

**New Mexico  
Redistricting Survey 2020**

Summary Report

This publication is a product of The University of New Mexico Center for Social Policy. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Center for Social Policy, the University of New Mexico, collaborating organizations, or funders.

Editor In-Chief: Gabriel R. Sanchez, Ph.D.

Location: 1909 Las Lomas Road, Albuquerque, NM 87131

Phone: 505.277.0130

Email: [center@unm.edu](mailto:center@unm.edu)

Copyright © University of New Mexico – September 2020.

## Executive Summary – Key Findings

New Mexico has a long history of having its redistricting maps litigated and decided by the courts followed failed processes at the legislative level. This inability to reach a consensus at the legislative level not only cost the state millions of dollars, but also undermined the public's confidence in the process. With several states across the country moving toward reforms such as independent or citizen redistricting commissions to determine the structure of their electoral districts, engaging the voting public more directly in this process, New Mexico has an opportunity to join these states by reforming its redistricting process.

This survey is aimed at providing policymakers, advocates, and the wider public with valuable information about how the electorate in New Mexico views the redistricting process and which reforms they would support if considered by the legislature. Below are some of the major findings from the survey of 500 likely voters:

- **The public wants more political competitiveness.** The majority of New Mexicans polled prefer advancing political competitiveness in the creation of districts so that no single party has an advantage. In fact, nearly twice as many New Mexicans favor the use of objective criteria to draw new maps, even if that means some lawmakers might lose their seats or face greater competition.
- **Voters want more transparency in the process,** as a robust 89% of respondents indicate that it is important (57% very important) that all redistricting meetings be held in public.
- **New Mexicans want a say.** The public is highly supportive of using public hearings to allow the public to provide comments on maps created by a combination of experts and community members, with high support regardless of whether the medium is to have these conducted in person or online. The public is also hungry for education on how this process works and how people can get involved.
- **There is strong support to engage young people and tribal nations in the process.** In the case of tribes, the public would like to ensure that sovereign nations are not only invited to give input, but that their input receives true consideration.
- **Opinions differ on incumbent protection.** The electorate in New Mexico is most divided in their views about if and how a legislator's home address should be included in the drawing of maps across districts, with a nearly even split in support for the use of home address across the full sample.
- **The public wants new laws.** A robust 93% of respondents believe it is important for New Mexico to consider implementing new laws in the future, one example being the creation of an independent redistricting commission. With 50% of the electorate indicating that it is "very important" to consider new laws to reform redistricting, the survey suggests a sense of urgency from the public to consider new laws to improve the way in which maps are created in New Mexico.

The methodology of the survey and full discussion of results are provided in the report below.

## Background and Goals for the Study

States across the nation are moving toward independent redistricting commissions to determine the structure of their electoral districts, and 28 states and counting have made efforts to engage the voting public more directly in this process.<sup>1</sup> However, in New Mexico, the Legislature determines the congressional and state legislative districts, as well as the Public Education Commission and Public Regulation Commission districts. Furthermore, New Mexico has a long history of having its redistricting maps litigated and decided by the courts. In fact, both the 2000 and 2010 maps were eventually determined by the court after failed processes at the legislative level. These failed processes not only cost the state millions of dollars, but have also undermined the public's confidence in the process, and consequently, in the political system being able to produce non-partisan policy outcomes.

This context provides the motivation for this survey of New Mexico's electorate to improve our understanding of how voters view the redistricting process currently in place in New Mexico and their levels of support for several revisions to the existing system that could be considered by the state's legislature, and which of the many dimensions to this process the public prioritizes. Below are a few of the prospective issues that survey respondents will be asked to consider:

- Preservation of Political Subdivisions
- Preservation of Communities of Interest
- Preservation of Cores of Prior Districts
- Avoidance of Protecting Incumbents/ Not Favoring Incumbents
- Not Favoring Partisanship
- Advancing Competitiveness
- Using Political Party as an Allowable Factor
- Incumbent Protection as an Allowable Factor
- Supermajority or Simple Majority for Approval of Final Maps
- Public Input Considered in an Authentic and Transparent Way
- Requirements for Cross-Party Inclusion on Decision-making Committees

As noted in our methodology section, the complexity of the content in this survey required a nuanced approach to the survey design to ensure that respondents provide informed opinions to the questions we have asked. The advisory committee stressed the importance of taking a non-traditional approach with the survey, as even highly informed citizens such as those we targeted in this survey may not have enough information about all of the concepts we are asking for their attitudes about, particularly if we were conducting phone interviews. We therefore made two important decisions about the research design that we feel improved the quality of the data we collected to inform the conclusions made in this report.

