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Redistricting and the Public Interest: Developing A Value-Explicit Dialogue

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Oral Presentation O2.1

**REDISTRICTING AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST: DEVELOPING A
VALUE-EXPLICIT DIALOGUE**

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Throughout the coming year, legislators will take up the decennial responsibility of drawing new boundaries for legislative districts. Political scientists and practitioners often emphasize the profound impact of redistricting on political careers, process, and policy. However, the ultimate goals of redistricting remain controversial. Redistricting plays a large role in establishing the framework for American politics, and is thus directly linked to representation and the “public interest,” a contested theoretical concept. Using the lens of previous public interest theory, this study examines the historical redistricting dialogue through a content analysis of redistricting-related Supreme Court cases. By applying an analysis of Brian Barry’s ideal- or want-regarding classifications of the public interest, this research finds that methods of legislative redistricting have trended toward want-regarding concepts of the public interest. Bolstered by an analysis of contrasting redistricting policy in the neighboring states of Illinois and Iowa, this paper concludes with a call for a more value-explicit theoretical dialogue surrounding the process of legislative redistricting.