

Redistricting 2012: 5 Lessons Learned

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Citizen participation in the 2012 round of redistricting was at an all-time high. Aggressive use of traditional forms of involvement (public hearings) in tandem with new media and free downloadable software greatly increased the number of Floridians engaged in the redistricting process *before* legislators created any maps, then again *after* proposals were released by each legislative chamber. There are some lessons to be learned (or re-learned) from this experience—some predictable, others quite a surprise.

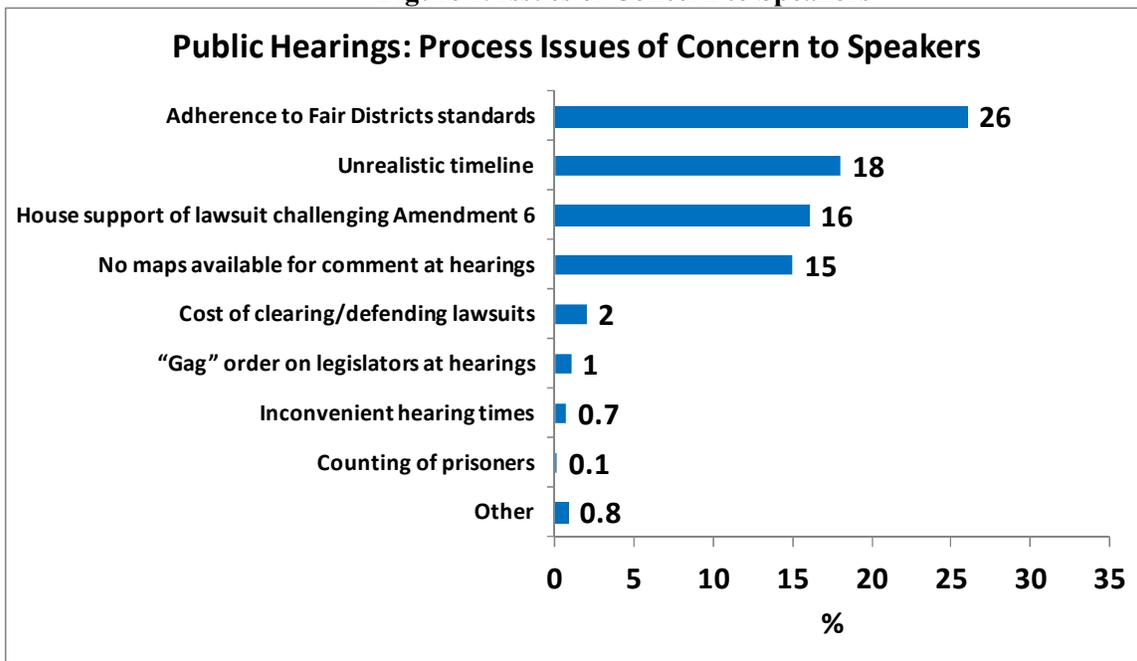
Lesson #1. The long-held belief that redistricting is a policy area of major interest to politicians and political parties but of little interest to the general public turned out to be *false*.

Any doubts about Florida citizens' interest in the 2012 round of redistricting or their divergent opinions as to how it should be done were dispelled at the 26 public hearings held across the state from June 20 to September 1, 2011, attended by 4,797 people. According to our analyses of videotapes of the 26 public hearings held across the state, 1,368 citizens spoke.¹ They represented 55 of Florida's 67 counties.² Among the speakers, 58% were men, 42% women. Racial/ethnic minorities comprised 15% (African Americans, 10%; Hispanics, 5%). In terms of who they were affiliated with (self-reported), 60% were private citizens, 17% were associated with a Fair District advocacy group,³ 8% represented a business or conservative group, 9% were local officials, and 5% were from a wide array of other groups, while under 1% did not identify any affiliation.

Issues of Concern about the Process. The issues of greatest concern to the speakers were: (1) whether the Legislature would adhere to the Fair Districts amendments standards when creating the district maps (26%), (2) whether the timeline for completion and court approval of the plans could be met (18%), (3) the state House's participation in a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of Amendment 6—congressional districts (16%), and (4) the Legislature's decision not to have proposed maps available at the hearings (15%). (See Figure 1.)