- Utilizing a web-based method of data collection: The highly technical content associated with this project requires that respondents have enough time to digest the questions we put in front of them to ensure that they provide accurate responses. Web-based interviews provided the advantage of allowing respondents to read the content at their own pace and provide

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ncsl.org/research/redistricting/public-input-into-redistricting.aspx>

responses on their own time, including pausing the survey and coming back to it if needed. Fortunately, as the survey methodologies associated with on-line survey platforms have advanced significantly, allowing our team to generate a random and representative sample of New Mexico registered voters.

- Providing respondents with background information to inform their responses: We were very interested in not only collecting information from the New Mexico electorate, but also utilizing the survey as an educational tool. We therefore included prompts with background information about the various themes in the survey, definitions of key concepts, and links to the current maps in New Mexico, all of which was embedded in the survey and could be referenced directly by respondents as they moved through the survey. Although this added to the length of the survey, this background content ensured that we received informed responses and improved the knowledge of the 500 respondents who participated in the survey.

We also enlisted an advisory committee of experts in redistricting reform to provide guidance on the survey instrument, including reviewing drafts of the survey and the text boxes providing background information about the definitions of key concepts put before survey respondents. The advisory committee includes a mixture of national and New Mexico experts in redistricting and election administration.

- Dr. Matt Barreto (UCLA Political Science, Voting Rights Project, Founder, Latino Decisions)
- Dick Mason (New Mexico League of Women Voters)
- Dr. Jason Rhode (National Coordinator, Princeton University Gerrymandering Project)
- Brian Sanderoff (President, Albuquerque Polling Inc.)
- Lilly Irvin-Vitela (President and Executive Director, NM First)
- Michael Weinberg (Policy Officer, Thornburg Foundation)
- Ben Williams (Policy Specialist, National Conference of State Legislatures Elections and Redistricting Program)

## Research Design and Methodology

In partnership with the Thornburg Foundation, the UNM Center for Social Policy contracted with Latino Decisions to randomly interview 500 registered voters in New Mexico who were drawn from a database of registered voters who had voted in the 2016 election, and/or the 2018 election. The survey and overall survey design was developed by Dr. Gabriel Sanchez, Director of The UNM Center for Social Policy and a Professor of Political Science at UNM in consultation with the advisory board who provided input on several drafts of the content. Latino Decisions fielded the on-line survey and provided the results of the survey for Dr. Sanchez and his team at UNM to analyze.

Respondents were screened for their past voting behavior to ensure that the data is reflective of likely or high propensity voters. Interviews were conducted online, the study was conducted between 8/4/2020 and 9/1/2020. The nominal margin-of-error for the poll is 4.3%. Respondents could take the survey in either English or Spanish, and the average time for survey completion was 15 minutes. The survey included questions of respondent's demographic profile to allow for comparisons to be made based on factors including race, gender, age, and nativity and county of residence. Respondents were also asked to identify their partisanship and ideology. References to these factors are made in the

report when there are meaningful differences to note. These demographic indicators were used to allow for the results of the survey to be weighted to known population characteristics using the Current Population Survey. Although the data was not weighted on partisanship or ideology, the party identification and ideology of the sample is consistent with other data on these distributions of New Mexico registered voters.

- 39% of the sample identifies themselves as “liberal” (26% very liberal/12% somewhat liberal). 31% identifies as “moderate”, 28% identify as “conservative” (18% very conservative/10% somewhat conservative).
- 48% of the sample identified themselves as Democrat, 34% Republican, and 18% as Independent or third party.

The survey was designed to not only gather attitudes about redistricting in New Mexico, but to educate respondents on this process. Respondents were therefore given background information on each issue they were questioned about, including having active live links to the current maps for the state. Respondents were able to reference any of the text boxes containing information about the redistricting process made available within the survey prior to provide responses.

## MAJOR FINDINGS ORGANIZED BY THEME

### Politically Competitive Verses “Safe” Districts

Prior to asking for their opinions, respondents were provided with some background on the distinction between competitive districts and the creation of “safe seats” in the drawing of political districts. This included the main arguments on both sides of this issue, and that four states *require* the advancement of political competitiveness, with nearly all states allowing it as a one of their criteria for their maps, and that New Mexico, like nine other U.S. states allow lawmakers to preserve existing districts. Finally, respondents were informed that some have suggested that the political affiliation of voters should not be a considered in the drawing of districts all together. They favor focusing on federal law, existing communities of interest, and objective factors such as population characteristics.

