

ILLINOIS ASSEMBLY ON  
POLITICAL REPRESENTATION  
AND ALTERNATIVE  
ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



IGPA *University of Illinois*

---

ILLINOIS ASSEMBLY ON  
POLITICAL REPRESENTATION  
AND ALTERNATIVE  
ELECTORAL SYSTEMS



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SPRING 2001



IGPA *University of Illinois*



# CONTENTS

Foreword .....	5
Introduction .....	7
Background .....	15
Participants, Illinois Assembly on Political Representation & Alternative Electoral Systems .....	25
Appendix. A Comparison of Selected Electoral Systems .....	29



# FOREWORD

In Spring 2000, the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois created the Illinois Task Force on Political Representation and Alternative Electoral Systems. Governor Jim Edgar and Judge Abner Mikva served as co-chairs. The task force examined the effects of the change from cumulative to plurality voting in Illinois House elections, gathered information about alternative electoral systems that are used throughout the world, and considered how and how well those systems work in other regions of the country and world.

With that information in hand, they brought together leaders from politics, the media, academe, business, and nonprofit organizations for the Illinois assembly on Political Representation and Alternative Electoral Systems. The assembly met to explore the pros and cons of various electoral systems as they might be used in Illinois House elections.

I am happy to present you with the final report of the Illinois Assembly. This report is very timely. Work on reapportionment and redistricting of local, state, and federal legislative districts has already begun. Moreover, some recent U. S. Supreme Court decisions have negated congressional districts that were gerrymandered in 1991 to achieve minority representation. Proportional representation and cumulative voting increasingly are seen as alternatives to gerrymandering. This report is being distributed nationally with the intent that it will play a positive role in what has become a worldwide discussion of how best to elect our political leaders.

The Institute of Government and Public Affairs wishes to express its gratitude to the Joyce Foundation for its generous support of the task force, the assembly, and the production of this report.

— Jack H. Knott  
*Director, Institute of Government and Public Affairs*



# INTRODUCTION

Citizens tend to take the electoral system they use to choose their public officials for granted. This should surprise no one. Most voters, after all, experience only one electoral system in their lives. In the United States, that system is, with a few local government exceptions, winner-take-all: he or she who receives the most votes wins. To the great bulk of Americans, winner-take-all and democracy are one and the same.

To be sure, studies that systematically compare electoral systems exist. Most appear in academic journals, not in high-circulation magazines, however, and they tend to be written in arcane and highly technical language. Consequently, debates and discussions rarely extend beyond scholars and a handful of election reform advocates.

This state of affairs is unfortunate. Elections are the centerpiece of any democratic system, and how citizens elect their public officials has important implications for how democracy works. Consider, for example, the following:

- As the nation watched intently, determining who would win the 2000 popular vote in Florida, and thus the United States presidency, turned into a question of how to count votes: Should Florida accept hand-counted ballots or not? If Florida's electoral system had provided a clear-cut answer, as some other states' systems do, the United States Supreme Court would not have been the final arbiter.
- Half of all races for the Illinois House of Representatives were uncontested in 2000. In one of every two races voters had no choice in either the primary or general election. They could vote for the incumbent or not vote at all. Among the remaining races, a large majority lacked meaningful competition; two candidates ran in opposition, but who would win was never in doubt. Many factors contribute to this disturbing lack of competition, but none is more significant than the use of the winner-take-all system to elect Illinois state legislators.
- The demographic composition of the United States and Illinois is changing dramatically. In less than one lifespan, by the year 2050, Americans who belong to racial and ethnic minority groups—Asians, African-Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics—will outnumber non-Hispanic whites and attain majority status. This population shift will bring—in fact, is already bringing—new demands for political representation. In the view of many experts, our existing electoral system cannot accommodate the growing diversity of interests.
- Many countries around the world use an electoral system that allocates legislative seats on the basis of the percentage of the vote that a party receives. The idea is that if a party receives, say, 20 percent of the vote, it should receive about 20 percent of the total legislative seats. Typically, this type of electoral system produces three or more legislative parties. Known as proportional voting, it produces relatively more women and minority legislators than the kind of system we use to elect state and national legislators in the United States.

“Many factors contribute to this disturbing lack of competition, but none is more significant than the use of the winner-take-all system to elect Illinois state legislators.”

“In the view of many experts, our existing electoral system cannot accommodate the growing diversity of interests.”

