



# Fair Maps Texas

## 2019 Legislative Priorities

Our top legislative priorities include creating an Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (IRC) for both state legislative and U.S. Congressional districts. We also will be supporting the individual components of the IRC model as legislation.

### Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission

- The commission would be politically balanced and consist of 14 citizens - 5 Democrats, 5 Republicans, and 4 voters who have not participated in any recent party primary.
- Commissioners would be chosen for their impartiality, skills, and would reflect our state's demographic and geographic diversity.
- The commission would be tasked to create a timeline and draw districts for U.S. Congressional, state legislative, and state board of education districts.
- The commission would use a list of prioritized, nonpartisan mapping criteria and would ensure that our Constitution, federal and state laws are followed. Texas' communities, cities, and counties would be respected and not divided unnecessarily.
- The Commission would draw new district maps in open, public meetings based on census data and public input.
- To approve the new maps, the plans must receive nine "yes" votes from the Commission –three "yes" votes from members registered with the two largest parties, and three "yes" votes from the other members.
- This reform would end the closed-door political deals by legislators to draw districts that protect themselves.

### Independent Citizen Redistricting Commission only for congressional districts

- Identical to above but by limiting it to only congressional districts.
- Adoption would require only legislative approval, not a constitutional amendment.

### Components of the IRC model as legislation

#### Transparency and Public Involvement

In its work to develop redistricting plans, this bill would require the state to:

- hold at least 5 public hearings throughout the state in order to solicit input from citizens;
- perform outreach to communities and provide advance notice of meetings held by the redistricting committee and to otherwise provide timely information on the committee's activities;
- provide the public opportunity for comment once a redistricting plan is proposed;
- require the state to develop a web portal and provide redistricting software so that citizens can have meaningful participation in the redistricting process.

Additionally, we also support legislation that would require all redistricting meetings to be webcasted.

#### Supermajority vote required to adopt plan

This reform would continue to leave redistricting primarily in the hands of lawmakers, but it would build in significant safeguards intended to prevent one party from shutting the other out of the process and drawing a severely unfair map.

- Lawmakers still have initial control of mapmaking, but they can only pass a map with a 60 percent supermajority in the legislature, including the votes of 50 percent of the minority party.

- If lawmakers can't agree on a map, the process goes to a seven-member bipartisan commission, which can only adopt a plan with the support of two members of the minority party in the legislature.

### **Establish nonpartisan criteria to draw districts with an emphasis on communities of interest**

- Districts must respect counties, cities, communities of interest, and neighborhoods, to the extent possible. A "community of interest" is a group of individuals who are likely to have similar legislative concerns, and who might therefore benefit from cohesive representation in the state legislature or U.S. Congress.
- Districts must not be drawn based on partisan data.
- Districts must be compact, contiguous, and nested, where possible.
- Districts must be composed of whole census tracts.
- An incumbent's or political candidate's residence may not be considered when creating a district.
- Districts must be substantially equal in population in accordance with these principles; and redistricting plans must comply with all federal constitutional requirements.

## **Other Legislation**

### **Prison-based Gerrymandering**

"Prison-based gerrymandering" is a practice whereby many states and local governments count incarcerated persons as residents of the areas where they are housed when election district lines are drawn. This practice distorts our democratic process by artificially inflating the population count—and thus, the political influence—of the districts where prisons and jails are located. As a result, the voting power of everyone living outside of those districts is weakened.

### **Advisory Committee**

This Advisory Committee could be made up of various people with the appropriate expertise including but not limited to demographers, academics, former legislators and voting rights attorneys. This Committee could draw proposed maps and/or weigh in on legislative proposals but final approval would remain with the legislature.

**Fair Maps Texas is a coalition of nonpartisan organizations working to reform the redistricting system in Texas.  
Our coalition partners include:**

*ACLU - TX  
Common Cause Texas  
Common Ground for Texans  
Clean Elections Texas  
League of Women Voters of Texas  
Texas Civil Rights Project  
Texas Progressive Action Network  
Texas Progressive Interest Research Group  
Texans Against Gerrymandering  
Voces Tejas*