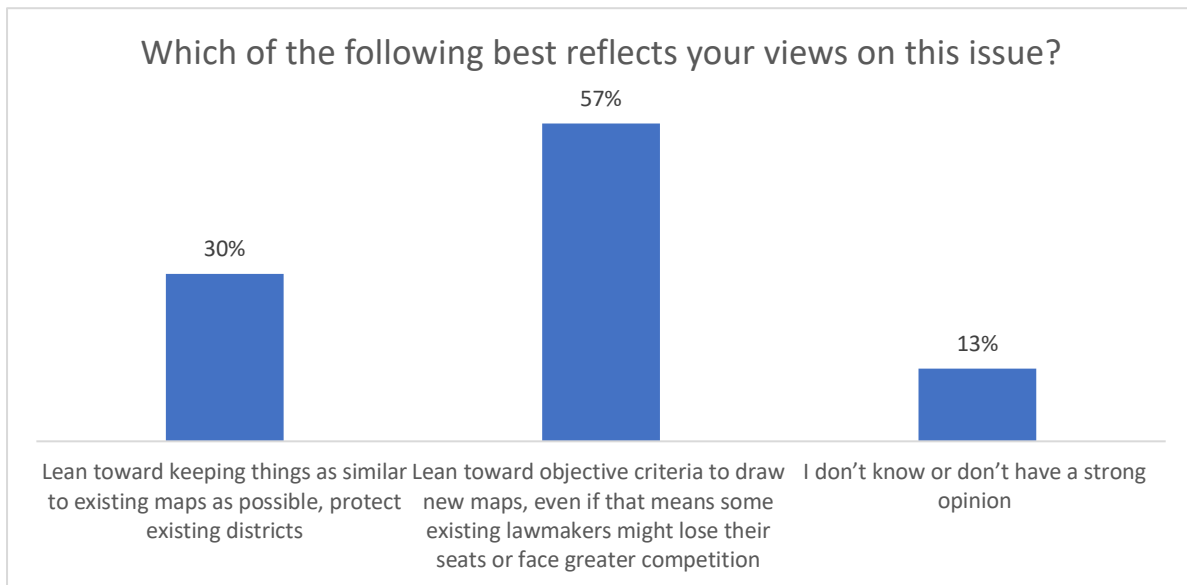
Respondents were then asked the following question: generally speaking, which of the following best reflects your views on the political party makeup of future districts? As reflected in the results below, New Mexican registered voters prefer advancing political competitiveness in the creation of districts so that no single party has an advantage. Support for advancing political competitiveness was particularly high among Republicans at 61%, with nearly a majority of Democrats (50%) also preferring this option. Political independents were much less supportive of this option at 14%. Men were also much supportive of this option for redistricting than women (58% compared to 38%).

The second most cited option was avoiding the consideration of political affiliation all together, with the maintenance of “safe districts” that protect districts that have been historically Democrat or Republican having much lower support across the sample. This was by the far most preferred response for political independents, as 69% of self-identified independents chose this response option.

Registered voters from Bernalillo County were also more likely to favor this option relative to New Mexicans from other counties (44% to 18%).

- 1) Lean toward making districts **politically competitive**, so Democrats, Republicans, or independents have a chance at winning, and no single party has an advantage **47%**
- 2) Lean toward protecting districts that have been historically Democrat or Republican, maintaining **“safe” districts** for candidates from those parties **14%**
- 3) **Avoid considering political affiliation** at all, instead drawing district lines based on federal criteria, demographics, and communities of interest **26%**
- 4) I don’t know or **don’t have an opinion** **13%**

Respondents were also asked to choose between two statements that reflect the balance between the use of objective criteria and maintenance or protection of existing districts following a prompt that provided a core argument in favor of preserving existing districts, that it reduces voter confusion and maintains continuity. As reflected in the percentages below, nearly twice as many New Mexicans favor the use of objective criteria to draw new maps rather than protecting existing districts, even if that means some lawmakers might lose their seats or face greater competition. Although self-identified Republicans were more mixed in their views on this issue than Democrats or Independents, using objective criterion was the preferred option for this sub-group of the larger electorate as well (47% to 42% who prefer protection of existing districts).