How we choose our public officials ***does*** matter, and thus citizens of this state, this nation, and the world should take discussions of electoral change seriously. Many already are. A variety of nations, from Japan to Great Britain to Australia, have undertaken critical reevaluations of their existing electoral systems. In the United States, criticism of the winner-take-all system has risen sharply in recent years. Critics point to declining turnout, the increasing lack of competition in state and congressional elections, and the inability of women and racial and ethnic groups to gain adequate representation in legislative bodies.

## THE ILLINOIS TASK FORCE ON POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND ALTERNATIVE ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

It is no exaggeration to say that a worldwide conversation about electoral systems is well under way. In an effort to encourage citizens from across Illinois to join this conversation, former Governor Jim Edgar and former federal Judge Abner Mikva convened, in Spring of 2000, the Illinois Task Force on Political Representation and Alternative Electoral Systems. With funding from the Joyce Foundation and research assistance from the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois, the task force was created to undertake an objective and comprehensive evaluation of the system used to elect Illinois state legislators.

### *Why a Task Force?*

The existence of the task force raises two questions: why create a task force at all and why create one specifically at the beginning of the year 2000? With regard to the first question, a task force is the most effective and appropriate vehicle by which to undertake an objective and comprehensive evaluation of Illinois' electoral system. Unlike some of the organizations currently active in the state, the task force did not come into being for the purpose of advocating change or defending the status quo. Although it ultimately offered recommendations, they were based on the best analysis and information available.

---

"How we choose our public officials ***does*** matter, and thus citizens of this state, this nation, and the world should take discussions of electoral change seriously ."

---

Moreover, members of the task force brought to their assignment a wide range of expertise and a variety of initial impressions about the workings of the current electoral system. Some members work in the private sector; some are associated with prominent civic organizations; some are past or current elected officials; some work closely, and day-to-day, with the state's electoral machinery; some represent racial and ethnic interests; some are Democrats, others Republicans. What bound them throughout their deliberations was a commitment to an effective electoral democracy that fosters good public policy.

### *Why a Task Force Now?*

Why create the task force at the beginning of the year 2000? Twenty years ago, Illinois voters passed an historic constitutional amendment that dramatically changed the way representatives to the Illinois House of Representatives are elected. The amendment replaced cumulative voting with plurality voting and eliminated the only statewide cumulative voting scheme in the United States.

Considerable controversy surrounded the historic vote. Many supporters of cumulative voting argued that the final vote was not a reflection of the electorate's attitude toward cumulative voting but, rather, their desire to reduce the size of the Illinois House. It is

indeed true that much of the rhetoric in support of the so-called Cutback Amendment centered not on the merits of plurality voting but on the reduction of the House from 177 to 118 members. A highly unpopular pay raise that legislators had passed prior to the vote on the amendment fueled public support of the cutback.

In the past few years, especially, many legislators and political activists have advocated a return to cumulative voting. They point to the lack of minority party representation in many areas of the state, or to the lack of racial, ethnic, and gender representation. They also attribute the growing centralization of power in the four legislative leaders as an outcome of the electoral change. Others contend that the current plurality voting system is preferable. In their view, it is less confusing to the voters and has facilitated legislative policymaking. They observe that the legislature is considerably more efficient today than it was prior to the change in electoral systems. Advocates of the current system also believe that critics have unfairly and wrongly used it as a scapegoat by placing the blame for existing problems on it.

“Discussion about the efficacy of the state’s current electoral system appears to be peaking, with some individuals longing for times past and others supporting the status quo. Voices on both sides are louder than ever before.”

## *Two Compelling Reasons*

In short, circumstances unique to Illinois offer two compelling reasons to examine the state’s electoral system now. First is plurality voting’s 20th anniversary: two decades of experience with plurality voting provide a sufficient time frame within which to examine the effects of Illinois’ historic change in electoral systems. Second, discussion about the efficacy of the state’s current electoral system appears to be peaking, with some individuals longing for times past and others supporting the status quo. Voices on both sides are louder than ever before.

Moreover, the growing national and international interest in electoral change provides two opportunities that did not exist earlier. On the one hand, information about the workings and likely effects of various electoral systems is more widely available than ever before. Thus the task force could evaluate the pros and cons of a variety of systems that conceivably might be used to elect Illinois’ state legislators. On the other hand, the task force’s deliberations can contribute to the ongoing national and international discussion. The substantive focus is Illinois, but the potential audience is worldwide.

