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New Study Evaluates Maps Drawn by California Redistricting Commission

An independent analysis of California's newly drawn legislative and Congressional districts concludes that the maps are less gerrymandered than the districts in place since 2001 and will likely lead to more electoral victories for Democrats — and potentially a two-thirds supermajority in the state legislature.

The study by Vladimir Kogan of UC-San Diego and Eric McGhee of the Public Policy Institute of California will appear in an upcoming issue of the *California Journal of Politics and Policy*, which is published by the Institute of Governmental Studies at UC-Berkeley.

Critics have accused the commission of violating voting rights laws and the state and federal constitutions, and have argued that the new plans unduly benefit the Democratic Party. The new study provides new information that can help evaluate many of these criticisms.

The main findings of the study include:

- The maps give Democrats the opportunity to win several additional districts, particularly in the congressional plan. However, these gains appear to come primarily from reversing some of the most egregious distortions in the 2001 plan, rather than from any effort on the part of the Commission to stack the deck in favor of the Democratic Party. The 2001 plan was designed to protect the incumbents of both major parties.
- The districts drawn by the Commission will increase opportunities for minority representation. The new plans create seven new districts where Latinos represent the majority of eligible voters and the first majority-Asian district in California history.
- Compared to the maps put into place by the Legislature and the governor in 2001, the Commission plans generally provide an improvement on various measures voters have said are important to them. The new maps are more compact and reduce the number of cities split among multiple districts.

- Although proponents of redistricting reform have argued that reform would reduce the number of safe districts — those in which one party has a substantial advantage — the analysis finds that the new districts will produce only a modest increase in the number of competitive elections.

Unlike earlier rounds of once-per-decade redistricting in California, the most recent process was overseen by California's new Citizens Redistricting Commission, a body created by voters in 2008 to adjust the state's political boundaries to reflect population growth and changing residential patterns. Although the commission adopted new political maps in August 2010, these plans are currently being reviewed by the California Supreme Court and are the subject of several referendum challenges.

By examining results from hundreds of previous California elections, data from the 2010 Census, and other records, the analysis forecasts how the new plans will affect political competition and the quality of political representation for California voters.

The full study is attached. It will be published in the *California Journal of Politics and Policy*, which is available at www.bepress.com/cjpp. The *Journal* is published by the Institute of Governmental Studies, a multidisciplinary research unit of the University of California and the state's oldest public policy research center.

Vladimir Kogan is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Political Science at UC-San Diego. He has been a research fellow at the Bill Lane Center for the American West at Stanford University, and was awarded the 2010 Alma H. Young Emerging Scholar Award by the Urban Affairs Association. Eric McGhee is a Policy Fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California. He previously served as a congressional fellow of the American Political Science Association and as an assistant professor of political science at the University of Oregon. He holds a Ph.D. in political science from UC-Berkeley.