The results make clear that advancing competitiveness is a priority of New Mexican voters. This value was also advanced through the responses provided in the open-ended follow up question that allowed respondents to express any additional thoughts or suggestions regarding this theme of the survey. The following are some of the quotes that are reflective of the wider set of responses provided to this question.

*“No partisanship or incumbency should be considered when developing districts. It is unfair to create a district specifically to elect a person from a chosen party.”*

*“Although I do feel that districts should be made politically competitive in order to accurately represent the political views of residents in each district I also agree with the fact that political affiliation should not be the biggest factor for re-designating districts and that the biggest factor should be protecting groups of interest.”*

*“Districts should only be drawn regarding demographics, historic associations, and similar concerns...”*

*“While this standard is designed to correct the danger of pinpoint redistricting, it can serve as a model for an effective district-based approach to future political gerrymandering claims.”*

*“Competitiveness is important as it makes people work harder, and always improve on what they know or what they have.”*

*“I think district lines should be drawn by an independent third party, to mitigate the issue of partisanship.”*

*“I have thought that districts should be 'constructed' using a non-biased mathematical algorithm that seeks to minimize the length of the boundaries.”*

*“Elections are a political process and keeping partisanship out of it is like looking for fool's gold. Competitive districts are called competitive euphemistically to hide the fact that they are designed to dilute minority voting and voting by other marginalized populations.”*

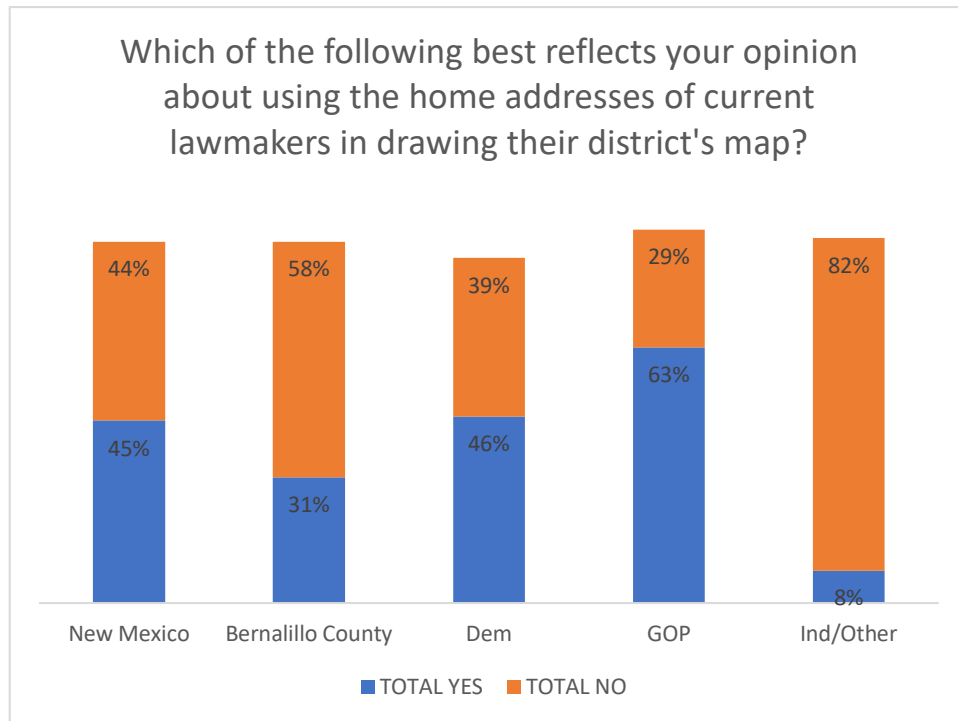
## **The Use of Incumbent Address in the Drawing of Districts**

The next section of the survey focused on if and how a political incumbents physical address should be incorporated into the redistricting process. Respondents read a background prompt that provided information on how incumbents addresses are used by states in the redistricting process, to either to carve an incumbent into, or out of, her district and the implications this has for re-election. Respondents were also given background reading on how states across the country use incumbent addresses, including that New Mexico allows the use of addresses without specifying a purpose for how they are to be used during redistricting. The prompt included that six states prohibit residence data to be used in their maps, relying on new census data and impartial criteria.