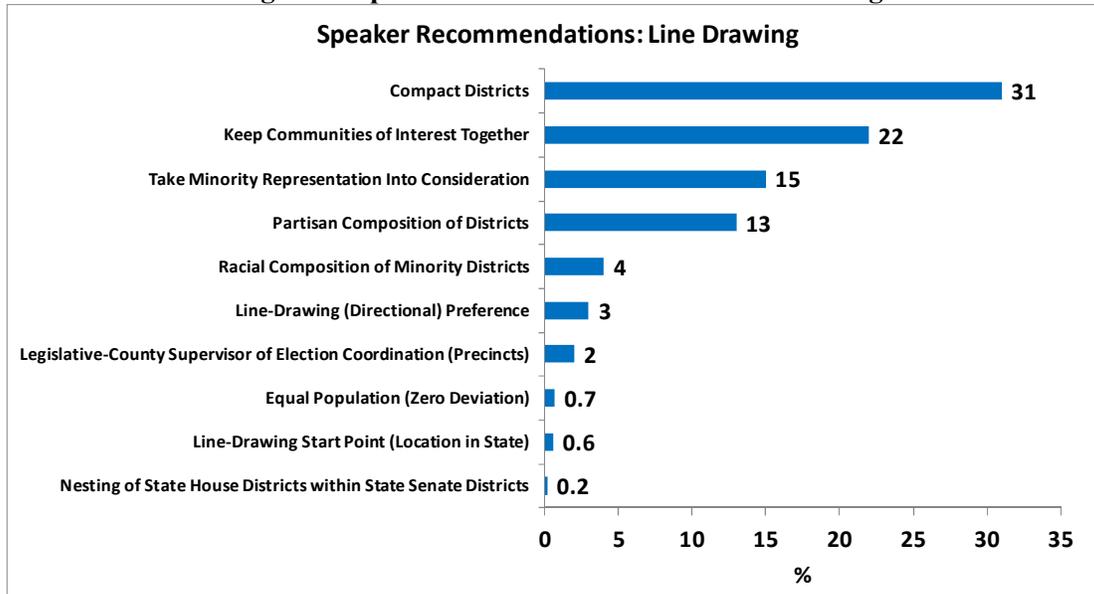
Issues of Concern about Drawing District Lines. There was little consensus as to what factors legislators should pay close attention to when drawing district lines. (See Figure 2.) All are interrelated, but the two most cited—compactness and keeping communities of interest together—are closely intertwined.

Figure 1. Issues of Concern to Speakers



Source: Analysis of all public hearing attendees making presentation in person; from videotapes posted on FloridaRedistricting.org.

Figure 2. Speaker Recommendations: Line Drawing



Source: Analysis of all public hearing attendees making presentation in person; from videotapes posted on FloridaRedistricting.org.

Compact Districts (31%). The most common line-drawing-related recommendation was to create more compact districts. Among the speakers making this recommendation to state legislators, 62% urged that where possible, counties and cities should not be split, 34% opposed odd-shaped meandering districts, and 16% argued against little pieces being cut off and placed in

other districts. Predictably, support for keeping cities and counties together was highest among local officials. Preferences for more compact and less gerrymandered districts were highest among Fair Districts supporters and private citizens. Business and conservative affiliated speakers were more likely than others to want to keep economic communities together. (See Table 1.)

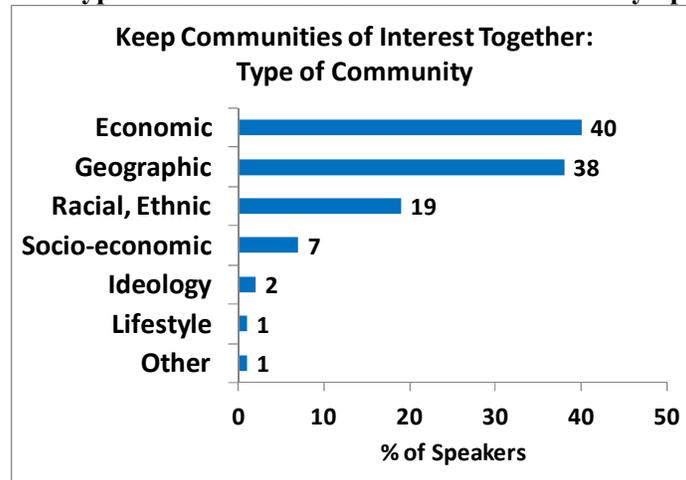
Table 1. Summary of Draw Compact District Recommendations by Speaker Association

Recommendation	Speaker Represents				
	Private citizen	Fair District Advocacy Group	Business, Conservative Group	Local Officials	Other/NA
Base	256	45	40	55	25
Keep counties, cities together	56%	53%	58%	76%	64%
Avoid odd-shaped meandering districts	38%	44%	23%	15%	28%
Avoid pieces being cut off into other districts	14%	9%	15%	16%	16%
Don't tie interior rural areas to coastal urban areas	6%	2%	18%	11%	0%
Other re Draw compact districts	10%	16%	20%	22%	12%

Source: Analysis of all public hearing attendees making presentation in person; from videotapes posted on FloridaRedistricting.org.

