

....independent redistricting

Since 1996 Americans have experienced the least competitive congressional elections in history, with more than 98% incumbent re-election rates and only two shifts in partisan control in more than 50 years.

These problems are rooted in winner-take-all elections and the partisan divide that defines modern politics. Although needed, independent redistricting alone will never provide a fair balance of competitive elections, partisan and racial fairness, geographic coherence and accountable leadership.

"The Way Democracy Will Be"  
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# BEYOND INDEPENDENT REDISTRICTING



....ensuring competition and fair representation



"The Way Democracy Will Be"

# REFORMS

For years, FairVote's groundbreaking research in reports like *Monopoly Politics* and *Dubious Democracy* has helped persuade changemakers that the political geography of our elections is the most important factor for determining winners and their victory margins.

We need independent redistricting to remove corruption from what should be a public interest process, but alone it will not achieve more than one of three reasonable goals: geographic coherence, competitive choice and fair representation. America's winner-take-all elections place these goals in direct conflict. To achieve the goals of redistricting reform we must learn from the best practices of nations around the world and a growing number of our own cities that go beyond winner-take-all elections.



“It’s simply wrong and corrupting to allow politicians to help their friends and hurt their enemies in what should be a public interest process”

Rob Richie,  
Executive Director,  
FairVote

## LESSONS FROM ARIZONA & IOWA

After Arizona voters implemented redistricting reform in 2001, 15 of the state's next 16 U.S. House elections were won by landslide margins of at least 20%. Despite a redistricting plan drawn by an independent commission, not a single state senate seat changed party hands in 2004; indeed 14 of 30 were uncontested. The congressional delegation remained all male, and women in the legislature dropped by 8%. Both civil rights groups and Democrats sued the state legislative plan, leading to one change in 2004 and ongoing litigation six years later.

Iowa is a model of independent redistricting. But even though unusually balanced in its partisan division across the state, its incumbency rate in U.S. House races has been nearly 98% since the adoption of independent redistricting. No woman has been elected to Congress since implementation of independent redistricting.

Voters haven't leapt to join the redistricting reform bandwagon. Redistricting reform measures in Ohio and California in 2005 received major financial support, and the backing of political stars. Both lost badly - California by 19% and Ohio by a whopping 40%. So where do we go from here?

## REFORMS AND STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE INDEPENDENT REDISTRICTING (IR)

- 1. Why We Need IR:** We should end overtly partisan gerrymandering and provide full transparency to the process. It's simply wrong and corrupting to allow politicians to help their friends and hurt their enemies in what should be a public interest process.
- 2. Where We Need IR:** Take the partisan edge out of reform proposals by not including “mid-decennial” redistricting within them and focus first on reforming state legislative redistricting. Going after U.S. House districts can earn big dollars from partisans, but spurs vigorous opposition. And what's fair in one state may have an unfair national impact.

**3. Federal IR:** Put more energy into the long slog of a congressional bill setting standards for all states at the same time – thereby eliminating state-by-state partisan calculations. More than 60 U.S. House Members signed onto such legislation in 2005.

**4. Superdistricts and proportional voting:** To provide voter choice to all Americans, states should elect legislators in multi-seat “superdistricts” with a proportional voting method. At the very least, IR commissions should have the right to consider such plans. Each district would elect several seats, with like-minded candidates winning seats in proportion to their share of the vote. Done successfully in Illinois for decades and in many countries around the world, proportional voting enables representatives to speak for different communities of interest within their superdistrict and promotes more cooperation on policy.

**5. Citizens Assembly:** A promising means to advance reform comes from Canada. British Columbia convened a broadly representative citizens assembly to study their election problems and various election methods. They overwhelmingly chose superdistricts with proportional voting, which then won 58% from voters (needing 60% to win). Similar assemblies have since recommended other forms of proportional voting in Ontario and the Netherlands.

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Based in Takoma Park, MD, FairVote is a leading national non-partisan, non-profit pro-democracy organization. We pursue an innovative, solution-oriented agenda that focuses on systemic change and increasing political participation.