FULL REPRESENTATION

The Case for a Better Election System

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Edited by

FairVote

The Center for Voting and Democracy

DEDICATION

For Rob, Cindy, Howie, Steve, Jim, Lee
and all the others who have been doing
the real work to bring electoral justice
to the United States.

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THE NEED FOR REFORM

American elections are in serious trouble. The symptoms are everywhere. One of the most obvious is our dismal level of voter turnout. While many other Western democracies routinely enjoy turnout rates of 80%-90%, we are lucky to get half ofeligible voters to the polls. Something is very wrong when most Americans don't bother to vote most of the time.

There are other signs of trouble as well:

- Many people feel alienated from the major parties, believing that these organizations have lost touch with the public.

- Voters often can't find candidates they really believe in, and feel forced to vote for the lesser of two evils.

- Interest in third parties is mushrooming. Two-thirds of Americans want to see other parties emerge to challenge the Democrats and Republicans.

- Candidates spend more time slinging mud at each other than discussing important issues.

- Cynicism about campaign financing continues to increase.

- Many elections aren't competitive. In 2000 two out of every five state legislature races went uncontested, and nine out of ten Congressional incumbents were reelected.

- 75% of Americans feel that they are not well represented by the officials they elect.

- Heated political and legal battles over minority voting rights continue, with no end in sight.

Various reforms intended to solve our election problems have been suggested, including voter registration efforts, campaign finance reform, and term limits. Recently, however, another proposal has been getting increasing attention: switching from our traditional winner-take-all voting system to one of a number of full representation election systems — sometimes known as proportional representation systems or PR. Articles advocating or discussing this type of reform have appeared in national newspapers such as the *New York Times, USA Today,* the *Washington Post,* and the *Christian Science Monitor,* and in major magazines such as *Time, Atlantic Monthly,* and the *New Yorker.* In addition, increasing numbers of political scientists,

Most other western democracies consider the single-member district system to be outmoded and unfair.

grass roots political reformers, legal scholars, and political commentators on both the left and the right — including Cynthia McKinney, Arend Lijphart, Michael Lind and Lani Guinier — argue that this reform deserves serious consideration.

All of this interest in proportional representation stems from the realization that our election problems go much deeper than the shortcomings of specific candidates or particular parties. Rather, the source of much of our frustration is located in the procedures by which we cast votes and elect candidates. These procedures are not mere technicalities; they have a profound impact on the outcome of elections and on the quality of our representative democracy. Our current voting system is deeply flawed, and its shortcomings are responsible for alienating American voters from the political process. That is why we need to take a close look at the mechanics of how we vote, and determine whether we can improve our elections by changing to a better voting system.

The Problem with Winner-Take-All Voting Systems

Currently, we elect most officials using a single-member district voting system. This means that typically, each voting district will elect one member to a legislative position, the winner being whoever has received the largest number of votes.   Since we have all grown up with this winner-take-all system, we tend to see it as the most natural form of democratic election, and assume that it is used by most democracies. But in reality, most other western democracies consider

Table 1. Voting Systems in Western Democracies

Winner-Takes-All Systems	Full Representation Systems
Great Britain, Canada, France, United States	Australia, Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland

the single-member district system to be outmoded and unfair, and many countries have deliberately rejected it in favor of some alternative, and more fully representative system. As table 1 shows, among western industrial nations, only the United States, Great Britain, Canada and France still cling to single-member district elections.

When we add in the newer democracies in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the count becomes even more lopsided. While these countries have rushed to embrace American-style capitalism, they have rejected American-style single-member district elections and opted for various types of full representation. Recently, when the U.S. has been involved in moving a country towards democracy, officials have not advocated winner-take-all elections. Elections using full representation systems have been planned in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Dissatisfaction with winner-take-all elections has even spread to Great Britain, their country of origin. The recently created Scottish Parliament and Welsh assembly are both elected using systems of full representation rather than single member districts. And there is ongoing public debate as to whether or not Great Britain's national parliament should switch to full representation elections — with polls routinely showing large numbers of citizens favoring this change.

So why have single-member district elections been on the wane worldwide? The answer is that they can often be unfair and undemocratic. Consider this list of specific drawbacks:

- The winner-takes-all system routinely denies representation to large numbers of voters.
- It artificially limits voter choices.
- It encourages gerrymandering.
- It produces legislatures that fail to reflect the views of the public accurately.
- It discourages competition and discriminates against third parties.
- It creates obstacles to the election of minorities and women.
- It discourages voter participation.

Full representation systems, by contrast, have a number of important political advantages. For example, they make it much easier for

third party and independent candidates to get elected in the U.S. Right now, only Republicans and Democrats have a realistic chance of receiving the majority or plurality of the vote necessary to win office in our winner-take-all system. A third party getting only 20% of the vote would win no seats. But under different voting rules, a party receiving 20% of the vote could expect to win 20% of the seats.

This simple change would have profound effects. It would give voters a much wider set of choices when they go to the polls — something that most Americans say they want. It would mean that more Americans would be represented in our legislatures and have a say in government. And these lawmaking bodies would more closely represent the actual variety of political views that exist among the public. In other words, our political system would become more representative and more democratic**.**

Adopting proportional representation in the United States would have other significant advantages as well. It would eliminate "safe seats" and make all districts competitive, with each party having a good chance of electing some candidates. Women and minorities would have a fairer chance of election. Voter turnout would increase. In addition, full representation would widen political debate and make it easier to introduce new ideas into the political system.

Studies of full representation in practice around the world show that it does bring all the advantages described above.* And it also works in the U.S. A growing number of school boards and city and county councils in Texas, Alabama and North Carolina have turned to full representation systems to ensure minority representation. The benefits of full representation are a matter of fact — not speculation — and this explains why so many other democracies have embraced this system and why more and more Americans are becoming interested in it.

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* For details on these studies and other scholarly material about full representation, see *Real Choices, New Voices: How Proportional Elections Could Revitalize American Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

> *We need to take advantage of the progress made in designing better voting systems.*

The Need for Innovation

As America begins the 21st century, we remain mired in an archaic 18th century voting system. When our state and federal governments were originally designed, the founding fathers adopted the winner-take-all system used in Britain because nothing superior existed. But voting procedures have evolved considerably over the last 200 years and, we should take advantage of those innovations. As Thomas Jefferson said, "Laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind... . As that becomes more enlightened, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times." Full representation is one such advance that we can ill afford to ignore.

America was once a leader in political innovation. In the early days of our republic, we were known as the "laboratory of democracy" because of our willingness to experiment with new approaches to political institutions — such as federalism and our system of checks and balances. But today, as we continue to cling to our outdated winner-take-all system, we are in danger of becoming the "museum of democracy." Much of the rest of the world has passed us by in their search for more representative and responsive election systems. If we are to breathe new life into our ailing election system, and if we are revitalize representative democracy in the United States, then we need to take advantage of the progress that has been made in designing better voting systems. We need to adopt full representation state of the art election systems.

WHAT IS FULL REPRESENTATION?

Full representation is the name given to a family of different election systems, all intended to realize a simple basic principle: although the majority has the right of decision, everyone has the right to representation. Full representation systems allow a legislature accurately to reflect the range of interests of those who voted for it. To achieve this, full representation systems use multi-member districts. Instead of one member of the legislature being elected in each local

district, larger districts elect several members at once. Within these multi-member districts, a political group gains seats in proportion to the share of the vote it receives. So in a five seat district, a minority representing 40% of the population could expect to win two seats rather than none. The precise mechanism through which this occurs differs according to which system is adopted.

Choice Voting

This system of full representation is also known by other names, including the single transferable vote, the Hare system, and the preference vote. It was the system of representation used by several cities in the United States during the first half of this century, where it was clearly shown to boost minority representation, for instance leading to the election of New York City council's first African American member in 1937. Choice voting remains in use in Cambridge, Massachusetts today. This system can be used in nonpartisan elections, making it particularly good for electing leadership in private organizations and small localities.

