

TEXAS VS ARIZONA

Redistricting in Texas leaves the process in the hands of the Texas Legislature and the Legislative Redistricting Board (LRB), all elected officials with a vested interest in engineering district lines. For members of the legislature, protecting incumbents of both parties or securing gains for their party in the legislature can be important. For members of the LRB, assisting their party in gaining or retaining control of the legislature also matters. However, the implications for wider issues, such as partisan control over state delegations to the U.S. House of Representatives, are apparent from the recent battles in Texas.

Arizona voters in 2000 approved Proposition 106, which amended the Arizona Constitution to create an independent commission to oversee redistricting for the state legislature and U.S. House of Representatives. The Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission consists of five persons.¹ By law, two members are Democrats, two members are Republicans, and one member is independent. All five must have maintained the same party affiliation, or no affiliation in the case of the independent, for at least the previous three years. In addition, all five members cannot have served as public officials, lobbyists, campaign workers, or political party officials in the three years prior to their appointment. Nominees are compiled by another independent commission charged with making nominations to Arizona appellate courts and are presented to the leadership of the Arizona Legislature for final appointment.

Proposition 106 contains explicit language to specify how the commission carries out the redistricting process.ⁱⁱ For example,

the initial mapping of electoral districts cannot consider party affiliations of voters or the history of voting in existing districts. The commission must follow the guidelines of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, other legislation passed by Congress, and relevant rulings by the courts. District lines are to be compact and to respect the boundaries of existing communities, counties, and cities. Also, districts are expected to be competitive between Democratic and Republican candidates. This provision is tested only after the initial plan is developed. Thus, highly gerrymandered districts that clearly favor one party or another are not possible in Arizona.

THINKING Critically

- ★ How does the system of the Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission attempt to depoliticize the redistricting process?
- ★ Does Arizona's system accomplish this goal? Why or why not?
- ★ Has redistricting affected your hometown? Would you like to see your state adopt such a plan?

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- i. Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission, "Frequently Asked Questions," www.azredistricting.org/?page=faq (accessed August 28, 2014).
 - ii. Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission, "Proposition 106," <http://azredistricting.org/2001/Prop-106.asp> (accessed August 28, 2014).