

NEW MEXICO REDISTRICTING EVALUATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SEPTEMBER 2022

 **REDISTRICTING
PARTNERS**

Summary of Research Design and Main Findings of Evaluation Report

Research Design

Redistricting Partners conducted a comprehensive analysis of the most recent redistricting process in New Mexico on behalf of the Arnold Foundation. Redistricting Partners conducted this research with the partnership of Dr. Gabriel Sanchez and Dr. David Cottrell, independent experts who led different aspects of the research for this report. Our goal with this evaluation is to determine if the presence of the Citizen's Redistricting Committee (CRC) led to a better redistricting process than in 2010?

Following extensive background research on government documents, news and media reports, as well as comparisons between New Mexico and other states, researchers conducted a statewide survey in the state of New Mexico of highly likely voters (n=500). The online survey allowed respondents to review key background information and media stories before answering questions. In addition to the survey, twenty interviews with experts who interacted closely with the redistricting process in New Mexico were conducted. To analyze potential gerrymandering across the maps, we compare the enacted House and Senate redistricting plans to the CRC-proposed plans and an additional set of plans drawn by a nonpartisan computer algorithm. The computer-drawn plans are the same plans used to assess the partisan fairness of the CRC maps and provide a baseline for expected outcomes if the plans were drawn using only partisan-neutral redistricting objectives.

Summary of Main Findings

We found that the CRC added tremendous value to the redistricting process in the state. In fact, several respondents to our qualitative interviews stated that this cycle was the best redistricting process they have experienced. Through map analysis, we also find that the maps the legislature passed are similar to the alternative plans in terms of the number of Democratic seats they produce, but different in that they produce fewer competitive seats (this difference is quite significant in the Senate, but less so in the House). Moreover, in addition to producing fewer competitive seats, we find that the enacted plans pair fewer incumbents than most of the CRC plans and far fewer incumbents than the computer-drawn plans. Although the enacted maps may not have been drawn to advantage one party over the other, our findings suggest that they appear to have been drawn to keep incumbent parties in their districts and safe from partisan competition.

The survey of highly likely voters was utilized to gather opinions about the performance of both the CRC and the state legislature this cycle. Some of the main findings from the survey and qualitative interviews with experts include:

- While participation in the redistricting process was not unexpectedly low, 1 in 5 highly likely voters in New Mexico “reviewing maps on the CRC website”, and 11% reported that they “contacted an elected official about redistricting maps”.
- The ability to participate virtually was a resource that led to greater participation from the public, and helped to overcome the challenges associated with in-person participation this cycle due to COVID- 35% of respondents reported that they were not able to attend in-person meetings due to COVID-19.
- A majority, 51% of respondents, had a positive rating for the CRC regarding public engagement, either responding that the committee did either a “great job” or a “good job”. Conversely, only 26%

of participants responded that the legislature either did a “great” or “good” job, with 57% indicating that they did a “poor” or “terrible” job. Many qualitative interview respondents pointed to the significant steps the CRC took in ensuring that state residents had an opportunity to provide their input in the process. This included using technology to allow respondents to participate virtually and expanding time limits for discussion which was particularly important to tribes.

- The survey makes clear that the electorate in New Mexico places high importance on transparency in the redistricting process, as 66% of respondents indicated that it is “very important” and another 25% said that it is “somewhat important” that meetings be held publicly. However, the survey suggests there is room for improvement regarding transparency. Only 29% of participants agreed that “the CRC process was open to the public, and public input was included in decisions,” versus only 20% who said the same for the New Mexico Senate.
- More of the electorate prefers to not advance incumbency in the generations of maps than those who do: 43% indicated that incumbent addresses should not be used in the decision-making process, while 40% believe it should be considered.
- There was relatively low support among the New Mexico electorate for utilizing political party in creating new districts, with only 38% of respondents indicated that political party of districts’ populations should be considered when drawing district maps. Respondents from the qualitative interviews were generally supportive of including partisanship performance data in the creation of maps, with strong consensus that there must be consistency between the CRC and legislature in how partisanship is, or is not, used to generate maps.
- Survey respondents to provide an “overall” grade for the performance of both the CRC and the legislature in New Mexico this cycle. 37% of respondents indicated that the CRC deserved either an A or B, and another 25% a satisfactory grade of C. Conversely, only 17% of respondents believed that the state legislature deserved an A or B, with a majority (56%) giving the legislature either a D or F.
- Finally, 77% of respondents support “creating an independent New Mexico redistricting commission that would directly, without the legislature’s involvement, draw the lines of legislative and congressional maps.” A majority of New Mexican voters support this reform, regardless of demographic or political identity. These findings were consistent with what the interview participants conveyed, with consensus among experts interviewed that although the CRC did a great job this session, it is necessary to move toward a truly independent commission with binding decisions on district maps.

The report includes some recommendations to consider prior to the next cycle. These include ensuring that the make-up of any future committee be more representative of the state’s population, and having a clearer set of rules that govern community participation in the redistricting process. It was suggested that future research should investigate and document the sources of funding that support redistricting efforts in New Mexico, and if the CRC model is continued in the state, there needs to be enhanced mechanisms to ensure that the legislature takes those maps into greater consideration.

The full report that includes a full set of recommendations based on the findings from the research is available at: