Is "Agenda" Singular or Plural?

Should I write "agenda is" or "agenda are"?

"Agenda" is singular. The plural of "agenda" is "agendas."

More about "Agenda"

"Agenda" is the Latin plural of the word "agendum." However, nowadays, "agenda" is not treated as a plural word.

Over time, the word "agenda" has shed all signs of its plural past. In modern English, it is treated as a singular word with the plural form "agendas." (The word "agenda" means "a list of items of business to be considered or addressed." Just like the word "list," it ought to be treated as singular.)

Example Sentences with "Agenda" and "Agendas"

Here are some examples of "agenda" being used as a singular noun and "agendas" being used as its plural form.

- The agenda **is** on the second page. ✔
- All the agendas **are** displayed on the screen. ✔
- Feminism's agenda **is** basic: It asks that women not be forced to choose between public justice and private happiness. ✔(Journalist Susan Faludi)
- There **is** a hidden agenda in the fragility of romance. ✔ (Fashion designer Alexander McQueen)

Why Is "Agenda" Singular?

An agenda is a list, which is a singular concept. Also, ever since the removal of Latin from the national curriculum, the protection for "agenda" as a plural word has been thinning. So, with the sense of a singular word and no protection to retains its plural status, "agenda" has morphed into a singular word.

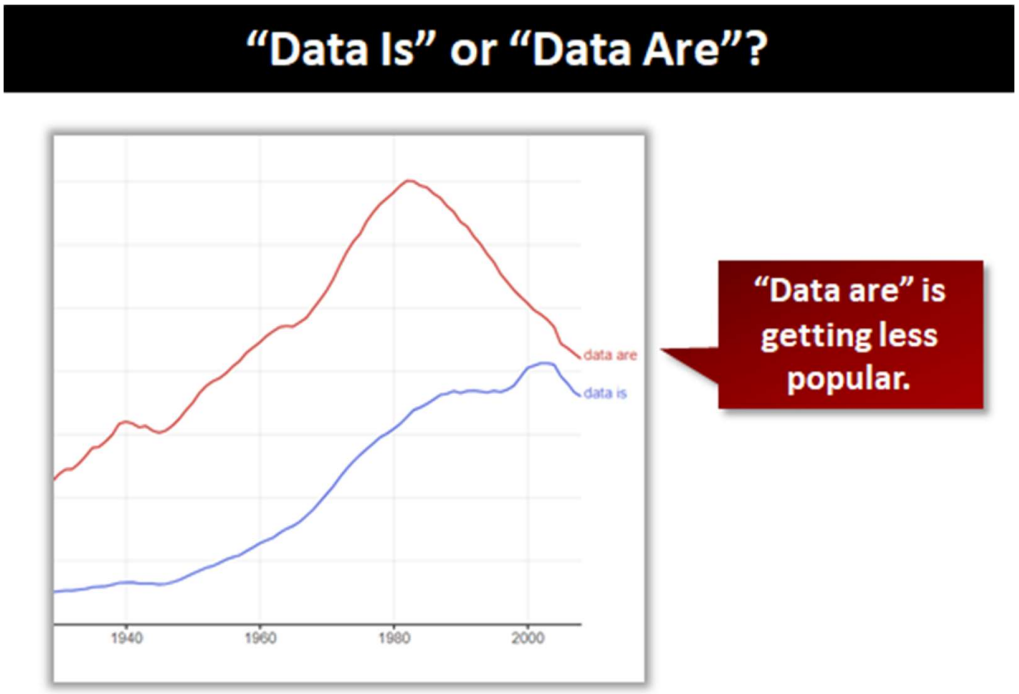
"Agenda" is similar to media, which has also shed its plural status. It is also similar to criteria, but "criteria" has retained some of its plural status because "criterion" (the singular form) is still used. Data is another word following the same route as "agenda." "Data" too now carries the sense of a singular word ("a collection of datums" rather than "lots of datums") and its plural protection has been thinning for decades.

Is Data Singular or Plural?

Should I write "data is" or "data are"?

"Data" should be treated as singular for a general audience. Of note, "data" is treated as plural in scientific and academic writing, but this is changing.

"Data" is best described as being in transition from a plural word to a singular one. So, if you naturally treat "data" as singular, stick with it because the argument for treating "data" as singular is beating the one for retaining it as a plural.



(This image from Google's Ngram Viewer shows that "data" is treated as both singular and plural. This graph is derived only from published works.)

It's the Latin Plural of Datum! Yeah, So What?

We all know that "data" is the Latin plural of "datum," but that is not a strong argument for treating "data" as plural. "Data" is following the same paths as "agenda" (a former plural of "agendum") and "media" (a former plural of "medium"). The only question is whether "data" has completed its journey yet.

The word "data" has changed. It no longer means "lots of datums" (NB: "datums" is now an accepted plural of "datum"). Nowadays, its meaning is more aligned to "information" or "a collection of datums," both of which are singular terms.

"Data Is" or "Data Are"?

For many people, treating "data" as plural is starting to sound pretentious. Here are two definitions for the word "data":

- (1) Details, facts, and statistics collected for reference or analysis.
- (2) Information electrically stored in, operated on, or transmitted by computers.