## MISSION STATEMENT

The Illinois Task Force on Political Representation and Alternative Electoral Systems set forth the following tasks as its mission:

1. Establish the context for discussing electoral systems in Illinois by reviewing the growing national and international interest in voting systems and the reasons for that growing interest.
2. Review the consequences of the change from cumulative to plurality voting in the election of members to the Illinois House of Representatives. The consequences to be analyzed include changes in:
  - competition for seats
  - drop-off in voting
  - the representation of regional and demographic groups
  - party cohesion in the state House
  - the internal deliberations and functioning of the General Assembly
  - cost of running the legislature
3. Review relevant features of electoral systems in other states.
4. Identify desired outcomes and appropriate criteria to use in evaluating the performance of any electoral system.
5. Identify a limited number of alternative electoral systems that appear to be appropriate for possible application in Illinois.
6. Evaluate each alternative electoral system in terms of the criteria and outcomes identified by the task force.
7. Hold an assembly for the purpose of making recommendations and encouraging public discussion of them.

## THE ILLINOIS ASSEMBLY ON POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND ALTERNATIVE ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

The most crucial step in the task force's deliberations was the holding of an assembly at the Union League Club of Chicago on October 3-4, 2000. The assembly brought together approximately 70 participants, including academics, concerned citizens, civic and business leaders, and past and present elected officials (see the list of Illinois Task Force members and Assembly participants on page 25). They were asked to review the work of the task force, to offer an assessment of Illinois' current electoral system, and, if they deemed it appropriate, to recommend changes in that system.

The assembly began with a debate between Patrick Quinn, former Illinois State Treasurer and founder of the Coalition for Political Honesty, and Dan Johnson-Weinberger, Executive Director of the Midwest Democracy Center. Quinn made the case for retaining the current electoral system and Johnson-Weinberger argued for a return to cumulative voting. Then, during the next one and one-half days, participants worked in small groups to identify the principal problems, if any, with Illinois' current electoral system and to consider possible changes in it as a means to address those problems.

## **Problems**

Participants in the Illinois Assembly on Political Representation and Alternative Electoral Systems expressed concern about the following problems:

### **Limited Choice and Lack of Electoral Competition**

- Many voters are offered no choice when voting in state legislative elections. In the just-completed 2000 election, 50 percent of all Illinois House races lacked any competition at all. In most of the remaining races, the challenger stood no realistic chance to win.
- The number of uncontested state legislative races has increased steadily over the last two decades. Uncontested races are far more common in both primary and general elections today than they were two decades ago.

**"In the just-completed 2000 election, 50 percent of all Illinois House races lacked any competition at all."**

### **Low Voting Turnout**

- Voting in Illinois state legislative elections is abysmally low. In the just-completed 2000 election, only 44 percent of the eligible electorate voted in Illinois House elections.
- Voting in Illinois state legislative elections has declined over the last two decades.
- Voting in state legislative elections is related to the availability of competition; voting is discernibly lower in districts that lack competition.

### **Exorbitant Campaign Costs**

- The cost of campaigning for state legislative office is exorbitant. For example, in several 2000 Illinois House races, the two candidates spent more than one million dollars in total during the general election. Although expenditures in other competitive races did not quite reach this level, they were, with few exceptions, substantial. That this high cost discourages challengers from running is indisputable.
- The cost of campaigning has skyrocketed in recent years. There is currently no indication that this trend will change.

### **Limited Representation of Non-Majority Interests**

- The representation of racial, ethnic, and gender groups has marginally improved in recent decades, yet their ability to win legislative seats under the existing electoral system remains limited.
- Because winner-take-all electoral systems produce a single representative from each district, members of the minority party are often left without representation. This reality has not gone unnoticed among Illinois citizens. In a recently completed survey, a majority indicated a preference for bipartisan—Democratic and Republican—representation within their districts.
- The lack of within-district bipartisan representation applies to regions as well as districts. Highly Republican regions of the state overwhelmingly elect Republicans and highly Democratic regions overwhelmingly elect Democrats. In Chicago, for example, almost all state legislators are Democrats, while in the five collar counties

almost all are Republicans. Although there are some notable exceptions to this generalization, many Chicago Republicans and collar-county Democrats find themselves without partisan representation. To put it another way, Republican votes in Chicago and Democratic votes in the collar counties are wasted.

### Concentrated Power and Lack of Deliberation in the Illinois Legislature

- In the Illinois General Assembly, a few legislative leaders wield excessive power, including the power to allocate campaign funds. As a result, many, if not most, legislators feel that their participation in the legislative process and their capacities to be responsive to their constituents have been dangerously diminished.
- The concentration of power in the hands of legislative leaders is precluding full deliberation of the major issues facing Illinois. Party leaders often decide the fate of important bills without allowing full floor debate or committee consideration.

