seats as possible for the party.

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Table 2

Differences Between Republicans and Democrats in Ranking of Goals

Variable	Mean	t-value
Strength of Party in Area		
Democrat	2.33	
Republican	2.34	-.03
Protection of Own Seat		
Democrat	2.14	
Republican	2.12	.05
Protect Seat of Own Congressman		
Democrat	2.86	
Republican	3.07	-.60
Protect House Incumbents of Same Party		
Democrat	1.72	
Republican	1.93	-.86
Protect All Incumbents		
Democrat	2.36	
Republican	2.98	-2.09*
Capture Maximum Seats for Party		
Democrat	1.86	
Republican	2.05	-.72
Keep Plan Out of the Courts		
Democrat	2.06	
Republican	2.02	.11
Districts Reflect Party Strength		
Democrat	3.08	
Republican	2.76	1.12

While perhaps a modicum of respect is expressed for incumbents from the other party, there is no other attitudinal evidence to conclude that redistricting is a bipartisan activity by choice. Rather, because of the risk-averse nature of the legislators and the many constraints associated with redistricting--shifts in population, protection of minority seats, preservation of communities of interest--the legislators may regard the protection of their

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own incumbents as simply the easiest way to produce a redistricting plan that is acceptable to those most interested in the eventual redistricting plan--the incumbents. But this is a partisan activity that produces results that look bipartisan. The data show that, given its druthers, the party that controls the redistricting process prefers to have its own candidates as the primary beneficiaries of a redistricting plan.

To further test the two hypotheses, multivariate analysis is needed to control for the effects of some of the attitudinal factors discussed earlier. In the first equation we attempt to explain the legislators' support for protecting the seats of the congressmen representing their districts.¹² We expect that factors which obviate partisan tendencies would manifest themselves with this dependent variable. Therefore, a good relationship between a legislator and a congressman and a history of campaign contributions should be correlated with the desire to protect the congressman who represents the district.

The equation indicates that two dimensions of partisanship are strongly related to a legislator's desire to protect the seat of the congressman. First, shared partisanship is correlated with the goal of protecting the seat of the congressman. The strength and positive sign of the coefficient indicate that the pull of shared affiliation is quite compelling. Second, the desire to maximize the number of seats for a particular party is also strongly correlated with the goal of protecting the seat of the congressman. This correlation implies that protecting incumbents is perhaps the manner by which partisan goals are ultimately achieved. In a competitive two-party state where control of the process is divided between the two parties, partisan goals are realized by protecting incumbents from both parties. The incumbents are not protected necessarily because of their incumbency, in which case more support for protecting all incumbents would have been expressed, but because they belong to parties that are competing with each other. Finally, denying further control to congressmen, one of the two variables that seeks to measure who should control the redistricting process, is correlated with the dependent variable, although the relationship is only statistically significant at the .10 level. The correlation of this aim with the dependent variable could perhaps be a recognition on the part of the legislators that retaining control of the redistricting process is a necessary condition for the achievement of partisan goals.

Keeping the redistricting plan out of the courts and the variables that measure the personal relationship between the congressman and the legislator are not correlated with the dependent variable. For example, past campaign contributions from the congressional member have no impact. It appears to be much more important for the congressman to share party

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Table 3

Dependent Variable: Protect Seat of Own Congressman

	Equation
U.S. congressmen should have more control over redistricting process	1.13* (1.99)
Party membership of legislator	-.063 (-.175)
Rep. from legislator's district belongs to legislator's party	1.73*** (3.80)
Keep redistricting plan out of the courts	-.054 (-.398)
Party capture as many seats as possible	.464*** (3.17)
Received campaign contribution in the past	.053 (.091)
Good relationship with rep. from legislator's district	-.531 (-1.58)
Want national party involved in the redistricting process	-.194 (-.550)
	R2 = .55 Adj R2 = .47

Numbers are unstandardized regression coefficients. The t-values for the coefficients are included in the parentheses.

- *** statistically significant at .01
- ** statistically significant at .05
- * statistically significant at .10

affiliation rather than campaign money.¹³ Finally, there is no correlation between party membership and the dependent variable.

