

Abstract

Electoral districts drawn by independent commissions are seen by political reformers to be preferable to those drawn by state legislatures. The overtly partisan interests of elected officials, say the reformers, lead to oddly-shaped, and gerrymandered districts. To test this, shapes of districts in states with commissions are compared to those within the same state prior to the commission's establishment. Additionally, shapes of districts in states with commissions are compared to those in a selected group of states without commissions. This study tests hypotheses on two methods of measuring compactness, Reock and Polsby-Popper, and coterminosity, the congruence of district lines and pre-existing political boundaries. The study finds that each state with a commission shows no significant difference in mean compactness compared to its pre-commission form. However, in aggregate, all post-commission districts show a significant increase in mean Reock compactness compared to all pre-commission districts, and all districts in states with commissions show significantly less Polsby-Popper compactness than districts in non-commission states. The study also finds no significant difference in coterminosity between commission states and non-commission states. Though the true effect of commissions may not be discernible from averages, other redistricting criteria also need to be controlled for and evaluated over time.