As reflected in the results below, the electorate in New Mexico is most divided in their views about if and how a legislator’s home address should be included in the drawing of maps across districts, with a nearly even split in support for the use of home address across the full sample. In fact, an identical 23% feel that addresses should “definitely” be used to draw maps as feel that they should “definitely not” be used to draw maps. When we look at variation across the sample we see some significant differences based on gender and county, with women and residents of Bernalillo county being less likely to support the use of legislator’s home address than men and voters from other counties in the



state. Although there is a meaningful 10% gap between Democrats and Republicans who do not support using legislators address in map making (39% support among Democrats/29% support among Republicans), it is political independents who are the least supportive of using addresses of legislators of any sub-group of the electorate – 82% reported no to the use of lawmaker’s addresses.



The open-ended responses provided by survey respondents reflect this lack of consensus across the electorate, as there is a mix of support for using the addresses for the creation of maps and lack of clarity on whether this would be useful to increase competitiveness or the overall process. As reflected in the sample of quotes below, many New Mexicans express the need for greater information about this issue to render a more solidified opinion.

*“Lawmakers should live in the districts they run for office in, however their address should not matter in terms of the district that is defined.”*

*“As long as we make sure legislators live in the area that they represent the address should not be used beyond that in the map-making process.”*

*“It seems the use of addresses creates a powerful incentive to manipulate district lines for political gain.”*

*“The use of an address of the incumbent doesn’t seem relevant to the democratic process.”*

*“We should know at least their community of residence because that determines their policies and what they will vote for or against”*

*"I don't see any major problem in using lawmaker addresses in mapping process because this is helping us to expand and it is not used for a particular benefit but for a global benefit."*

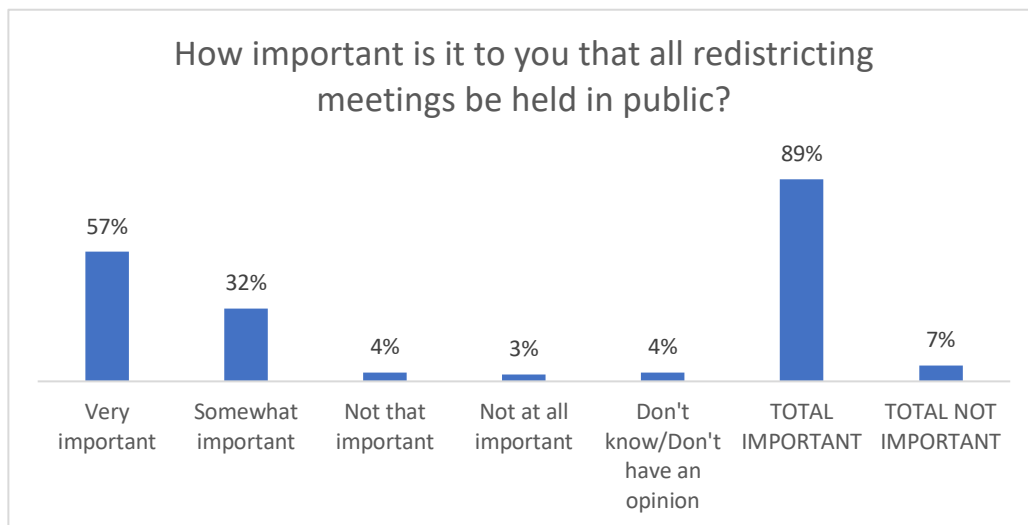
*"I need more information about this issue to understand the pros/cons"*

*"I don't what to really say about this one I haven't really focused on it that much and it is complex."*

## The Public's Role in the Redistricting Process

The survey also included a battery of questions aimed at getting a sense of how New Mexico's electorate views the role of the larger community in the redistricting process. Respondents were provided with some information on how public hearings have been used in past redistricting cycles in the state, but that it was not clear whether public comments were influential in the final results of the process. Respondents were also informed that reporters and the public were allowed into official redistricting committee hearings, but that most of the final maps were drawn behind closed doors. We noted that the work associated with redistricting is complicated and tedious, which may be one of the reasons lawmakers might suggest the meetings have been held in private in the past.

The theme with greatest consensus across the survey is in regard to increased transparency in the redistricting process. In fact, a robust 89% of respondents indicate that it is important (57% Very Important) that all redistricting meetings be held in public. There is no sub-group across the population with less than 80% support for having all meetings held publicly. It is clear that New Mexicans would support greater opportunities for the public to participate in the process.



