

Public Comments

Montana Districting and Apportionment Commission
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Montana Districting and Apportionment Commission
June 3, 2022
Comments from the League of Women Voters
From Nancy Leifer, President of the League of Women Voters of Montana

Comments regarding definition of competitiveness

The League of Women Voters encourages the Commission to include as much competitiveness in its final map as possible. Dave's Redistricting data indicate that the House map drawn after the 2010 census had 21 of the House Districts competitive in the 2018 election. In other words, voters in about one race of every 5 had a chance of switching a seat to the opposite party. Now that the prison adjustments have been made to the Montana data base, 10 districts fall within the plus or minus 1% population variation. The Commission will have the opportunity to do better in drawing the remaining 90 House districts, or in starting with a clean slate for the whole state. As noted in extensive public comment previously before this Commission, competitive races generate higher voter turnout, require candidates to reach out to the broader range of voters in their districts, and encourage those elected to be responsive to the broader range of constituent concerns. These are the foundation of an effective democracy.

The League has two criteria for determining which definition of competitiveness to support:

- a. accessible for the public to understand and use.
- b. identifies races that are actually likely to be competitive.

The Commission has three proposals for the definition of competitiveness before it. The League favors a hybrid of the definitions offered in the three proposals.

We favor Commissioners Essmann and Stusek's proposal for the range of elections to be used to calculate percentage partisan lean likely in each district. Essmann's proposed list of elections is the list used by Dave's Redistricting. A member of the public attempting to draw maps is unable to change which elections are factored into this metric to match a different list of elections. The list of elections proposed by Essmann and Stusek will enable the public to use the data already in Dave's Redistricting.

We favor Commissioners Miller and Lamson proposal in establishing the ranges of percentages for two levels of competitiveness. Lamson and Miller propose a more restrictive standard for competitiveness than does Dave's redistricting. These more restrictive standards are more likely to identify races that are truly competitive.

However, we feel there is some clarification needed in how the Commission would assess the range of partisan lean percentages adopted.

Dave's Redistricting competitive partisan lean measurement is described as races that fall between 45% and 55% of total votes. In looking more closely at the shading on the

statistics tab, Dave's Redistricting uses two criteria to determine competitive races: the higher percentage party vote is within the 45-55% range, and the difference between the parties' percentages does not exceed 10%. For example, looking at the table of statistics for the House using current districts and 2020 census data, Dave's Redistricting tallies 20 districts as competitive, i.e., in the 45%-55% range. However, five of these districts have one of the parties within this range, while the correlated percentage for the other party, while within ten percentage points of the higher party, falls below 45%.

How does the Commission intend its standard to be measured? Is the standard of competitiveness based on both Republican and Democrat Party percentages falling within the specified range, or just the higher percentage of the two parties? Is there a second criteria of spread between the two parties that should be included in defining competitiveness?

Dave's Redistricting also provides three "measures" of competitiveness that differ from each other. The notes at the bottom of the statistics tab include the actual number of districts that fit Dave's Redistricting two-part description of competitiveness. The other two measures that appear in the "analytics" tab are ratings derived from but different from the actual number of districts noted at the bottom of the statistics chart.

It is not immediately clear how Dave's Redistricting mathematically manipulates the total number of competitive districts to arrive at the other two "ratings." Having users assess the competitiveness of their maps by tallying the number of districts from the partisan lean column on the table of statistics seems the most straightforward way to assess competitiveness. The table of statistics allows users to see the actual percentage numbers for each district directly. It is a straightforward matter to count the number of districts in the statistics table for a proposed map that fall within the criteria established by the Commission, including the ranges proposed by Miller and Lamson.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comment.