

# Adopting Criteria

At the start of the districting process, the Commission adopts criteria that will define how lines are drawn. Some of this criteria is mandatory, like compliance with the Voting Rights Act, but some of it is discretionary and is entirely defined by the Commission. **Since the districts they draw are informed by these criteria, it's really important that everyday Montanans have a say.**

## Criteria Priorities

### Population Equality & Deviation

**WHAT IT IS:** Districts should be roughly equal in size. The deviation is the allowable difference between any two districts.

**WHAT WE WANT:** The deviation should be set at +/-5%, the federally allowable maximum.

**WHY IT MATTERS:** A +/-5% deviation allows commissioners to balance population equality with other important criteria. It also allows commissioners to consider Census undercounts.

### Competitiveness

**WHAT IT IS:** Districts are drawn so that either party could win the district.

**WHAT WE WANT:** Politically Competitive districts, when practical\*.

**WHY WE CARE:** Voters should get to pick their leaders, leaders shouldn't get to pick their voters. By drawing competitive districts, candidates of every party have to earn the votes of the Montanans in their district resulting in a healthier democracy.

\*There will be districts where this isn't realistic while still meeting mandatory criteria, which is why it's used when practical or applicable.

### Political Fairness

**WHAT IT IS:** Districts should be drawn to align with how the state on a whole votes.

**WHAT WE WANT:** Political fairness is defined by the impact of fairness, not just the intent of political fairness. While intent provides context for a decision, it's the impact of the decision that is meaningful & measurable.

**WHY IT MATTERS:** A fair map should be politically neutral - neither side should enjoy an unfair advantage that doesn't align with the state as a whole.

### Unranked Criteria

**WHAT IT IS:** Outside of falling into the mandatory or discretionary bucket, criteria is considered co-equally.

**WHAT WE WANT:** The criteria to be unranked and co-equal.

**WHY WE CARE:** Ranking discretionary criteria ensures that lower criteria ultimately get ignored in favor of higher ranked criteria. By maintaining co-equality of criteria, the Commission can balance the unique needs of each district and center feedback from the public in the process.

## How to Talk about Criteria

The best public comments, whether written or spoken, highlight your personal experiences and values. To help you get started, you'll find some talking points about our priority criteria below.

### Population Equality & Deviation

- A +/-5% deviation allows commissioners to balance population equality with other important criteria, like keeping a County intact or ensuring political fairness.
- A lower deviation standard could require that we unnecessarily divide political subdivisions, like counties, or communities of interest to meet the population equality criteria.

### Political Fairness

- A fair plan should be politically neutral. That means neither side should enjoy an unfair advantage that doesn't align with the state as a whole.
- When you line up seats from most Republican to most Democratic, the median seats should vote like the state as a whole. Since the median seats would determine control of the Legislature, that means the party that wins the state would likely win a Legislative majority.

### Competitiveness

- It's not realistic that every district be competitive, but the Commission should strive for competitive districts, when possible.
- By drawing competitive districts, candidates of every party have to earn the votes of the Montanans in their district resulting in a healthier democracy.
- Competitive districts ensure that voters get to pick their leaders, leaders don't get to pick their voters.

### Unranked Criteria

- Ranking criteria will cause lower criteria to ultimately get ignored in favor of higher ranked criteria.
- By maintaining co-equality of criteria, the Commission can balance the unique needs of each district and center feedback from the public as the center of the process instead of locking them out before Census data even arrives.

### Community Districting

- Our districts should be drawn to ensure that hard-working Montanans get to pick the best leader to represent our communities.
- Montana has long led the country in fair and equitable districting and is one of the only states with an independent districting commission giving Montanans a real opportunity to ensure fair lines are drawn.