For the voter, an election using choice voting is very easy. Candidate are simply ranked order of preference. So if you like Nash best, you put a "1" by her name. If you like Carston second best, you put a "2" by his name, and so on.

The vote count then proceeds in the following manner. First, the minimum number of votes necessary to be elected, or the 'threshold', is calculated. The threshold is usually calculated as the total number of voters divided by one plus the number of seats to be filled. So in a nine seat district, a candidate would need just over 1/(1+9), or one-tenth of the vote, to be elected on the first count.

Ballot papers are then sorted in accordance with voters' first preferences. Any candidates who gain more votes than the threshold are declared elected. Then the surplus votes (that is, the number of votes in excess of the threshold) of these candidates are transferred to the other candidates according to the voters' second preferences. Any new surpluses created by this process are similarly transferred.

If all the seats are not filled through the reallocation of surplus votes, the last place candidate is eliminated and his or her ballots are transferred to the second choice candidates on those ballots. The ballots are then recounted to see if anyone has now reached the threshold.

This transfer process continues until the required number of candidates have been elected.

The main purpose of the transfers is to ensure that your vote isn't wasted if your favorite candidate doesn't win. If your #1 choice is eliminated, your vote is transferred to your #2 choice to help him or her win. This transfer process ensures that all voters have a good chance of electing one of their top-ranked candidates and that all political groups are represented in proportion to their strength in the electorate. Moreover, choice voting solves the problem of "spoiler" candidates and vote spliting, and also encourages a more inclusive brand of politics. Candidates will be more inclined to reach out to their opponents' natural supporters if there is a chance that they could benefit from being ranked second or third on the ballot.

Cumulative Voting

With cumulative voting, candidates are elected in multi-member districts and voters have as many votes as seats being contested. Unlike in traditional winner-take-all election, though, they can choose either to apportion all of these votes individually or to "plump" several of them on a single candidate. In a three-seat district, for example, voters could decide to cast one vote each for three different candidates, two votes for one candidate and one for another, or three votes for one candidate.

If a minority group of like-minded voters choose to plump their votes on a single candidate, they can ensure his or her election. This system has been adopted in several jurisdictions in the U.S. in order to resolve voting rights cases. It is currently used in Peoria, IL, Chilton County, AL, Sisseton, SD and Amarillo, TX. Cumulative voting was also used to elect the Illinois State House of Representatives for over a hundred years, and in 2000 the Illinois Task Force on Political Representation and Alternative Electoral Systems recommended its reinstatement.

Limited Voting

When using limited voting, voters either cast fewer votes than the number of seats, or parties nominate fewer candidates than there are seats. So in a six-seat district, voters might have only one vote. Winners are determined by totaling all votes cast. The greater the difference between the number of votes and the

number of seats, the greater the opportunities for fair representation. Limited voting has recently been adopted in several North Carolina and Alabama localities.

Party-List Systems

Party-List systems are currently used by many democracies in Western Europe, including Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Greece, Israel, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, and Sweden. Each party puts up a list or slate of candidates equal to the number of seats to be filled. Voters cast their ballots for one of these party lists, and the parties receive seats in proportion to their share of the vote.

There are two broad types of list systems. In "closed list" systems, such as that used in Israel, the party fixes the order in which the candidates are listed and elected, and the voter casts one vote for the party list as a whole. Party candidates are elected in the exact order they appear on the ballot. Thus if a party wins enough votes to be awarded three seats, the first three candidates listed on the ballot are automatically elected.

"Open list" systems allow voters to indicate their preferences from among the list of party candidates on the ballot. Candidates with more votes are moved higher up the list and have a better chance of getting elected. This gives more of the power of choice to voters, and less to parties.

Once the vote is in, the seats are allocated among the parties proportionately. Thus in a 10 member district, a party winning 40% of the vote would get four of the ten seats, a party winning 20% of the vote two seats, and a party winning 10% of the vote, one seat. There is usually a threshold, often around 5% of the vote, below which a party receives no seats.

Mixed Member System

This system (also known as the additional member system) has become increasingly popular during the last decade. It was first used in Germany, and variations of it were adopted by many of the new democracies in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, including Russia, Lithuania, and Hungary. This system was also chosen by voters in New Zealand in 1993 to replace their traditional American-style, winner-take-all system.

The mixed member system is a hybrid which combines single-mem-

ber districts with a party-list system. Half the members of the legislature are elected in single-seat contests and the other half of the seats are filled via a party-list vote. The aim is to allow voters to choose an individual local representative, at the same time as ensuring that all parties get their fair share of legislative seats.

Using the mixed member system, voters cast two votes on a ballot. First, they vote for a district representative. This part of the ballot resembles what we have become used to in the U.S., with single candidates from each party vying to become the one representative to the legislature from a small geographic district. As usual, the candidate with the most votes wins. In a hypothetical 100 member state legislature, 50 of the seats might be filled in this way.

On the left part of the ballot, voters put vote for the party of their choice, and the other seats are filled from these party lists. Candidates from each party's list are added to its district winners until that party achieves it appropriate share of seats — as determined by its share of the national party list vote. For example, if the Democratic Party were to win 40% of the party-list votes in our hypothetical election for a state legislature, they would be entitled to a total of 40 of the 100 seats. If they already elected 28 of their candidates in district elections, then they would add 12 more from their party list to come up to the quota of seats they deserve.

FAIR REPRESENTATION FOR ALL

Our single-member district voting system does a terrible job of representing the American public. All Americans should have a say in government, but this is impossible under our current system. This system is intentionally designed to represent only one part of the public — those who vote for the winning candidate in an election. Everyone else — who may make up 30%, 40% or in some circumstances even the majority of voters in a district — gets no representation. Under single-member district rules you have the right to vote, but not the right to be represented.

Most of us are familiar with this problem. If you are a Republican in a predominantly Democratic district (or vice versa), an African-American in a white district, or a minor party supporter in any district, then you are usually shut out by our current election system. Your candidate is unlikely to win and you will have no one to speak for you in the legislature. The motto of the MTV get-out-the-vote campaign has been "Choose or Lose". But in winner-take-all elections, many voters choose and still lose - it's inevitable.

Of course, defenders of single-member districts argue that we all are represented by whoever is elected in our district. But this is often not true. If you are a conservative Republican, you can hardly be represented by a liberal Democratic politician who is voting against every policy that you believe in. It is simply impossible for one official to effectively represent all of his or her constituents since they will inevitably have conflicting views on many issues. So even though elected officials claim to represent their entire district, in reality they usually represent the interests and views of only those who voted for them.

Another way to view this problem is in terms of "wasted votes." A wasted vote is one that does not help to elect someone. Single-member district elections always result in large numbers of these wasted votes. For example, in the 2002 elections for the U.S. House of Representatives, approximately 33% of votes were wasted — cast for candidates that lost. More than 24 million voters came away from the voting booth with no one to represent them in the House. If we add in the 121 million voters who didn't even bother to show up at the polls, a total of 145 million voters (70%) ended up being represented by House members they didn't vote for. It's no wonder that Americans feel little connection with their members of Congress — hardly anyone actually votes for them!

Distortions in Representation

Wasted votes are a large problem in themselves, but they also produce another problem — distortions in representation. Some political groups get more representation than they deserve and others get less. In a single-member district, for instance, the party with 51% of the vote will get 100% of the representation, and the party with 49% of support will get 0% of the representation. On the legislative level, the result is that parties often receive many more or many

fewer seats than they deserve, based on their proportion of the vote. For example, in the 2002 U.S. House elections, the Democrats won 36% of votes in Wyoming. But all of these votes were wasted and they won none of the five seats. That is hardly fair representation. This type of distortion can affect Republicans as well as Democrats. In 2002 U.S. House elections in Oregon state, for instance, Republicans received 42% of the vote, but wasted most of them and won only one of five seats.

The misrepresentation produced by single-member district elections can become so severe that it actually violates the principle of majority rule. Under our system, a party that receives only a minority of the vote may receive a majority of the seats in the legislature. This typically occurs when you have more than two parties competing in the election. If one party gets 40% of the vote and two others receive 30% each, then the largest party can win most of the seats even though it doesn't get a majority of the votes. This kind of outcome is not uncommon. One study of elections in six countries with single-member district elections found that it occurred in 44% of the elections between 1945 and 1996.

In the 1997 Canadian national election, for instance, the Liberal party won only 38.4% of the vote, but received a majority of the parliamentary seats! In the same year in Great Britain, another country with single-member districts, Tony Blair's Labor Party won a record-breaking majority of seats in parliament having received only 43% of the popular vote. This meant that the country was ruled by a party that most people hadn't voted for. This kind of minority rule violates most people's basic sense of how democracies should work.

And it gets worse. Sometimes the distortions in representation are so severe that the party that comes in second place at the polls wins a majority of the seats! For example, in the 1998 U.S. House elections in Texas, the Republican candidates won 52% of the vote, while the Democrats garnered 44% — and yet the Democrats were given 57% of the House seats.

This same injustice plagued national elections in New Zealand, where in 1978 and again in 1981, the party that came in second in the vote, won a majority of the parliamentary seats. Public outrage about these bizarre results prompted the formation of a national commission to study the voting system. The commission recommended abandon-

ing single-member district elections and adopting full representation elections, and this change was eventually approved by a national referendum in 1993.

It should be clear by now that the single-member district system is often unreliable and undemocratic. It cannot be trusted to give us full or fair representation. That is why we need to take a closer look at the alternatives.

From Winner-Take-All to All-Are-Winners

One of the main reasons for full representation's worldwide popularity is that it eliminates the wasted votes and misrepresentation that plague single-member district elec-

The party with 51% of the vote gets 100% of the representation.

tions. It does so by using large multi-member districts and by allocating seats according to the proportion of votes won by political groups. So in a ten-seat district, if the Democrats were to win only 30% of the vote, they would not be shut out — they would still receive 3 of the 10 seats. In a full representation system, voters in both the majority and the minority win representation.

This arrangement drastically reduces the number of wasted votes, and nearly everyone's vote counts. In the 1998 German elections, more than 96% of all voters elected a candidate of their choice. I In stark contrast, only 66% of the voters elected a candidate in the 2002 U.S. House elections.

Many Americans find it hard to believe at first that elections can result in nearly everyone winning representation. We are so used to seeing elections as zero-sum games, where some people have to lose so that others can win. As a result, full representation may seem too good to be true. Yet it is possible to have elections where virtually everyone wins.

Cambridge, Massachusetts uses choice voting for its elections, and its Mayor, Michael Sullivan, explains the advantages in this way: "Some people think it's a crazy system; I think it works. It gives us a variety of voices... You don't end up with as much conflict — you don't want to tick off other candidates."

Full representation not only ensures that nearly all voters have a say in government, but also that all political groups receive their fair share

of representation — representation that corresponds to the group's strength in the electorate. If a party receives 40% of the vote, it can expect to win 40% of the seats, not 20% or 60% as can happen now with our system. And if a party gets a majority of the vote, they will get a majority of the seats. As we have seen, single-member district elections cannot guarantee either majority rule or minority representation. But we would get both with full representation.

> *"The first principle of democracy is representation in proportion to numbers."*
> **John Stuart Mill**

Representation in proportion to numbers is not simply a statistical nicety — it is part of what democracy is all about. The whole point of democratic elections is to produce a legislature that accurately reflects the public — one in which each voter and each political group has their fair share of representation. As one of our founding fathers, John Adams, once said, a legislature "should be an exact portrait, in miniature, of the people at large, as it should think, feel, reason, and act like them."

When legislatures fail to accurately represent the people, this can have serious political consequences. An unrepresentative government is less likely to be accountable and responsive to the public. It is more liable to take actions that ignore large segments of society, and its citizens are more likely to question the legitimacy of its policies. In addition, when people feel unrepresented and unconnected to government, they are more apt to resort to extralegal action, including violence, to get their views noticed. Fair representation is a basic requirement for an effective and stable democracy.

> *"The right of voting for representation is the primary right by which all other rights are protected."*
> **Thomas Paine**

A Fatal Flaw

Our single-member district system is fatally flawed. It can never produce full or fair representation. Even if this denial of democracy were the only thing wrong with this system, that would be reason enough to abandon it in favor of proportional representation elections. But as we will soon see,

this basic flaw in our system causes many other serious political problems as well.

MORE CHOICES FOR VOTERS

Walk into any supermarket and you'll be confronted by a dizzying variety of breakfast cereals. Walk into a shoe store and you'll find dozens of styles of shoes to choose from. But walk into an American voting both and you'll usually find only two choices — Democrats and Republicans. That's it. Americans come in a wide variety of political stripes — from the ultra-conservative to the ultra-liberal — and yet on election day we are forced to try to fit ourselves into one of only two categories.

If you lived in Sweden or Germany, you would have seven parties in the legislature to choose from. So why are our political choices so limited in the United States? Why do we have only a two-party system? Is it because Americans believe the two major parties fit all of their political needs? Hardly. Only about a third of the electorate identifies strongly with either the Democratic or Republican Party. More and more people are calling themselves independents. And polls show that almost two-thirds of Americans would like to see other parties emerge to challenge the two traditional parties.

The real reason why the two party system persists is that winner-takes-all elections artificially protect big parties from competition. Our electoral system strongly discriminates against any outsider challenges to the major parties. It does so by requiring a party to win a majority or a plurality of the vote in a district in order to win any representation. Since most third parties and independents start off with relatively small support bases, this requirement creates a barrier that few can overcome. Third parties almost always finish third, when even finishing second wins nothing in a district. Even if a third party were to win a substantial part of the vote — say 20%-30% — it would still not be able to elect anyone to office.

This barrier discourages voters from supporting third parties. People quickly learn that casting their ballots for third party candidates is a

waste of their votes. Worse yet, their vote may actually help to elect the candidate they dislike the most! Imagine, for example, a race between a Constitution party candidate, a Republican, and a Democrat. If a conservative votes for the Constitution party candidate, this takes away a vote from the Republican candidate and helps the Democratic candidate to win office. Faced with this dilemma, most supporters of third parties reluctantly cast their votes for the lesser-of-two-evils among the major parties, and end up feeling that they have no real voice in the political system.

This electoral barrier gives the major parties a virtual monopoly — or a "duopoly" — on American government. In the private sector, we know that fair competition is good for consumers — that is why we have antitrust laws. But in the public sector, the electoral laws actually help to maintain the two-party duopoly and to discourage any real competition.

Our single-member district system has been remarkably efficient in keeping out third parties. Since the founding of our Republic, over 1,000 minor parties have offered candidates for election. But virtually all of them have disappeared after a short time, largely because they were unable to overcome the obstacles set in their path by our single-member district system. A party that can't elect candidates not only has trouble attracting voters, it also has trouble attracting contributions and talented politicians to run on its ticket.

> *Two-thirds of Americans would like to see other parties challenge the Democrats and Republicans.*

Today we see a growing number of third party efforts, including the Libertarian party, the Reform party, the Constitution party, the New party, and the Green party. And while some of these parties have had a few scattered successes on the local level, it is no surprise that none have been able to consistently elect candidates to higher levels of political office. The prognosis for these alternative parties is not good — unless we have some change in our election system.