The first definition is a plural phrase, but the second is a singular phrase. However, look again at the first one. It could easily be rewritten as "a collection of details, facts, and statistics for reference or analysis," which would make it singular. That is crux of this whole debate.

More about "Data"

In the early 1900s, "data" was considered a plural word, and treating it as singular was viewed as uneducated. However, two things happened that started the transition of "data" into a singular word. First, "data" started to become an everyday term, which people viewed as synonymous with "information." Second, the drop-off of Latin from the school curriculum meant that the "plural protection shield" around "data" started to thin. Given its new meaning to the populace and their ignorance of its origins as a plural, "data" quickly morphed into a singular word.

These two sentences now sound fine to the majority of native English speakers:

- My data **is** corrupted. ✔
- The data **supports** my theory. ✔

However, treating "data" as a plural is still common, and those who work with data (e.g., researchers, analysts, academics) are the most likely to retain its plural status. Nevertheless, for most people, the following sound awkward:

- My data **were** corrupted. ✖
  (We have marked this wrong because we think it sounds awkward. Have your say in the poll below.)
- The data **support** my theory. ✖
  (Awkward)

Why Do Scientists and Academics Treat "Data" as Plural?

From what I have observed, academics who treat "data" as plural do so with deliberate effort (as opposed to naturally). If you watch an academic talking about data, it won't be too long before they slip into treating it as singular, especially when using a verb other than "are."

If these academics are treating "data" as a plural to make the point that it's the Latin plural of "datum," then they are outdated. "Datum" now has its own plural "datums," and "data" has changed its meaning to "information" or a "collection of datums."

Comparing "Data" to "Agenda" and "Criteria"

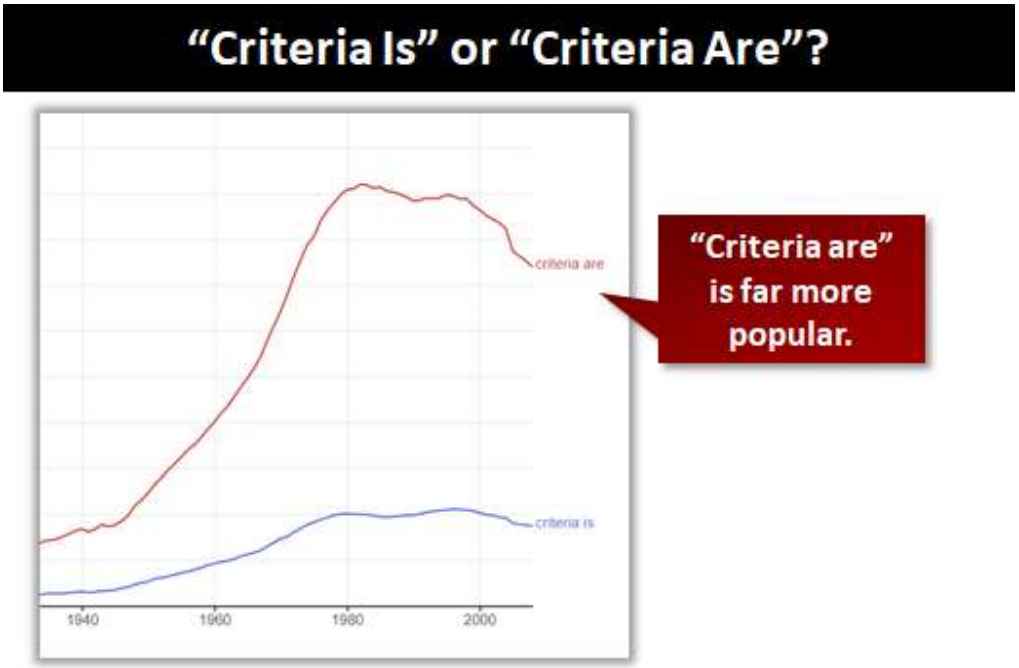
The word "agenda" is the Latin plural of "agendum," but almost no one treats it as plural. In modern English, it is treated as singular with the plural form "agendas." Conversely, the word "criteria" (the Latin plural of "criterion") is treated as plural because, unlike "agendum," its singular form is still in common usage.

If this were the precedent for whether "data" should be singular or plural, then it should be singular because "datum" has - for all intents and purposes - fallen out of the language.

Is 'Criteria' Singular or Plural?

Should I write "criteria is" or "criteria are"?

"Criteria" can be singular or plural nowadays, but treating it as singular might irk some of your readers. The safest option is to use "criterion" for the singular and "criteria" for the plural.



(This image from Google's Ngram Viewer shows that, while most authors still treat "criteria" as plural, "criteria" has adopted a singular status, much like "agenda" and "data.")

More about "Criteria"

The word "criteria" is the Latin plural of "criterion." However, it does not follow that "criteria" is always treated as a plural word in modern English. "Criteria" is sometimes treated as a singular word because its meaning is morphing into a singular version of itself. Here is the most commonly understood meaning of "criteria":

- "The **principles** or **standards** against which something is evaluated"
  (In this meaning, "criteria" is plural.)