We next look at the equation where the protection of incumbents from the same party is the dependent variable. Only one correlation in Table 4 is statistically significant at the .05 level: the desire "to maximize the opportunities...to capture as many congressional seats as possible" is strongly correlated with the desire to protect incumbents from the same party. The relationship is both strong and positive. Once again, the

Table 4

Dependent Variable: Protect Incumbents from Same Party

	Equation
U.S. congressmen should have more control over redistricting process	.352 (.732)
Party membership of legislator	-.048 (-.159)
Rep. from legislator's district belongs to legislator's party	-.013 (-.033)
Keep redistricting plan out of the courts	-.164 (-1.45)
Party capture as many seats as possible	.509*** (4.11)
Received campaign contribution in the past	.488 (1.00)
Good relationship with rep. from legislator's district	.137 (.481)
Want national party involved in the redistricting process	-.278 (-.930)
	R ² = .33
	Adj R ² = .21

Numbers are unstandardized regression coefficients. The t-values for the coefficients are in the parentheses.

- *** statistically significant at .01
- ** statistically significant at .05
- * statistically significant at .10

protection of incumbents seems to be the means by which legislators best believe they can achieve partisan goals.

Although none of the other correlations is significant, they are consistent with two of our earlier findings. First, as we found in the previous equation and in the bivariate analysis, there is no difference between the political parties. The correlation between party membership and protection of incumbents from the same party is small and insignificant. Second, the quality of the relationship between the incumbent and the

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legislator is not correlated with the legislators' desire to see incumbents from the same party protected. Shared party affiliation appears to be a powerful standard by which legislators evaluate the merits of various redistricting plans, regardless of the quality of the personal relationship they may enjoy with their congressman.

State Legislators and National Parties

The achievement of partisan goals through redistricting is, as we have argued, extremely important to state legislators. Due to the federated structure of political parties in the United States, it is possible to have disagreement among the different levels of the party on which goal is the most desirable to achieve. For example, leaders of the congressional party may desire the protection of incumbents. Through the efforts of groups like the Democrats' IMPAC 2000, congressional incumbents seek to create favorable redistricting plans for themselves. However, state party leaders may want to optimize good government goals or avoid court challenges to their efforts. The legislators are subjected to pressures from both sets of leaders and their goals are colored by these expectations.

This issue was explored in a series of questions included in the survey. Seventy-five percent of those who responded to the survey expected their national party to become involved in the redistricting process. A smaller percentage of respondents, 61%, actually wanted the national party to become involved. When the national party does become involved, the state legislators believe that it acts in both the interests of the individual congressmen and the national party. In response to the question, "Do you believe the national party acts in the best interests of the party as a whole, individual congressmen, or a combination of the two?": 26% said the national party, while 62% stated a combination of the two. Only 8% said that the national party acts exclusively in the interests of the individual congressmen.

In response to the question "Should the national party act in the best interests of the party as a whole, individual congressmen, or a combination of the two?" legislators overwhelmingly answered that the national party should act in the interests of both. Only 20% said that the national party should pursue exclusively its own goals.

The answers to these questions indicate that partisanship for the majority of legislators involves a commitment to both members of the party's delegation and the goals the state and national party want to achieve. These several elements further complicate the decision-making for legislators and ultimately influence the redistricting plan that is adopted.

Conclusion

Although they are by no means conclusive, the findings of this study suggest certain important patterns. Clearly there are several goals that state legislators would like to see realized in the redistricting process. Some of these goals are partisan, some are bi-partisan, and some are actually concerned with responsive government. The achievement of these goals is made more complex by the personal relationships that legislators have with the congressional delegation and by the involvement of the national party in the redistricting process. It may sometimes be possible for the national party to complicate the process by pursuing ends that do not clearly fit those envisioned by the state legislative leaders. In this case, the legislators not only have to balance the type of goals they want, but the level, national or state, at which these goals should be realized. Overall, the findings indicate that legislators are generally motivated by partisan considerations, even though partisan goals can be achieved through a variety of strategies, some of which are more overtly partisan than others.

In any event, the contact between the legislators and the congressmen, the connections between the national party organizations and the state legislatures, and the involvement of hundreds of other groups concerned with redistricting, create a complex environment where multiple and often conflicting goals must be weighed and acted upon. For this reason, most redistricting plans that are eventually accepted do not perfectly embody any one particular goal; rather, the plans reflect the several values that legislators bring with them to the process and respond to the numerous pressures to which they are subjected. Therefore, further research on the attitudes of state legislators in other states with different party systems and assorted methods for reapportionment are needed to broaden our understanding of the components of decision-making that govern this process.

Appendix 1

Independent and Dependent Variables Used in Regression Equations

Party Membership

Party membership was measured by the question "What is your political affiliation?" A dummy variable for party identification was created in which Republican was the base category.

