



When the People Draw the Lines

An In-Depth Report on California's First-Ever Citizens Redistricting Commission

The League of Women Voters of California believes a strong, effective and transparent democracy allows for citizens rather than self-interested legislators to determine how Assembly, Senate and Congressional district lines are drawn.



In the past decade, California voters have worked to increase their voice in the democratic process through passing laws that wrestled power from California legislators. Through Propositions 11 and 20, Californians took a stand and stated that they should be the ones leading the process for drawing Assembly, Congressional and Senate district lines. In 2010, this line drawing process advanced when the California Bureau of State Audits (BSA) began the process to create the California Citizens Redistricting Commission (CRC). The 14-person commission was given the complex task of guiding an independent redistricting process and redrawing 177 districts in only eight months.

A new report, “When The People Draw the Lines,” finds that California’s first citizen-led redistricting commission successfully democratized the redistricting process. Among the estimated one third of voters who were familiar with the work of the commission, 66% approved of the CRC district maps.

The independent report, commissioned by the League of Women Voters of California in partnership with The James Irvine Foundation, was prepared through hundreds of hours of analysis, research and interviews. The researcher found that the commission made a concerted effort to make the process more democratic and nonpartisan. In particular, the commission effectively gathered input from Californians to through developing a statewide campaign that incorporated public meetings, open databases and online engagement.

There were, however, moments when the Citizens Redistricting Commission suffered from lack of time as well as monetary and structural support.

Commissioners were only given eight months to redraw district lines and solicit public input. There were also lengthy delays in producing maps and engaging in public outreach because the infrastructure to support the commission was virtually non-existent. Additionally, the CRC lacked appropriate funding for public outreach and engagement, which meant they had to rely on partner organizations and reserve funds for approximately \$13 million in funding.

To ensure the continued active and informed participation of citizens in California’s democracy, the League of Women Voters of California believes we must address obstacles that may doom the work of future citizen redistricting commissions before the commissioners are even selected.

The report provides us with an opportunity to reflect on how we can support future commissions. We must provide greater assistance to the commission and increase their access to more effective technologies that help them more fully engage with the public. At the same time, the public must understand the important role they can play in California’s democracy, especially in relation to the redrawing of district lines. We must prepare communities across the state for fuller engagement in the redistricting process and better advance local awareness efforts that increase participation. Finally, we must be vigilant for laws or ballot measures that directly seek to damage or eliminate the commission and impact their line drawing efforts. In this way, California can continue on the path towards fuller democratic participation.

To view the full report, please visit: <http://cavotes.org/redistrictingreport>.