To get some more specific insights on how to increase engagement in the redistricting the survey included several potential innovations that could be implemented in the state and asked respondents to evaluate whether they were great ideas, OK ideas, or not an idea that they would be interested in seeing implemented in New Mexico. Consistent with the overall goal of educating the electorate in the state about the redistricting process, respondents were provided with the following prompt prior to being asked for their opinions about specific innovations. The prompt included a direct link to the Tufts/MIT mapping tool available for community members to create their own maps.

“In the last decade, many new technologies became available, allowing the public to contribute to redistricting in new ways. Free online software allows students or community members to make their own hypothetical redistricting maps. Trial versions, including [this tool](#) developed by Tufts and MIT, are already available. Traditional methods of public engagement, such as hearings and online comments, remain important options as well.”

The results of this section of the survey are depicted in the figure below organized by the policy innovations that have the most support across the sample. The public is highly supportive of using public hearings to allow the public to provide comments on maps created by a combination of experts and community members, with high support regardless of whether the medium is to have these conducted in person or on-line. There is greater support to have community or public generated maps available for public comment than to restrict this process to only expert generated maps, but the public appears to be less interested in having the community generated maps directly considered by lawmakers relative to those created by experts that are vetted by community members.

There is also high support for having webinars held on redistricting to allow for greater education on how this process works and how the public can get involved. Finally, there is strong support to engage young people and tribal nations in the process. In the case of tribes, the public would like to ensure that sovereign nations are not only invited to give input, but that their input receives true consideration.

<b>New Mexico Voters Views Regarding Ideas to Engage the Public in the Redistricting Process in New Mexico</b>	<b>Great Idea</b>	<b>OK Idea</b>	<b>Not interested/ Bad Idea</b>
Public hearings to accept comments on expert-created and community submitted maps	54%	36%	9%
Allow public comments on-line to expert-created and publicly submitted maps	56%	31%	13%
Webinars on redistricting (how it works, how to get involved)	49%	40%	10%
Experts creating maps and the public providing comments	43%	45%	12%
Student map-making contests (i.e., fairest map, most gerrymandered map, most mathematically sound map)	41%	38%	20%
Ensuring Sovereign Nations are invited to give input, and that their input receives true consideration.	36%	37%	27%
Individuals and community groups creating online maps for lawmaker consideration	34%	51%	15%
Contests for which county engages the highest percentage of their community members in the redistricting process	25%	54%	21%

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide any comments they wished following the questions on transparency and public involvement in the process. As reflected in the comments below, New Mexico’s electorate is hungry for seeing greater transparency in the redistricting process and believes that this could go a long way toward improving public trust in how district lines are drawn.

*“I think transparency for the public is paramount to regaining the public's trust. Far too much 'back door' and secret closed-door meetings have destroyed the public's trust.”*

*“I really feel that the public should have a large amount of input into the process of redistricting and I really like the idea of students and of counties creating their own maps.”*

*“It might be hard to have the actual map districting done in public setting; too many different ideas to actually finalize a map, however input or first draft districting map in public might work...”*

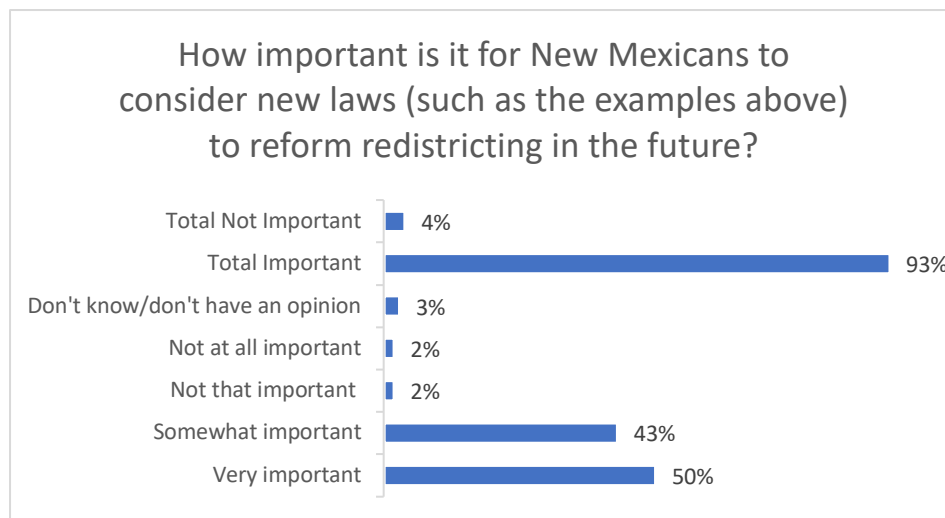
*“It is very important to redistricting meetings in public so we can all know what's going on.”*