Keep Communities of Interest Together (22%). The delineation of what communities should be kept together varied considerably, not surprising in a large diverse state like Florida. As shown in Figure 3, *economic* (40%) and *geographically-based* (38%) definitions of “community” were the most prevalent, followed by socioeconomic, cultural, and political commonalities.⁴

Figure 3. Types of Communities of Interest Identified by Speakers



Source: Analysis of all public hearing attendees making presentation in person; from videotapes posted on FloridaRedistricting.org.

Among the speakers calling for the protection of specific *economic* sectors, 56% singled out coastal communities, 49% agriculture, 17% tourism, 9% interior (non-coastal), and 4%

military. Among those focused on more *geographically-defined* communities, 52% wanted to keep rural areas together, 24% metropolitan/urban areas, and 4% suburban areas. Two common prescriptions were: “Separate interior from coastal areas” and “Don’t tie rural counties to big cities.”

Speakers representing business/conservative groups were more likely to define community of interest in either economic or geographic terms, while Fair Districts affiliates and private citizens saw community more in terms of race/ethnicity or socioeconomic composition. (See Table 2.)

Table 2. Summary of Type of Community to Keep Together by Speaker Association

	Speaker Represents				
	Private citizen	Type of Interest	Business, Conservative Group	Local Officials	Other/ NA
Base	168	36	46	38	25
Economic	36%	17%	54%	53%	36%
Geographic	25%	14%	34%	26%	12%
Racial, Ethnic	21%	39%	4%	11%	8%
Socio-Economic	4%	6%	0%	0%	0%

Source: Analysis of all public hearing attendees making presentation in person; from videotapes posted on FloridaRedistricting.org.

Lesson #2. Public input *can* change both the redistricting process and the outcome.
“Authentic [citizen] participation requires...[a] focus on both process and outcome.”⁵

Certainly in a politically-divided state, there was no consensus among the citizens who weighed in on each. But there is some evidence that where voices were the loudest and recommendations more plausible, legislators did make some adjustments. Over one-fourth (27%) of the speakers gave specific process-related recommendations for how to proceed with the redistricting process. The three that received the most support were to speed up the timeline (54%), get out of a lawsuit challenging Amendment 6 (29%), and hold hearings after the initial maps drawn by the legislators were released to the public (25%).

Public officials were the strongest advocates for speeding up the timeline, Fair Districts supporters for another round of public comment to respond to maps and amending the constitution to speed up redistricting, and both private citizens and Fair Districts proponents for getting out of the litigation challenging Amendment 6 (Table 3). The legislature ended up speeding up the timeline and allowing for public input regarding the proposed maps.

Table 3. Process Recommendations by Speaker Association

Recommendation	Speaker Represents				
	Private citizen	Fair District Advocacy Group	Business, Conservative Group	Local Officials	Other/NA
Base	185	118	15	26	22
Speed up timeline	39%	57%	53%	77%	68%
Get out of lawsuit challenging Amendment 6	32%	31%	7%	5%	23%
Hold hearings after maps officially drawn by legislature	22%	31%	20%	15%	27%
Other process-related statement	34%	24%	20%	8%	9%
Suspend public hearings until maps drawn	1%	5%	0%	0%	5%
Hold hearings at more convenient times	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Propose constitutional amendment to permit legislative redistricting earlier	1%	5%	0%	0%	5%

Source: Analysis of all public hearing attendees making presentation in person; from videotapes posted on FloridaRedistricting.org.

An analysis of 830⁶ written submissions sent via email, mail, fax, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook to the Florida House, Florida Senate or specific legislators⁷ shows citizen reaction to legislative districting plans (congressional, state senate, and/ or state house) was somewhat more positive (56%) than negative (38%).

A high percentage of those who liked the maps (and gave a reason) cited the respect legislators gave to communities of interest (74%) and minority representation, especially the Hispanic congressional influence district in central Florida (15%). Among critics of the maps, nearly half complained that legislators had ignored Fair Districts standards (25%) or continued to draw gerrymandered districts (20%). One fourth was disappointed with maps that split counties or communities of interest.