Full Representation Makes Third Parties Viable

The only effective way to increase voter choices and allow fair competition between major and minor parties is to adopt full representa-

tion systems for elections in the United States. This would give third parties a real chance to elect their candidates for the first time. Even if one of these minor parties received only 10-20% of the vote, they would still receive 10-20% of the seats in the legislature. Voters could support the candidates and parties they really believed in without the fear of wasting their votes or aiding their opponents. Voters would be free to vote their hearts, not their fears.

If the U.S. moved towards full representation, minor parties would stand a much better chance of being elected. Moreover, the benefits offull representation systems would go far beyond giving voters a wider range of choices. Political discussion would become more exciting, with candidate debates encompassing a far wider range of viewpoints. Minor party candidates would have to be included because they would now have chance of a winning some seats in the legislature.

> *"Because of our peculiar election law, the American government is divided between two parties. The American people are not."*
> **Michael Lind**

Making it easier for minor parties and special interest groups to participate in legislatures would make it easier for new ideas to get a hearing in our political system. The major parties are often slow to respond to new issues and new political perspectives. Throughout our history, it has often been minor parties that have introduced new policy ideas. Important reforms like the abolition of slavery, the direct election of U.S. senators, child labor laws, women's suffrage, business regulation, Social Security, and unemployment insurance were first championed by third parties.

Drawing on a wider range of opinions would make our legislatures much more democratic and representative. For the first time, these bodies would represent the variety of political views that actually exists within the electorate. After all, the whole purpose of elections is to produce legislatures that accurately mirror the diversity of political opinions in the population at large. This kind of faithful representation is what gives government its legitimacy. Only when a legislature accurately represents the political diversity of a society can its decisions be

accepted as the decisions of that society.

More Candid Candidates and Positive Campaigns

A multi-party full representation system would also encourage candidates and parties to be more honest with the American public. In our current system, candidates have to woo large numbers of voters — either a majority or plurality — in order to win. Many candidates are unwilling to publicize their stands on controversial issues widely because they fear alienating supporters they need for victory. Candidates may feel that if they strongly oppose gay rights and abortion rights, they will lose the liberal vote; but if they avidly support those rights, they risk losing more moderate supporters. As a result, the best strategy in a single-member district election is often to play it safe and not be too candid about one's real political beliefs. This is why most candidates currently spend most of their campaign trying to create a pleasing "image" rather than discussing difficult issues.

> *Full Represenation would make it easier for new ideas to get a hearing.*

But under full representation rules, being honest with the public would not necessarily be a handicap. Candidates who openly held strong views on controversial topics would still have a chance of election, so long as a sufficiently large minority of voters agreed with them. Adopting full representation would allow candidates to be both honest and successful — an unlikely combination in our current system.

Fair Competition for All Parties

Americans want and deserve more choices at the polls, and to get that we need fair competition among all political parties. But fair competition is impossible as long as we are stuck with our current election system. Parties will compete on a level playing field only when we have full representation, only when both major and minor parties have a realistic chance of electing candidates.

HOW FULL REPRESENTATION WOULD HELP REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS

Full representation would clearly be good for third parties; but does that mean that it would be bad for the major parties? Since voters would have more choices with full representation we might expect some to defect from the major parties and join alternative parties. However, if we look carefully at the likely impact of full representation, it turns out that its effects on the major parties are not nearly as bad as they first appear. In fact, full representation would actually have several advantages for our traditional parties.

Full representation would certainly help many Republican and Democratic voters — primarily by assuring them of representation. No such assurances exist now. In every national election, tens of

> *"Campaigns in multi-party systems are much more likely to provide an honest discussion of ideological differences."* **John Anderson**

millions of major party supporters come away from the polls with no one to represent them in Congress. Republicans living in a predominately Democratic districts stand little chance of electing their candidate — and vice versa. Even if the smaller of the two parties manages to marshal 30%-40% of the vote, those votes would usually be wasted on a candidate that loses. This frustrating situation is all too common. In fact, almost all of the wasted votes in the United States are cast by supporters of the two major parties — not third party supporters.

In addition, as we saw earlier, these wasted votes often produce unfair election results, where one party wins far fewer seats than it deserves. For example, in the 2002 elections for the U.S. House of Representatives, the Democrats won 42 percent of votes in Iowa, but only one of the state's five seats in the House.

The only sure way to stop this kind of political travesty is to adopt full representation. In this system, major parties who won only 20% -

30% of the votes in a given district would still be able to win 20%-30% of the seats. In the Iowa example, the Democrats' 42% of the vote would have won them two of the five congressional seats under a full representation system, rather than one.

Of course, this still leaves the problem of Democratic and Republican parties losing some members to the third parties. Some ultra-liberal Democrats might break away from the main party to form their own leftist party. And the Republicans might lose some of their more conservative members to a far right party. But would this be a disaster for the two major parties? Probably not. The number of defecting voters would probably be small. The Republicans and Democrats would still reign as the two largest parties.

In addition, the "loss" of these splinter groups would, in a sense, only be temporary. Most minor parties and independents would be likely to join up again with a main party in a legislative coalition. Say, for example, that a Christian Coalition party broke off from the Republican party. In the legislature, these parties would be natural allies on many issues and would join together their conservative forces in most legislative battles with the left.

> *Almost all of the wasted votes in the United States are cast by supporters of the two major parties — not third party supporters.*

Losing some voters to splinter parties would also have at least one positive impact on the two major parties. The exodus of the more radical members of these parties would significantly cut down on fractious internal conflicts. The Democratic party, for instance, is often racked by intense and divisive debates between its centrist and leftist elements. When the leftist groups lose these fights, they feel resentful and may offer little active support for the party's nominees. But when the party adopts the positions of these fringe groups, the mainstream of the party feels betrayed. And as we saw in the case of George McGovern in 1972, the victory of fringe groups in a party can drive away many traditional supporters. Losing some of these more radical voters to other parties would allow the major parties to become more moderate, unified, and cohesive.

ADDRESSING COMMON CONCERNS ABOUT FULL REPRESENTATION

There are deep political, racial, religious, and economic divisions in our society. Given this, it is understandable that any system which could allow yet more political groups to participate in a legislature, and potentially allow yet more areas of disagreement to become apparent, is regarded with suspicion. The fear is that full representation would further fragment American society. Instead of dividing people into smaller groups, maybe it would be better to stick with our current system, where people are brought together in large umbrella parties.

Since American political opinion will always be diverse, it certainly makes sense to encourage dialogue and compromise between all political groups. However, the traditional two-party system combined with winner-takes-all elections may not be the best way to do this. In the current system, different special interests within the a major party will usually hold negotiations before the election. During conventions and primaries, the groups in large umbrella parties try to settle their differences and build an electoral coalition.

At least, that is what happens in theory. Arguably, though, umbrella parties will tend to ignore or paper-over conflicts. As discussed above, party leadership may be wary of dealing openly with contentious issues since this may alienate supporters needed to win election. Mainstream party members may additionally take advantage of the lack of alternative options open to minority groups within the party. White mainstream Democrats, for example, may not feel that they have to take the demands of Black Democrats seriously, because they know that there is very little chance of them voting for any other candidates. Thus, political agreement within a party can be largely illusory.

At the same time, the winner-take-all system usually produces legislatures less diverse than the society that elected them, and this hampers their ability to manage political conflict. Majorities are represented disproportionately, and minority political groups get less than

their fair share of representation or are left out completely. This approach gives merely the appearance of tranquillity and political consensus. Back in the 1950s and 1960s, the all-white city councils in most multi-racial cities produced the illusion of a calm and congenial political situation — but it did nothing to address the deep racial tensions which later exploded into urban riots.