Want National Party Involved

National party involvement was measured by the question "Do you want the national party to be involved in the redistricting process?" "No" was coded as 0 and "yes" was coded as 1.

Campaign Contribution from Congressmen

Campaign contribution was measured by the question "In the past, has the congressman who represents your district contributed to your electoral campaigns?" The alternatives are yes or no. The variable was inserted in the equations as a 0-1 dichotomy with yes coded as 1.

Legislator Belongs to Same Party as Congressman

The same party was measured by the question "Is the congressman who represents your district from the same political party as yourself?" The alternatives were yes or no. The variable was a 0-1 dichotomy with yes coded as 0.

Relationship with Congressmen

Relation was measured by the question "Generally, what is your political relationship with the congressman who represents your district?" The alternatives were poor, good, excellent, or no relationship. The values of 1, 2, 3 were assigned to poor, good, and excellent respectively.

Capture as Many Congressional Seats as Possible

"The following statements describe possible goals of redistricting. With 1 being "very important" and 5 being "not important at all," and 2 through 4 being positions in between, please rate how important it is to you to see the

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following outcomes from redistricting: trying to maximize the opportunities for your party to capture as many congressional seats as possible."

Keep Redistricting Plan Out of the Courts

"The following statements describe possible goals of redistricting. With 1 being "very important" and 5 being "not important at all," and 2 through 4 being positions in between, please rate how important it is to you to see the following outcomes from redistricting: Keep the redistricting plan out of the Courts."

U.S. Congressmen Should Have More Control

"Do you believe U.S. congressmen should have more 'formal' control of congressional redistricting?" Yes was coded as 1, No was coded as 2.

Dependent Variables Used in Regression Equations

The two dependent variables are products of the same question. Legislators were asked: "The following statements describe possible goals of redistricting. With 1 being "very important" and 5 being "not important at all," and 2 through 4 being positions in between, please rate how important it is to you to see the following outcomes from redistricting:"

"Protect the seat of your own congressman"

"Protect House incumbents of same party"

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Endnotes

1. The authors would like to thank Robert Y. Shapiro, John T. Young, and two anonymous reviewers for their assistance. Funds for this project were provided by Franklin & Marshall College and Brigham Young University. The authors alone are responsible for any errors.
2. There is some dispute as to what measure should be used in assessing the outcome of a redistricting plan. Current studies have focused more on the partisan strength in districts rather than on the number of seats won by a particular party (Gopoiian and West 1984; Glaser, Grofman and Robbins 1987).
3. The subject of those studies has been the change in public policy in those states after reapportionment of the legislative districts (Saffel 1980/81; O'Rourke 1980).
4. There is no way to determine whether or not the legislators actually answered the questionnaires. However, in subsequent interviews with various state legislators, the attitudes expressed were compatible with the findings of the survey (Armon 1990). There were no follow-up mailings.
5. By partisan goals we mean a redistricting outcome that clearly benefits one party over another, whether it be the number of seats gained or an increase in voting strength.
6. The question to which the legislators responded is the following: "The following statements describe possible goals of redistricting. With 1 being very important and 5 being not important at all, and 2 through 4 being positions in between, please rate how important it is to you to see the following outcomes from redistricting:"
7. Mean scores for the variables were calculated. The variables were then ranked according to their mean score. The smaller number reflects a higher priority for the legislators. See once again the question wording in note #5.
8. There will be rare exceptions. When a legislature is dominated by one party and the legislators are united behind one goal, as in the case of Indiana in 1980, partisan results will be plainly evident. But few state legislatures meet these conditions.

9. The case of the Republican party in North Carolina during the most recent round of redistricting, which resulted in the creation of the much maligned 12th district, is an example of this kind of behavior.
10. The two hypotheses tested in this section of the paper are essentially the same hypotheses formulated by Glazer, Grofman and Robbins 1987.
11. Statistical significance is established using a .05 level, two-tailed test.
12. Ordinary least squares regression was utilized. The analysis used pairwise deletion of missing cases. See Appendix 1 for a discussion of the question wording and recoding of the variables included in the equations.
13. For a report on efforts of congressmen to contribute money to the campaigns of state legislators, especially in Pennsylvania, see Chuck Alston, "Incumbents Share the Wealth With Redistricting in Mind," Congressional Quarterly Weekly, May 25, 1991, pp. 1343-1350.

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