Lesson #3. An “inform, then engage” approach does bolster citizen participation.

Extensive use of new communication technology and media is vital to the success of this approach as is the effective structuring of opportunities for public input in-person or online. Beginning in 2009 with pre-Census preparations, key legislators and staff members adopted the approach of “first educating, then engaging” the public in the redistricting process. This “strategic communication effort” created websites (www.FloridaRedistricting.org and RedistrictFlorida@flsenate.gov), Facebook pages, two blogs, and an email subscriber option. At the 26 public hearing sites, staffers were available to demonstrate the redistricting software and answer technical questions. A YouTube channel featured video tutorials on how to draw maps and use the software.⁸ The multi-media approach certainly contributed to greater participation in the 2012 redistricting than in any previous cycle.

Lesson #4. Citizen participation analyses yield richer insights of who favors what and why when opinions are examined within the context of their interest group affiliation.

Our analysis of citizen participants clearly shows that redistricting preferences were often sharper among those representing divergent local interest groups than different political party affiliations. It should be noted that this is the most extensive analysis of grassroots-level citizen participation in the redistricting process that has been conducted in any state to date.

Lesson #5. Ill-defined redistricting standards, with a multiplicity of competing measures on which there is little consensus (e.g., compactness, retrogression), virtually guarantee court battles in a politically-divided state.

Although constitutional Amendments 5 and 6 established new redistricting standards, many of the standards lacked clarity as to how adherence to them would be measured. The Florida Supreme Court in its review of the House and Senate redistricting plans ended up establishing these measures, although the decision to do so was not unanimous among the justices.

As predicted, court battles began as soon as the legislature approved both the congressional and legislative maps on February 9, 2012 and have yet to be resolved. More may be filed and appeals are likely. Retrogression remains a major sticking point, with its multiple legal interpretations as to what is required under the federal Voting Rights Act—majority minority districts, minority influence districts, or minority coalition districts.

One thing that is indisputable is that redistricting remains the most political of political decisions whether in the legislature or in the courtroom.

This column is a shortened version of a longer academic paper (“Redistricting in Florida: Voices From the Grassroots: Who? How Many? How Cohesive? How Successful?”), presented by the authors at the 2012 Citadel Symposium on Southern Politics, Charleston, SC, March 2, 2012.

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ENDNOTES

¹ According to statistics released by the Florida Senate, 1,637 spoke at hearings (Florida Senate Hearing Reports found @ <http://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Redistricting/Hearings>). Some signed up to speak, but some ended up not

doing so for various reasons and others submitted written comments rather than make public statements. Our analyses are based on those who actually spoke at the hearings—those appearing in videotapes of the hearings.

² The counties not represented are Bradford, Calhoun, DeSoto, Dixie, Franklin, Gulf, Hamilton, Holmes, Liberty, Madison, Suwannee, and Washington. Forty percent of the speakers did not identify their county of residence.

³ Any group that was part of the coalition conducting the petition drive to put Amendments 5 and 6 on the November 2010 ballot, any group that endorsed the Fair Districts amendments, or any group that joined in the litigation challenging the constitutionality of the Florida Legislature’s approved congressional and state legislative redistricting plans.

⁴ Other types of communities of interest identified as important and examples singled out in each included: *Socioeconomic*: blue collar v. wealthy; retirees v. college town; *Racial/ethnic*: African American, Haitian, Hispanic/Latino; *Lifestyle*: GLBT (gay community); *Ideology*: Tea Party; conservative; liberal; and *Political party*: Democrat; Republican.

⁵ Cheryl Simrell King, Kathryn M. Feltey, and Bridget O’Neill Susel. 1998. “The Questions of Participation: Toward Authentic Public Participation in Public Administration,” *Public Administration Review* 58(4): 320.

⁶ The actual number of responses entered into the data base was 630. The other 200 responses were merely described as mirroring the others.

⁷ Florida Senate Written Submissions @ http://www.flsenate.gov/PublishedContent/SESSION/HOME/REDISTRICTING2012/PUBLICCOMMENTS/Email_Comments_PCBs.pdf and Florida House Written Submissions @ <http://mydistrictbuilderplanexplorer.wordpress.com/public-comment-on-legislative-proposals/>.

⁸ “OPI Pulse:2012 Redistricting,” February 1, 2012.