By contrast, full representation can help reduce conflict. It gives candidates less incentive to wage the fiercely negative campaigns that Americans are so tired of. When there are more than two viable candidates, you can't be sure that a smear campaign against an opponent will drive voters into your camp — they might opt for one of the alternatives instead. Choice voting in particular could help to build real consensus between different political groups during the electoral process. During an election using choice voting rules, it is frequently politically expedient for candidates to emphasize their common ground and cooperate with each other. It makes sense for ideologically similar candidates to club together, and hope that they can benefit from being ranked highly by each other's supporters.

Moreover, full representation can ensure that a wide range of political viewpoints are represented with in the legislature itself, where divergent opinions might be better addressed. Racial and ethnic minorities, for instance, stand a much better chance of having their concerns dealt with if they actually have representatives in government, and this is far more likely to happen when a full representation system is used. There is no reason to think that a more diverse legislature would be a more fractious one, or that involving more groups in decision-making would necessarily slow down the legislative process. The Illinois Assembly on Political Representation and Alternative Election Systems found that compared to plurality voting, cumulative voting as previously used in the State Legislature tended to "generate richer deliberations and statewide consensus among all legislators". And in the long run, we have a better chance of really resolving conflicts if all political groups participate in the governing process.

While some Americans worry that full representation voting systems could worsen conflict, abroad they are widely regarded as the best way to mitigate extreme factionalism and to bolster political stability. When South Africa — a country torn apart by violent political and racial conflicts — emerged from apartheid and adopted a democratic

form of government, all sides agreed that a proportional system would be the best one for their diverse society. Former president F.W. de Klerk endorsed the use of party lists, arguing that the winner-take-all system "works well in homogeneous societies, but it is not the right system for a big country with vast regional interests and many language and culture groups." The African National Congress also rejected American-style elections, even though this system would have worked to their political advantage by over-representing their party in the assembly. They realized that this system would seriously under-represent whites and other minorities, and as a result would be politically destabilizing in the long run. Similar concerns have lead to the adoption of full representation in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Full Representation and the Threat of Gridlock

A more diverse legislature would give us a better chance to identify and resolve our differences, but some people worry that in the process it could create chaos in government. Gridlock is already a serious problem in the U.S. Congress, and wouldn't it only get worse? How could representatives of a greater range of political interests possibly agree on legislation?

Fortunately, there is little reason to worry that full representation will make government unworkable. First, we needn't have "dozens of parties" in our legislatures. All proportional systems have a mechanism, called a threshold, to ensure that fringe interests with very little popular support cannot prevent government from functioning. The threshold is the minimum percentage of the vote that a party must receive in order to fill any seats in the legislature. To gain a position on the legislature in Cambridge, Massachusetts, for instance, a candidate needs to gain around 10% of the vote. This level has worked well for decades, allowing both diverse representation and workable local government. The precise level of the threshold can always be adjusted in accordance with specific situations and local sentiment. If gridlock was perceived as being a serious possibility, a higher threshold could be adopted.

But some worry that even if a legislature had only a small minority interest presence, this would still make governance much more difficult. They argue that in the current American winner-takes-all system, either the Democrats or the Republicans will almost always have a legislative majority, and this makes the passage of bills much easier.

In a legislature with no predetermined majority party, several groups must come together in a coalition in order to pass legislation. The danger is that these coalitions would prove difficult to form or apt to fall apart.

Italy is usually the example cited of this particular problem. Undeniably, Italy has a history of unstable government,

> *The evidence clearly shows that instability and gridlock are very rare in full representation systems.*

with coalitions forming and breaking apart on a regular basis. Yet the difficulties experienced in Italy are not common to all legislatures elected using full representation. The vast majority of countries using these voting systems have enjoyed stable and efficient government. Legislative coalitions tend to last many years, in some cases, decades, and most parliaments have a record of passing legislation much more quickly and efficiently than our own Congress!

Evidently, the success or failure of a full representation system depends on the local political environment. And past evidence suggests it can work well in an American context. The use of full representation in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and areas of Texas, Alabama and North Carolina has largely been judged successful. The Illinois Assembly on Political Representation and Alternative Electoral Systems, a nonpartisan taskforce created by the Institute of Government and Public Affair at the University of Illinois to study the change from cumulative to plurality

> *We have a better chance of resolving conflicts if all groups are participating in the governing process.*

voting in the Illinois House elections, concluded that cumulative voting had been the superior to winner-takes-all in a number of significant areas. There is no reason why such success could not be duplicated elsewhere. Most evidence seems to suggest that, rather than gridlock and conflict, full representation produces highly representative and workable governments that generate more political compromise and consensus than a two party system. This is exactly the kind of government that most Americans want.

INCREASING VOTER TURNOUT

Voter turnout in the United States is pitiful. In a good election year we are lucky to get half the voters to the polls, and in non-presidential years, turnout often dips below 40%. This raises serious questions about how legitimate and representative our governing institutions really are. For example, in 2002 only 38% of the voting age population turned out to vote in the House elections. How can any party claim a mandate to govern with such low levels of voter support?

Voter participation looks even worse when we compare ourselves to European Democracies. As Table 2 shows, the U.S. ranks embarrassingly low compared to many other developed countries. Several factors explain this glaring difference. Some of these other countries have compulsory voting, and others make voting easier with simple registration, voting on weekends, and other conveniences. But another major factor is the election system. As the table suggests, countries which do not elect representatives to single member districts tend to have higher turnouts than countries which do. But what exactly is it about multi-member districts that encourages voter participation?

Why Full Representation Would Help

One reason why more people tend to participate in elections using systems of full representation is that they offer more choice. When it is easier to find a candidate or party you are really excited about, you are more likely to vote. In addition, with full representation, voters have a much better chance of having their votes count — of actually electing someone. This is another strong incentive to participate.

Another reason our current system tends to discourage voter turnout is that many incumbents have "safe seats". Why should Democrats go to the polls in districts where they are far outnumbered by Republicans and have no chance of electing their candidate (or vice versa)? Political parties usually make little effort to get out the vote in districts where they stand little chance of winning; .

Safe seats have become an epidemic. There were so many of them

in the 2002 U.S. House elections that 4/5 of the incumbents were either unopposed or won by landslides of more than 20%. In Virginia, over half of the seats were uncontested and every incumbent won by a landslide. Turnout there understandably stood at a pitiful 27%.

Using full representation, there is no such thing as a "safe district". Every district is competitive because minority interests and parties have a realistic chance to elect candidates. And it makes a big difference whether a party gets 20% or 40% of the vote, because more votes means more seats. So more people have a reason to vote, and parties try to mobilize their voters in all districts, not just a few.

For all of these reasons, adopting a system of full representation would be a big help in addressing our chronically low voter turnout levels. Full representation won't solve the entire problem by itself, but experts estimate that it could increase turnout in the United States by 10%-15%. We could see millions more voters going to the polls in every election and this would be a significant step toward addressing one of the most persistent problems in American politics.

TABLE 2: Voter Turnout in Legislative Elections in 8 Democracies

Country	Election System	Turnout Rate in most recent election (election date)
Italy	Mixed Member	85% (2001)
Sweden	Party-List	78% (1998)
Germany	Mixed Member	75% (1998)
Norway	Party-List	73% (2001)
Netherlands	Party-List	70% (1998)
Great Britain	**Single-Member Dist.**	**58% (2001)**
Canada	**Single-Member Dist.**	**55% (2000)**
United States	**Single-Member Dist.**	**38% (2002)**

FAIR REPRESENTATION FOR MINORITIES

The issue of fair representation for racial and ethnic minorities is one of the most vexing problems surrounding American elections. The *idea* of fair representation is not controversial. Most Americans would agree that all racial and ethnic groups should have a fair chance to elect their own representatives to our legislatures. The real problem is that this goal is very difficult to achieve in a single-member district system.

