



## President Obama On Redistricting Reform

### **Reforming the redistricting process:**

*“Let me make one final point about election reform. The American people don't just expect us to protect their right to vote, we also need to protect their right to a meaningful vote. The fact is that in too many districts today people's vote really probably won't make a difference. I know that's sacrilege to say, but as a consequence of the gerrymandering of congressional districts, people aren't being illogical when they stay at home, because the outcome is a foregone conclusion.*

*As the next census approaches and the Supreme Court weighs the merits of the controversial Texas redistricting plan, I think we should begin an open bipartisan discussion about ensuring that future attempts at redistricting are as fair as possible. You know, it's one thing to draw lines that ensure the adequate representation of minority populations, it's another to draw them for purely partisan advantage. Both parties have been responsible for doing this. Both parties should be responsible for ending it.*

*This is something that I find myself with strange bedfellows. Arnold Schwarzenegger, as you will recall, proposed this in California and it was fought vigorously by Democrats. In Ohio, it was fought vigorously by Republicans. But the fact of the matter is that we now have a system where, too often, our representatives are selecting their voters, as opposed to the voters selecting the representatives. That is a situation that I think the American people should not accept. ...*

*-Brookings and the American Enterprise Institution  
Launch Joint Election Reform Project 2/8/06*

### **Against partisan gerrymandering and non-competitive districts:**

*“I personally think that we should seriously consider, on a state-by-state basis, moving away from partisan gerrymandering because I think it discourages the kind of robust debate that we need to have. If people feel like this is a 90 percent Democratic district or a 90 percent Republican district, then at a certain point folks start opting out of the process.”*

*- MyDD interview 2/8/07*

### **Conflict-of-interest in redistricting:**

*In an article in the Hyde Park Herald about how “partisan” and “undemocratic” Illinois redistricting had become, Obama was asked for his views. As usual, he was candid. “There is a conflict of interest built into the process,” he said. “Incumbents drawing their own maps will inevitably try to advantage themselves.” The New Yorker 7/21/08*

## **Opposed to mid-decade gerrymanders & support for independent commissions**

**As President, would you support federal legislation prohibiting states from redrawing valid congressional district lines more than once a decade?**

Obama: *I opposed the partisan mid-decade gerrymandering that Tom Delay engineered in Texas. I believe that mid-decade redistricting is rarely justified. There may be some exceptional cases, such as a natural disaster, that create population shifts that may warrant mid-decade redistricting. But I do not support state efforts to redraw otherwise valid congressional district lines more than once a decade.*

**As President, would you support federal legislation requiring states to form diverse, transparent, and independent redistricting commissions to redraw congressional district lines?**

Obama: *I would encourage states to form such commissions.*

-Responses to questionnaire from the Midwest Democracy Network 11/07

## **For voters choosing politicians and against politicians choosing their voters:**

*"Election reform," he said, "is one where Americans have the tendency to go from shocked to trance."*

*"In too many districts today, people's votes probably won't make a difference," Obama said. "As a consequence of the gerrymandering of redistricting, people aren't being illogical when they stay home because the outcome is a foregone conclusion." Then, he added: "We now have a system where too often, representatives are selecting their voters instead of voters selecting their representatives. That is a situation that we should not accept."*

*"The idea of redistricting is a complicated problem," Obama said, noting that he is looking to the Supreme Court to give guidance in a Texas redistricting case it is considering. "But I cannot imagine any scenario where Congress would draw new districts, thereby rendering half of the seats competitive"*

-The Baltimore Sun 2/8/06

## **Reforming redistricting:**

*"Of course, there are technical fixes to our democracy that might relieve some of this pressure on politicians, structural changes that would strengthen the link between voters and their representatives. Nonpartisan districting, same-day registration, and weekend elections would all increase the competitiveness of races and might spur more participation from the electorate - and the more the electorate is paying attention, the more integrity is rewarded. Public financing of campaigns or free television and radio time could drastically reduce the constant scrounging for money and the influence of special interests. Changes in the rules in the House and the Senate might empower legislators in the minority, increase transparency in the process, and encourage more probing reporting. But none of these changes can happen of their own accord. Each would require a change in attitude among those in power. Each would demand that individual politicians challenge the existing order; loosen their hold on incumbency; fight with their friends as well as their enemies on behalf of abstract ideas in which the public appears to have little interest. Each would require from men and women a willingness to risk what they already have."*

-excerpt from *Audacity of Hope*