However, not realizing that "criteria" was originally a Latin plural (due to the drop-off of Latin from the national curriculum), people have been using "criteria" as a singular version of itself. In other words, it has now come to mean the following:

- The **principle** or **standard** against which something is evaluated.
  (In this meaning, "criteria" is singular.)

In this way, "criteria" is following the same path as "agenda" and "data," both of which are routinely treated as singular words in modern English. However, "criteria" is different. As the word "criterion" is still in common use, "criteria" is retaining its plural status far more than "agenda" and "data," whose singular forms have largely disappeared. Nevertheless, it is still common to see "criteria" treated as a singular word in speech and writing.

Here's the dynamic:

- Her criteria **is** clear. It has to be black.
  (This is acceptable, but it might annoy some of your readers. For this reason, we haven't given it a tick.)

The safest option is to use "criterion" when talking about a single standard.

- Her criterion **is** clear. It has to be black. ✔
  (This is correct, but it also runs a slight risk of sounding pretentious.)

When talking about more than one "criterion," you can only use "criteria." For example:

- Her criteria **is** clear. It has to be black, and it must be cheap. ✘
  (This is wrong because there is more than one criterion.)
- Her criterion **is** clear. It has to be black, and it must be cheap. ✘
  (This is also wrong because there is more than one criterion.)
- Her criteria **are** clear. It has to be black, and it must be cheap. ✔
  (This is the only version possible when there is more than one criterion.)

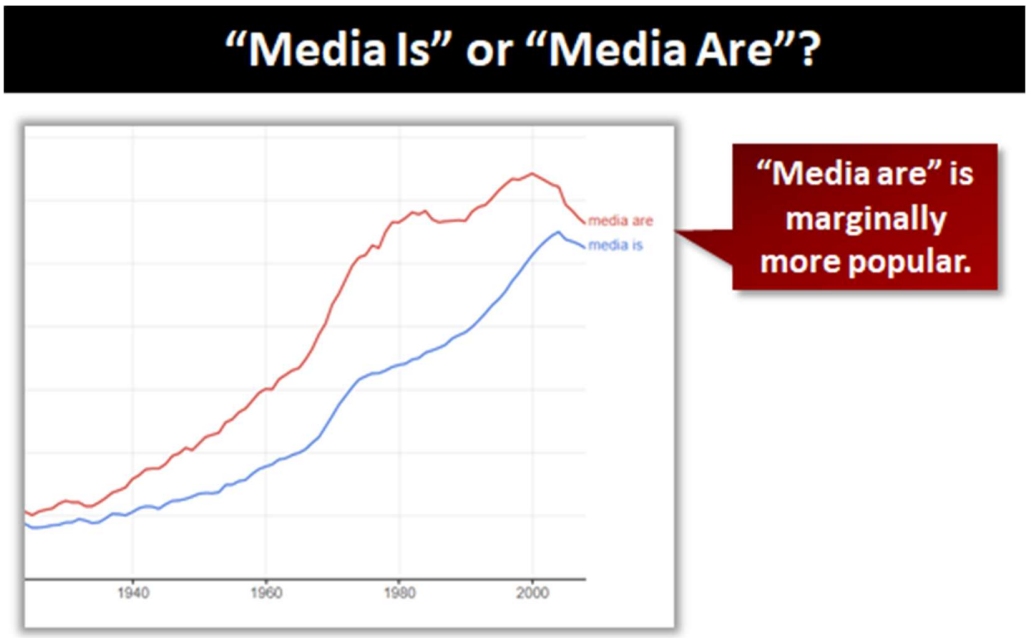
Here is another example:

- **Are** the criteria available to read? What **is** the main criterion? ✔

Media (Singular or Plural?)

Should I write "the media is" or "the media are"?

"Media" is a collective noun, which means you can treat it as singular or plural depending on the sense of your sentence. If your sentence does not convey the idea of lots of individuals within the media, then you should treat "media" as singular.



(This image from Google's Ngram Viewer shows that "media are" is marginally more popular than "media is.")

Is "Media" Singular or Plural?

"Media" derives from the Latin plural of "medium." However, it does not follow that "media" should always be treated as a plural word in modern English. "Media" is no longer the plural of "medium." The plural of "medium" is "mediums." The term "media" now means:

- "Those who message through television, radio, the printed press or the electronic "press" (i.e., the internet)."

(Using this definition, "media" is a collective noun, i.e., a word that represents a group of people, animals, or things.)

As "media" is a collective noun (just like the words "team" and "jury"), writers should treat it as singular unless the "media" in their sentence considers the media as lots of separate entities. For example:

- The media **are** present with vans, lorries, scooters, and bicycles. ✔
  (This sentence considers the media as lots of separate entities.)
- The media **is** present. ✔
  (This sentence considers the media as one entity.)

It's Plural!

As the word "media" comes from the Latin plural of "medium," some of your readers might expect you to treat it as a plural noun. However, its meaning has changed from the days when it was the plural of "medium." Nowadays, "media" can safely be considered a collective noun. Therefore, you should treat it as singular unless your sentence conveys the idea of lots of individuals within the media, in which case you should treat it as plural.