

Public Comments

Montana Districting and Apportionment Commission
Comments between 5 p.m. on November 25 and 8 a.m. on November 28, 2022

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From: David Patterson <dapatterson@fastmail.fm>
Sent: Monday, November 28, 2022 1:03 AM
To: Districting
Subject: Comments
Attachments: Patterson-MRCCComments.pdf

Here are my comments on the proposed plans for legislative redistricting.

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November 28, 2022

To Montana Redistricting Commission

Comments from David Patterson, Missoula, on state legislative redistricting

I support either plan 2 or 3 or a plan with similar properties to these two plans for two reasons: competitiveness and proportionality. I also think that compactness should not be overvalued for reasons given below.

Competitiveness

I strongly support having as many competitive districts as reasonably possible. I think that's good for government and it motivates voters to participate when they know their candidate has even a small but reasonable chance of being elected. It also encourages candidates who can reach across party lines and truly represent all the people in a district. Here are the results using the Commission's definition of a competitive district as one that, according to previous election results, would have voted for the Democratic (or Republican) candidate between 3 and 7 times in 10 previous statewide elections. Plans 2 and 3 have higher numbers of competitive districts than plans 1 and 4.

Plan	Democrat	Competitive	Republican
HD1	26	8	66
HD2	38	10	52
HD3	37	11	52
HD4	25	7	68

However, none of the plans have a high number of competitive districts by this definition. I think it's informative to look at the exact number of the previous 10 elections that would have been won by the Democratic candidate in each district for each plan. Here are the counts for the 100 districts in each plan:

Plan	Number of Democratic "wins"										
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
HD1	50	4	12	5	1	1	1	0	2	9	15
HD2	42	4	6	3	2	0	4	1	6	22	10
HD3	44	4	4	4	1	1	3	2	5	22	10
HD4	49	5	14	3	1	1	0	2	1	10	14

Plans 1 and 4 had 65 and 63 districts where one party would have won every single statewide race while plans 2 and 3 had only 52 and 54 such districts. There's a significant difference if your party had come out ahead in none of the previous 10 elections versus at least one. The latter proves it's possible for a candidate of either party to win the district while a 10-0 result for either party provides little hope.