The source of the difficulty is obvious. When African Americans make up a minority of the voters in a district — say 20% — their chances of being able to choose who is elected are nonexistent. The election of black representatives from predominately white districts remains a rarity today because, as we have seen, single-member districts only represent the majority of voters. In such a system, it is impossible to assure that voters in the minority have a fair chance to elect their preferred representatives.

This problem typically has affected African Americans, Latinos, and Asians. These groups have been chronically under-represented in our city, state, and federal legislatures. Even though Latinos and African Americans together make up nearly a quarter of our population, there are at present no ethnic or racial minority senators in Congress. But whites can be affected by this problem as well. In the Southwest, non-Hispanic whites increasingly find themselves in the minority in predominately Hispanic districts, and some fear they will not get fair representation in local government. Single-member districts discriminate against whatever racial group happens to be in the minority.

Majority-Minority Districting

The only way to deal with this problem in our current system is to create so-called "majority-minority" districts. Spurred by the Voting Rights Act, the federal government has encouraged the creation of special districts in which racial and ethnic minorities are the majority of voters. This strategy has had some success, with the numbers of African American and Latinos in Congress growing steadily during the last two decades.

However, this solution can only work in areas where different ethnic and racial groups live in geographically district areas. Where populations are more integrated, majority-minority districts can be impossible to draw, and the decision of who to include and who to exclude becomes essentially arbitrary. Moreover, some have argued that special districts of this sort constitute reverse discrimination. Recently the Supreme Court has issued several rulings that have declared some of these districts unconstitutional. In one North Carolina case, the Court objected to the strange shape of some of the majority-minority districts, one of which was no wider than a highway in some places. More recently, the Court has overturned several majority-minority districts by ruling that race should not be the predominant factor in districting. While the court battle over these race-based districts is sure to continue, it is clear that this approach is becoming less acceptable, both politically and legally.

"Race-Neutral" Districting Isn't Neutral
Opponents of majority-minority districts would like to return to what they call "race-neutral" districting — the drawing of districts in a way that does not take race into account. But this approach is not really race-neutral at all since the result would be a return to districts in which minorities are submerged in the larger white communities. In North Carolina, for instance, during the 100 years before the use of majority-minority districts, black voters were submerged in majority white districts and were unable to elect any representatives to Congress, despite making up 26% of the population. A districting system that makes it nearly impossible for minorities to elect their own representatives is hardly "neutral."

One way out of this dilemma is to realize that much of the problem is created by the single-member district system itself. Under this arrangement, some group is always going to go unrepresented in a district — either whites or minorities. No matter how we draw the lines, some group is going to feel cheated. The answer, then, lies in finding a voting system in which all groups in a district can win representation. That system is full representation.

Full Representation: A Simple Solution
The large multi-member districts used under full representation allow all racial groups to win representation. Assume, for instance, that we had a five-seat district in which African Americans made up

20% of the voters. If they were all to vote for a black candidate, that person could expect to win one of the five seats. The advantage of full representation elections is that they allow for fair representation of both minorities and majorities.

The cumulative vote has already been in use in several cities in Alabama, Texas, and New Mexico. The results have been encouraging: both Hispanic and African-American candidates have been able to win local office under this system. The move to a cumulative voting system in the Amarillo School Board in Texas, for instance allowed an African American and a Latina to be elected for the first time ever in the district. Alphonso Vaugn, the Amarillo NAACP President stated that the new voting system "gave minorities the prospect that we can make a difference; our vote can make a difference and we can be an integral part of the process."

The Center for Voting and Democracy has shown that full representation could also work in federal elections for the House of Representatives. It has drawn up a maps of a number of states demonstrating how multi-seat districts would look. For example, the twelve districts currently used to elect the twelve congressional seats of North Carolina could be organized into 3 four-seat super-districts using proportional representation. In three of these districts, African-American voters make up at least 25% of the electorate and would therefore have a good chance of being able to elect a candidate who they felt truly represented them.

Some Misconceptions
Misconceptions about full representation and racial representation sometimes arise, and these need to be addressed. First, we are *not* talking about a racial quota system. Under full representation, seats are not set aside for minorities, nor is it assumed that only minority officials can or should represent minorities. Full representation simply allows minorities the opportunity to elect whoever they want to represent them. That representative could be a member of an ethnic or racial minority, a white, a liberal, or a conservative — the point is that minority voters should have the power to make this choice themselves, and that full representation would finally give them that power.

Second, proportional representation would not require minorities to form their own parties — though that would be an option if they felt

this was the most effective way to represent their interests. It is more likely that minority candidates would run as part of a major party slate in the multi-

> *"We need to put proportionality at the center of our conception of representation."*
>   Lani Guinier

member proportional districts. In many areas, for instance, African-American candidates would probably run as Democrats. But in places with large minority voting populations, it could easily be that both major parties would include minorities on their slates in order to attract these voters and gain more seats. This is exactly what happened in Cincinnati when it used choice voting for its city elections from 1926 to 1957.

Justice for All

In the long run, full representation may be the only politically and constitutionally viable solution to the problem of minority representation in the U.S. It is a solution that should appeal to all sides in this controversy. Full representation would eliminate the use of the race-based districts that some find so objectionable. Minority voters would certainly benefit from a system that gave them a fair chance to elect their own candidates and white voters would have reason to be happy with a change as well since they too would be assured of having their fair share of representation in all areas. Full representation is the only truly "race neutral" approach to districting. And because it is fair to all groups, it could be the approach that resolves this festering political problem for good.

FAIRNESS FOR FEMALE CANDIDATES

Another advantage of proportional representation is that it gives women a fairer chance to be elected. Currently, American legislatures remain overwhelmingly male institutions. Despite recent progress, women still make up a small percentage of our legislatures — only about 14% in the U.S. House of Representatives and 13% in the U.S. Senate.

Since this imbalance has been constant a feature of American legis-

latures, some Americans don't seem to notice anything strange about this ar-

> *Full Representation is the only truly "race neutral" approach to districting.*

rangement, but you merely have to consider the opposite situation to be made aware of how great the distortion is. Imagine an election that resulted in almost 9 out of 10 members of Congress being women! This development would make headlines in newspapers around the nation. Talk show hosts would be wondering how we got into this extraordinary situation, and whether it was good for the country. Clearly, we should be asking the same questions about of current Congress, whose gender composition continues to vary so dramatically from that of our general society.

The paucity of women in our legislatures looks even more peculiar when we compare the United States to other Western democracies. Today, Sweden's parliament is made up of 45% women, while the Netherlands and Norway are not far behind with 37% and 36%. So why does America lag so far behind these other countries? Many political scientists now argue that elections procedures are one reason — that the type of voting system used in a country plays an important role in determining how well women are represented.

Voting Systems Make A Difference

Scholars have long known that countries like the United States, France, and Great Britain, which have single-member district systems, do a very poor job of electing women. As Table 3 shows, these countries consistently rank below most proportional representation countries in that regard.

The examples of Germany and Australia show just how much impact a voting system can have. The German Bundestag is elected using a mixed-member system — a dual ballot system in which some of the members of their parliament are elected in single-member districts and some are elected from a party-list ballot. In Germany between 1987 and 1993, three times more women were elected to party list seats than won election in the single member districts. The Australian Parliament contains two houses - a Senate elected by choice voting and a House of Representatives elected through winner-takes-all single-member districts. The percentage of women in the Senate is consistently far higher than the percentage of women

in the House. This evidence strongly supports the view that voting procedures can play a very large role in determining the success rate of female candidates.

How Full Representation Helps

 A 1994 study by the National Women's Political Caucus of U.S. elections showed that "a candidate's sex did not affect his or her chances of wining general elections... When male incumbents were compared to female incumbents, men running for open seats to women running for open seats, and male challengers to female challengers, women won as high a percentage of their races as men". If women can be nominated to competitive seats, they are as likely to win as men.

Women make up 45% of Sweden's parliament, but only 13% of the U.S. Congress.