*“Creating maps behind closed doors makes one believe that gerrymandering is happening. By opening up the process, then it's much more believable that it's not gerrymandered.”*

## New Mexico Voters Attitudes Toward Future Reforms

The final section of the survey was aimed at getting an indication of how important it is to the voting population in the state that redistricting reform in New Mexico happen in the future. Respondents were provided with some background information on the national movement toward independent redistricting commissions and other innovative approaches to widening authority for the map-making process beyond incumbent legislators. Respondents were informed that 14 states have an independent redistricting commission that is responsible for drawing a plan for legislative districts.

The salience of implementing new laws to the public, such as the creation of an independent redistricting commission, is reflected in no sub-group in the data having less than 90% of their group expressing that it is important for New Mexico to consider new laws to reform redistricting in the future (**93% overall**). With 50% of the electorate indicating that it is “very important” to consider new laws to reform redistricting the survey suggests a sense of urgency from the public to consider new laws to improve the way in which maps are created in New Mexico.



The comments provided by respondents in the open-ended follow up question identify some of the specific reform ideas members of the community would like to see in the future.

*“I also completely agree with the view that voters should choose their lawmakers, rather than lawmakers choosing their constituents.”*

*“I believe the independent redistricting commission is that best option because it eliminates partisanship from the equation.”*

*“I like the idea of nonpartisan committees having the task of drawing redistricting maps, rather than simply just lawmakers, who always have a hidden political agenda in either direction. Redistricting MUST be independent of party politics. partisan redistricting is how one particular party has gained nominal control of state and national seats despite being a minority party in the state in some other states.”*

*“Should include stake holders from community and especially minorities who have been underrepresented.”*

*“I like that there would be a non-partisan group doing the redistricting so that it'll be drawn fairly regardless of who's in power at the time.”*

*“It all hinges on how the commission is selected to ensure minority party has equal input and representation.”*

*“We need to make those process more trusted by the people so it is good to have a future reform where people have more participation and can be in peace of mind with the process.”*

*“Future reform needs to include the generations that will mostly deal with the reform.”*

*“Our state definitely needs new laws and total reform of the system would be amazing.”*

## **Conclusions – Next Steps**

This survey of New Mexico’s electorate regarding the redistricting process in New Mexico provides valuable insights for the state legislature and advocates. The survey reveals that New Mexico’s voting population is highly supportive of reforming how maps are created in the state following multiple rounds of redistricting that resulted in the courts needing to resolve disagreements among lawmakers and create the maps for districts across the state.

Based on the survey data New Mexico’s lawmakers should strongly consider new laws that would increase competition across political races by not giving any of the parties any inherent advantages based on how their districts are structured. Lawmakers should also ensure that the map-making process is more transparent with nearly 90% of respondents believing that is important that all meetings associated with redistricting be held in public. Whether engagement of the public occurs through webinars or through in-person meetings, the voting public has a strong desire to see this process be opened up for all interested parties to participate in.

With an independent Redistricting Task Force being formulated to consider how New Mexico's redistricting process could be improved, this report can be a valuable resource for this group of experts from across the state to draw from. The survey provides some insights on ideas for engaging the public in this process, including having public hearings to allow the public to comment on maps created by both experts and the wider public. Although the redistricting process is highly complex and technical, this survey provides evidence that with sufficient background information, New Mexico's voters are both capable and interested in providing their informed views on the process.

We hope that this can be a model for future efforts to more directly engage the wider population in the important discussions that lay ahead regarding how districts are created that will directly drive policy outcomes in the state for the next decade. We close with this quote from one of the survey participants that summarizes the problem many New Mexicans see with the existing approach taken with redistricting in the state - ***"I also completely agree with the view that voters should choose their lawmakers, rather than lawmakers choosing their constituents."***

## About the Authors

Gabriel R. Sanchez is a Professor of Political Science and Director of the Center for Social Policy at the University of New Mexico. Professor Sanchez is also a Principal at Latino Decisions.

Melanie Sayuri-Dominguez is a PhD candidate in Political Science and a Doctoral Fellow at the Center for Social Policy at the University of New Mexico.