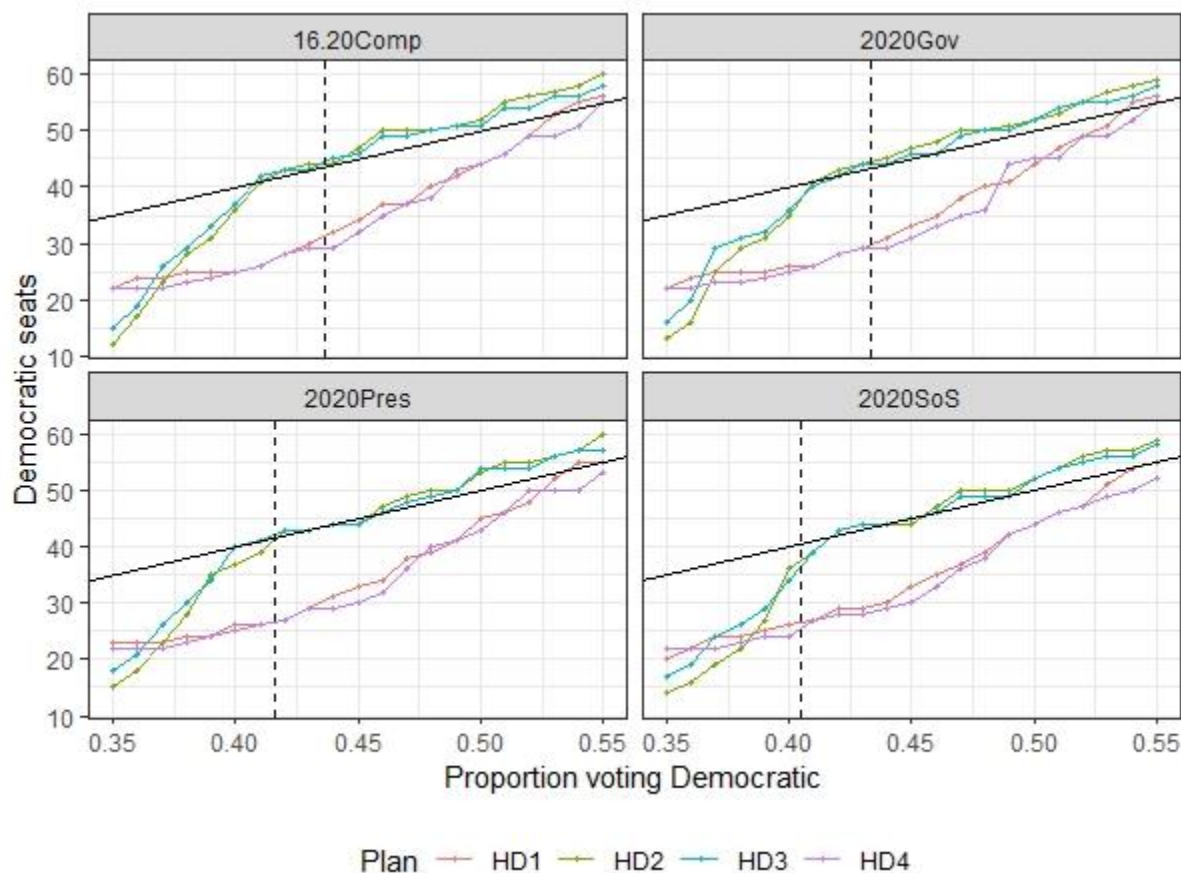
Proportionality

Although not a requirement of redistricting it seems reasonable that, other things being roughly equal, one should choose the plan that is nearest to proportionality, that is, the number of seats for each party being approximately proportional to the statewide share of the votes for that party. It also seems reasonable that if there is a swing over time in these proportions, then proportionality should still be

satisfied as closely as possible. A standard way to examine this is through uniform partisan swing plots. A uniform partisan swing asks what would happen if the proportion of voters for one party increased or decreased uniformly across the state. The following graphs use the votes for each of three previous statewide races plus the composite vote for all the races.

The dashed vertical line shows the actual value of the statewide proportion Democratic (as a proportion of the total Democratic and Republican votes, omitting third party votes) for that race. The y-values for that point are the numbers of Democratic seats that would be won under each plan. The solid black line represents exact proportionality. For example, for 2020Gov vote, where the actual statewide vote was about 43% Democratic, plans 1 and 4 would result in about 30 democratic seats and plans 2 and 3 in about 44 seats, much closer to proportionality. If the proportion voting democratic were to increase uniformly across the state, the number of Democratic seats would stay very close to proportionality for plans 2 and 3, and would only approach proportionality under plans 1 and 4 when the percent Democratic increased all the way to 55%. If the proportion voting Democratic were to decrease uniformly, plans 2 and 3 would have trouble maintaining proportionality, but would still be better than plans 1 and 4.

The pattern for the votes from other races is very similar to the one for 2020Gov.



Compactness

Other things being equal, proportionality should be a deciding factor. One of these other things is the compactness of districts. However, compactness is a difficult concept to define, especially in Montana, and we should not base it on a visual evaluation of the resulting map. The pitfalls in doing that have been demonstrated in some eastern states where computer searches are able to find nice-looking maps with compact-looking districts, with some of the maps gerrymandered one direction and the others gerrymandered in the opposite direction. Visual evaluation is especially difficult for Montana because much of the area has few or no people. In fact, about half of the approximately 88,000 census blocks in Montana have no people in them. Therefore, simply looking at the outline of a district can be misleading because it may contain large swaths of uninhabited or sparsely habited land.