It is at the nomination stage, however, that obstacles are currently placed in the way of women hoping to be elected. Under the winner-takes-all system, most seats in the U.S. Congress and State Legislatures are essentially non-competitive, and most incumbents have very little chance of losing. Consequently, a large degree of inertia is built into the present political system. The preexisting gender imbalance is perpetuated, and trying to alter it becomes politically difficult since in order to nominate more women in races where there is some hope of victory, parties have to deny nomination to mostly male incumbents. And where a plurality is necessary

Table 3: *The Representation of Women in 9 Western Democracies*

Country	Type of Election System	Percentage of Women Elected to Parliament
Sweden	Party list	45%
Norway	Party list	36%
Finland	Party list	37%
Denmark	Party list	38%
Netherlands	Party list	37%
Germany	Mixed member	32%
New Zealand	Mixed member	28%
Canada	Winner-takes-all	21%
United Kingdom	Winner-takes-all	18%

 to gain election, female challengers from outside the party structure have little chance of success.

The adoption of full representation in multi-member districts, by contrast, can make it easier to promote the nomination of women. Under most systems of full representation, parties would be likely to nominate more than one candidate for each multi-member district. A party that put only men on their slate would be inviting charges of sexism, and would risk alienating the feminist vote. At the same time, the reasons *not* to nominate women become far less convincing, since adding women to slates does not necessitate the throwing out of incumbents.

The boost given to smaller parties and minority groups by full representation can also increase the pressure to be fairer to female candidates. In Norway, once some smaller parties began to nominate substantial numbers of women to prominent positions on their slates, the larger parties followed suit in order not to appear sexist in comparison.

Another reason that women are better represented in certain countries is because some political parties set a quota of female candidates to be included on party slates. The African National Congress, for instance, requires one third of candidates on their party list to be female. Obviously, the idea of quotas is highly controversial. If they were even to be considered, however, it is difficult to imagine how they could work outside the context of some sort of proportional system. Enforcing quotas in single-member districts where candidates were nominated one at a time would be highly problematic.

The current under-representation of women in American political life is a massive act of injustice. Moreover, the drive to get more women into government is not merely a symbolic one. Where women are elected, they are much more likely to support legislation benefiting women and children, and to make a real difference to the type of laws being enacted. Moving to full representation would be one of the single most effective ways to increase women's chances of being elected to office, and finally correcting a grievous and dangerous imbalance.

FULL REPRESENTATION: THE TIME IS NOW

Full representation is an idea whose time has come. We should no longer put up with an election system that is dysfunctional in so many ways. Elections are one of our central political institutions, and when they do not work democratically, democracy itself is weakened. Retaining an election system that denies representation to many voters, limits their choices, and produces unrepresentative legislatures will only further increase citizens' dissatisfaction with their government.

We cannot rely on other reforms to solve all of our election problems. Even if we had such things as term limits, campaign finance reform and voting by mail, we would still need full representation. None of these other reforms would do much about unrepresentative legislatures or the lack of choices at the polls. Term limits would help to unseat incumbents, but they wouldn't eliminate wasted votes or the bias against third party candidates. Campaign finance reform would make elections more honest, but it would do little to increase voter turnout or to give women and minorities a much fairer chance to be elected. We need full representation because it addresses basic defects in our election system that no other reform can remedy.

Although full representation was first adopted abroad and has been used only sparingly in this country, there is something very American about the idea. As we have seen, the basic values embodied by full representation are fairness, opportunity, and freedom of choice. These are quintessential American values. Americans want more choices at the polls and they want an election system that is fair to all voters and all candidates. We can only get these things if we adopt a new voting system. This is why full representation needs to be on the reform agenda of all Americans who want to make our government more representative and more responsive to the people of this country.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Full representation can be promoted in a variety of ways. Prob ably the best place to begin is educating yourself more about proportional representation. (See the list of further sources of information at the back of this pamphlet.) You need a thorough understanding of full representation if you are to persuade others of its merits.

If you participate in any local political groups, you can educate your fellow members about this issue and urge your organization formally to endorse this reform. Some organizations have formed study groups to read about and discuss alternative voting systems. Study groups also can be a great way to bring major players in the community together to study the feasibility of a move towards full representation. And full representation is an idea that thrives on scrutiny: the more you look at it, the more you like it.

If you are a member of a church, school, or professional organization, you can promote the use of a full representation system in your group's own elections. Several student organizations have led campaigns at colleges and universities to elect their student governments with full representation. Promoting full representation in these non-governmental groups serves to educate the public on how it works and what it can do, and so helps to lay the groundwork for more sweeping electoral reform.

In promoting full representation for governmental elections, the easiest place to begin is at the local level. Usually a change the city or county charter is all that is required to adopt proportional representation. City governments regularly form committees to review their charters, and these are excellent opportunities for citizens to raise the option of using different voting systems.

City officials are sometimes reluctant to lead the way in this kind of change, and they may even try to impede it. So in many areas citizens may have to organize themselves and offer referendums in order to reform their city charter. In recent years, citizens have put full representation referendums on the ballot in Cincinnati and San Francisco. Both efforts were defeated only narrowly, garnering 45% and 43% of the vote respectively.

The state level is also ripe for change. In many states, full represen-

tation could be adopted without any change to the state constitution. A reasonable approach would be to work for full representation in one house, leaving the other house elected by districts. But given the difficulties involved in organizing a state-wide campaign, promoters of full representation should not jump too quickly into a referendum process without first taking the time to lay the political groundwork for such an effort. Proponents must form an effective state-wide organization and build coalitions with other political groups. A premature effort that leads to defeat might turn some people off the idea permanently. In order to build support, citizens might want to first work for the establishment of a state commission to examine the electoral system. This could prove a valuable forum for promoting the idea of full representation and familiarizing the public with this issue.

Litigation is another way to promote the use of full representation, particularly in areas where the current system can be shown to be disadvantaging minority groups. Full representation can often be introduced as a possible legal remedy to city and state suits over voting rights issues. Working with the litigants or filing "friend of the court" briefs could at the very least lead to full representation being considered as an option. In one case in Maryland, a judge who had previously been made aware of full representation by activists went on to use it to settle a voting rights case.

Obviously, the adoption of full representation for U.S. congressional elections is an important goal for the full representation movement. But change at this level will be difficult. Although there are no constitutional obstacles to using a different voting system for U.S. House elections, congressional legislation mandates single-member districts. You could join the effort to repeal this legislation and allow states to use full representation systems. Rep. Cynthia McKinney has several times introduced a bill, "The Voters' Choice Act," to do just that.

Finally, you can also promote proportional representation by lending your support to other organizations that are leading the fight for this reform. On the national level, FairVote - The Center for Voting and Democracy in Washington, D.C. is a nonpartisan organization which distributes information about election reform and alternative election systems, primarily proportional representation. The Center depends heavily on citizen donations to support its work.

APPENDIX: **COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT FULL REPRESENTATION**

With new ballots and more candidates and parties, wouldn't full representation be too complicated for most American voters?

No. Full representation systems are used in most other Western democracies, and where citizens have no trouble using them — as evidenced by their high turnout rates. With the proper educational efforts, American voters will be able to master any voting system very quickly.

> *PR embodies the quintessential American values of fairness, opportunity, and freedom of choice.*

Where has full representation been used in the United States?

Currently, choice voting is used in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Cumulative voting is used in Peoria, IL, and in several city and county councils in Alabama and Texas. Other councils in Alabama use limited voting, as do some in North Carolina. A number of school districts in New York, Texas, New Mexico, and North Dakota also use various forms of full representation. In the past, two dozen American cities also used full representation elections, including New York, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Toledo, and Boulder. Several states also require corporations to use full representation to elect their boards of directors in order to ensure representation of minority shareholders.

