

The next round of redistricting will begin in 2001. Nearly all legislative district lines – for federal, state, county, and local government offices will need to be redrawn.

Redistricting can be a time consuming and costly nightmare, suffused with partisanship and political vendettas – or it can be a process resolved with less divisiveness, more fairness and meaningful citizen input. Redistricting can also be avoided altogether by instituting modified at-large election systems such as limited voting, cumulative voting and choice voting.

These alternative systems are described in detail in this pamphlet because one of their benefits is tied directly to debates over redistricting – they are increasingly used to ensure localities comply with the federal Voting Rights Act.

Redistricting is perhaps the most dramatic example of how cities and towns must deal with structuring elections in the near future, but it is hardly the only one. Municipalities will also look at other issues such as vote-by-mail, procedures for special elections, and terms of office.

The **Center for Voting and Democracy** can assist your municipality with these questions and others associated with elections and redistricting. We offer expertise and services to governments large and small on democracy issues, including:

- Presenting tested options for redistricting, ranging from different commission models to criteria-driven procedures
- Providing information on the full range of voting systems to address matters such as the Voting Rights Act and special elections
- Discussing strategies for ensuring majority winners and saving money in runoff elections
- Proposing alternative approaches to increase participation in elections
- We are also conducting a study of democratic health in the Washington, DC area

The Center for Voting & Democracy has a history working with charter commissions and related groups and local governments, including Miami Beach, FL; Austin, TX; Kalamazoo, MI; Nassau County, NY; Detroit, MI; Cincinnati, OH; Pasadena, San Francisco and Santa Clara County, CA; Multnomah County, OR; Vancouver, WA, and at the state level, particularly in Vermont, New Mexico, Georgia, and Alaska.

Founded in 1992, the **Center for Voting and Democracy** is a nonprofit 501c(3) organization that offers its services at no cost to localities. We are available for presentations, consultations, and as a resource for information on electoral issues like redistricting. Please contact us at: 301-270-4616; or by email at: cvderic@aol.com

Fresh Approaches to Elections

At the Center, part of our work focuses on ways to increase electoral involvement – such as boosting turnout through voting-by-mail and other reforms. Another part of our work focuses on the consideration of alternative electoral systems. Given that these systems may be unfamiliar to leaders in some localities, here are some brief descriptions of different systems:

***Instant Runoff Voting** – This system works in races where there can only be one winner, i.e., mayoral, county executive, and gubernatorial races. It allows voters to rank candidates in order of their preference: 1, 2, 3, and so on. If, at the end of tallying the first choice votes, no candidate receives a majority, the candidate with the fewest number of first-place votes is eliminated and the votes of his or her supporters are counted for their second choice. This process essentially simulates a series of runoff elections, as it continues until one candidate receives a majority of votes.

Instant runoff voting (IRV) eliminates the need for costly runoff elections while ensuring that

the winner receives a *majority*, not a simple plurality, of the vote. It maximizes the number of voters whose ballots count toward a winner, and it does not “waste” votes. Additionally, it promotes less divisive campaigns because candidates not only seek first place votes, they also seek second choice votes from supporters of other candidates.

***Limited Voting** - This system works in at-large or multi-member district elections. Two versions exist: either voters must cast fewer votes than the number of seats, or parties must nominate fewer candidates than the number of seats. The greater the difference between the number of seats and the number of votes, the greater the opportunities for fairer representation. Limited voting is used in a number of places, including Washington, DC and localities in Alabama and North Carolina. It is required for at-large local elections in Connecticut and used for county elections in Pennsylvania.

***Cumulative Voting** – In this system voters cast as many votes as there are seats, as in traditional at-large elections. However, voters are not limited to one vote per candidate. Instead, they can concentrate their votes on one or more candidates. Winning candidates are determined by a simple plurality of votes. Cumulative voting is used in Peoria, Illinois, Chilton County, Alabama, and more than 50 Texas localities, including Amarillo.

***Choice Voting** – (Also called the single transferable vote). This voting method is similar to instant runoff voting, but it is used for at-large, or multi-member district elections. It allows voters to rank order (1, 2, 3, etc.) as many candidates as they wish, it eliminates the problem of “wasting” votes because winning a seat requires receiving only a proportion of the vote, and “spoiling” an election is not a concern, because if your candidate is eliminated, your next choice vote counts. Choice voting is used in Cambridge, MA and for national elections in Ireland. It was promoted vigorously by leading civic reformers earlier this century.

Contact us with all your electoral questions – we’re your resource for voting and democracy.

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Redistricting and Democracy Highlights

- **Washington state** in 1991 used a non-partisan commission for state and federal redistricting, which resulted in the most competitive U.S. House elections of the 1990s.
- **Iowa** also enjoyed meaningful, competitive elections during the 1990s, due in large part to criteria-driven, non-partisan redistricting.
- **The League of Women Voters/Ohio** is promoting a plan for redistricting in the public interest. They have been joined by the state AFL-CIO and many Republicans, among others.
- **San Diego, California** draws its city council districts through an impartial commission process, without involving its elected officials.
- **Chicago, Illinois** ultimately spent \$20 million on lawsuits defending a handful of city council districts against voting rights lawsuits during the 1990s. Ultimately, the city lost in court and had to redraw boundaries slightly.
- **Amarillo, Texas** in 1999 settled a voting rights case by adopting cumulative voting for its school board elections. In 2000, the first election was held using this voting method, resulting in the fairest election outcome ever. Defenders of the old system praised the election, turnout surged, and Latino and African American candidates won elected seats for the first time in decades.
- **U.S. Rep. Mel Watt** (D-NC) is running in his 3rd consecutive election in a different geographic district. His district has been in court each year since 1992. Subsequently, Watt sponsored 1999 legislation allowing proportional voting in multi-seat congressional districts. Affirmative action opponent **U.S. Rep. Tom Campbell** (R-CA), as well as the U.S. Department of Justice, offered strong testimony in support of Watt’s bill.

*Your city was prepared for
Y2K...*

*You were prepared for the
Census...*

*...but are you ready for
Redistricting? (and other
issues critical to the electoral and
civic health of your community)*

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