Isn't full representation the same as a parliamentary system?

No. A parliamentary system is a type of government in which the head of state is elected by the legislature, instead of separately as in our presidential system. Full representation is a **voting** system, not a **government** system. Most European parliaments happen to use full

representation — hence the confusion — but these two systems do not necessarily go hand in hand. We can use full representation in the U.S. without switching to a parliamentary system.

Can full representation be used in nonpartisan elections?

Definitely. Several forms of full representation — choice voting, cumulative voting and limited voting — can and have been used in nonpartisan local elections in the U.S. Cambridge, Massachusetts holds nonpartisan elections using a choice voting system.

Is full representation the same as at-large elections?

No. At-large elections, used in some cities, have all the candidates for city council running in one large city-wide district, with the voters having as many votes as there are seats on the council. While these multi-seat districts do resemble the districts used in systems of full representation, at-large elections are conducted on a winner-take-all basis and do not result in all groups being represented fairly. Indeed, 51% of the voters can elect 100% of the seats.

Would full representation require me to vote for a party slate? I like to vote for individual candidates.

A few party-list forms of full representation require people to vote for parties. However, the types of full representation usually recommended for adoption in the United States — choice voting, cumulative voting and limited voting — allow voters to vote for individual candidates.

Would adopting full representation require a constitutional amendment?

Article 1, section 4 of the Constitution grants states and Congress the power to choose election systems. Currently, only an act of Congress prevents states from using full representation to elect members of the House of Representatives. Repeal of the act would open the door for states to use whatever system they chose to elect their U.S. House delegations. The constitution does prevent the use of full representation for U.S. Senate elections, since senators must now be elected one at a time. Most state and local voting systems could be changed without amending state constitutions.

Can full representation do anything about gerrymandering?

Yes. Gerrymandering is the manipulation of district lines so that one party can be sure of securing a large majority of the voters and the other party cannot win any representation. Single-member districts encourage this unethical behavior. But in the multi-member districts necessary for full representation to work, gerrymandering is almost impossible, because even if a district is drawn to give a party only 20% of the votes, that party can still expect to win 20% of the seats. Using full representation, the drawing of districts lines becomes the innocuous political activity it should be.

Can full representation be used to elect mayors, governors, and presidents?

No. Full representation can only be used in legislative elections, because it requires multi-member districts where the seats can be allocated proportionally. But single-office elections can be greatly improved by the use of other new voting methods. Contact the *Center for Voting and Democracy* to learn how to reform single-office elections.

Would I lose my local district representative in full representation?

It depends on the version of full representation adopted. With the mixed-member system, you would still able to elect candidates from your small local district as well as from a regional party list. With other forms of full representation, districts would not be eliminated, but they would become much larger. For example, five single-seat districts might be combined into one large 5 seat district. But while multi-member districts are larger, they actually allow for closer relationships between representatives and constituents. In our present system, many constituents feel little relationship to a representative that they voted against. With full representation, nearly everyone should be able to relate to at least one of the district representatives that they helped to elect.

Would full representation encourage extremism by making it easier for small radical parties to elect candidates?

Certainly not. We know that countries using full representation have

not been plagued by extremist parties. All voting systems have a threshold — a minimum number of votes necessary for parties to win representation — that keeps small extremist parties out of power. Instead of radicalism, full representation promotes moderation and centrism, with the ruling coalitions typically being of the center-right or center-left variety.

Wouldn't full representation give an advantage to the left (or the right)?

No. The basic principle underlying proportional representation is that an election system should not give any one political group an unfair advantage over another — but that each group should receive its appropriate share of seats and power. If some groups on the right or left would gain seats from the adoption of full representation it is not because full representation is biased towards them, but because our previous system gave them fewer seats than they deserved. Full representation aims to create a level playing field with fairness and justice for all political groups.

Which system of full representation is the best?

It depends on the circumstances. Choice voting would probably work best in most American legislatures since it does not require voters to coordinate their support for a single candidate, and functions effectively whether candidates are standing for political parties or are running as independents. When using choice voting, there is no danger of the vote being split, that is, of too many similar candidates dividing similar-minded voters between them.

Cumulative and limited voting have been used successfully to resolve some voting rights cases, and can be attractive because they are both easy to explain and understand. However, both rely on groups of voters with shared interests being willing to vote as a bloc. If, for example, an ethnic minority made up 25% of a 4 seat district, using cumulative voting they could hope to chose one representative so long as they all voted for the same person. If two candidates stood hoping to represent that minority, the minority vote could be split with the result that neither would be elected. Party lists and the mixed-member system would both necessitate a change in political culture, and are unlikely ever to gain significant support in the U.S.

FURTHER INFORMATION

BOOKS

Douglas J. Amy, *Real Choices/New Voices: The Case for Proportional Representation Elections in the United States.* Columbia University Press, 1993. Contains a great deal of in-depth information about the advantages of full representation elections. (See the order form at the back of the pamphlet.)

Kathleen Barber, *Proportional Representation and Election Reform in Ohio,* Ohio State University Press, 1995. A good analysis of the history of proportional representation in Ohio and other places in the United States.

WEBSITE

Proportional Representation Library. Contains several valuable sources of information about full representation, including beginning readings and articles by scholars and activists. Also includes an extensive bibliography with citations of dozens of articles and books on full representation. Finally, the site also includes a guide to other full representation-related Web sites in the United States and abroad. (http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/polit/damy/prlib.htm)

ORGANIZATION

FairVote - The Center for Voting and Democracy. A non-partisan, educational institution that provides much good information about full representation and other alternative elections systems. Also a good source of information about current political activity and local organizations working for this reform.

6930 Carroll Avenue, Suite 610

Takoma Park, MD 20912

301-270-4616 FAX: 301-270-4133

www.fairvote.org

Scholars Comment
on Full Representation

"I did a comparative study of 13 democracies. . . . I found a clearly superior performance of the PR systems with regard to 'quality' factors: generally better minority representation, a much higher representation of women in legislatures, a much higher voter turnout, and greater income equality."
 Arend Lijphart
 Past-president of the American Political Science Association

*"If democracy in the twenty-first century is finally to mean the full and substantive participation of all groups in political life, the electoral foundations for such change can be found in a variety of proportional systems. . . . Electoral systems should not be expected to bring utopia, but adoption of the proportional principle for American elections would create opportunity for a more inclusive, less polarized democracy."
 Kathleen Barber
 John Carroll University

"[With PR,] representation becomes the process of bottom-up empowerment based on self-defined expression of interest. . . . The legislative body can reflect fairly the range of opinions and interests within the public at large, including racial minorities who can be represented based on their electoral strength."
 Lani Guinier
 University of Pennsylvania Law School

"A new electoral system, proportional representation, would go along way toward clarifying what parties stand for, while giving voters more parties from which to choose. . . . Proportional representation may be an idea whose time has come."
 Matthew Shugart
 University of California, San Diego

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	Price	Order

_____ **Proportional Representation: The Case for a Better Election System**
Pamphlet summarizing the case for PR. 3.00 _____

_____ **Real Choices/New Voices: The Case for** P**roportional Representation Elections in the United States**
The definitive book arguing for PR in the U.S. Published by Columbia University Press. 278 pages. 10.00 _____

_____ **Proportional Representation Bibliography**
A complete guide to readings about PR in the scholarly and popular press. 1.00 _____

_____ **Voting and Democracy Report, 1995**
The Center for Voting and Democracy's collection of articles on elections and election reform. 78 articles by Lani Guinier,
John Anderson, Kevin Phillips, Hendrik Hertzberg,
Arend Lijphart,and many more. 10.00 _____

_____ **Dubious Democracy: 1982-1994 House Elections**
CV&D's ground breaking statistical analysis of the 1994 elections to the U.S. House showing lack of competition in single-member district elections. 10.00 _____

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