**"Overall, the Assembly finds that cumulative voting would better serve a diverse state that has geopolitical regions in which one party dominates."**

### Goals

The assembly also identified five goals that an electoral system should meet. These goals are as follows.

**First**, an electoral system should maximize voter choice in the electoral process by encouraging candidate competition.

**Second**, it should provide opportunities for candidates from diverse backgrounds to run competitive campaigns without having to rely on large financial contributions.

**Third**, it should invigorate the voices of individual legislators in policymaking.

**Fourth**, it should encourage broad legislative deliberation on important issues and generate policies that reflect a broad public vision.

**Fifth**, it should foster decisiveness in the legislative process.

### RECOMMENDATION: A RETURN TO CUMULATIVE VOTING

With these concerns and goals as context, the Assembly evaluated several electoral systems (see *A Comparison of Selected Electoral Systems*, page 29, for specific details) with the objective of determining if one would be superior, overall, to the others in addressing the preceding concerns and goals. The Assembly focused principally, although not exclusively, on four electoral systems: winner-take-all, cumulative voting, instant-runoff voting, and party-list voting. As noted above, Illinois used cumulative voting to elect members to the Illinois House until 1982, when a voter-passed constitutional amendment replaced it with winner-take-all voting (see *Background*, page 15, for a brief history). The other two systems—instant-runoff and party-list voting—are common in Europe and other parts of the world. Participants also discussed the benefits and feasibility of a unicameral legislature, although they ultimately rejected that option.

At the close of their discussions, the participants in the Illinois Assembly on Political Representation and Alternative Electoral Systems reviewed the following statement. The statement represents general agreement; however, no one was asked to sign it. Further, it

## ASSEMBLY PROCLAMATION

The Illinois Assembly recognizes that changing an electoral system is itself not capable of fully addressing all of the assembly's goals and concerns. Other factors that contribute to the identified problems include (but are not limited to) the state's currently lax campaign finance laws, the reduction in partisan attachment among voters, and the effects of partisan- and incumbent-motivated redistricting. Nonetheless, a majority of the assembly finds that cumulative voting in multi-member districts would be preferable at this time to single-member districts for electing members to the Illinois House.

Compared to plurality voting, cumulative voting tends to:

- offer greater choice for voters in primary and general elections;
- provide prospective candidates easier access to the electoral system;
- provide greater representation for the minority political party in districts dominated by the other party;
- provide individual legislators greater independence from legislative leaders;
- generate richer deliberations and statewide consensus among all legislators since both parties would be represented in all parts of the state;
- be more readily adaptable to the existing electoral machinery than instant-run-off and party-list voting.

As with any electoral system, cumulative voting has deficiencies. Cumulative voting is somewhat more complex than single-member-district voting. Legislators from large, multi-member districts might be less accountable to their constituents as a whole than those elected by single-member districts. In the past, moreover, the two parties sometimes colluded in putting together a single slate of candidates. Finally, circumstances have changed. Candidates use TV campaign ads far more than they did 20 or 30 years ago. Candidates who ran 20 or 30 years ago spent a sliver of what candidates spend today. In short, even if one concedes that cumulative voting 'worked' decades ago, there is no guarantee that it will 'work' today. Overall, however, the assembly finds that cumulative voting would better serve a diverse state that has geopolitical regions in which one party dominates.

A change in electoral systems alone will not resolve the issues surrounding Illinois' political system. Campaign finance reform, for example, is a must. Nonetheless, a change in the current electoral system could be a significant first step in a process of reform that will help to overcome the problems the assembly identified and to achieve the goals it set forth.

should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to every part of the statement. (The League of Women Voters of Illinois noted that they are currently undertaking their own study and thus opted to abstain from expressing either support or opposition.)

# BACKGROUND

This section of the document summarizes the empirical analysis that the task force requested in the course of its deliberations. The concerns expressed in the preceding section derive in good part from the findings reported below.

## CUMULATIVE VOTING IN ILLINOIS STATE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS

When the Illinois Constitutional Convention convened in 1870, largely in response to governmental corruption, Delegate Joseph Medill made a strong plea for cumulative voting on the grounds that it would dampen polarization between northern and southern Illinois. At the time, Republicans dominated the northern part of the state (including Chicago) and Democrats the southern.

Medill, who was also editor-owner of the Chicago Tribune, held that cumulative voting would abate partisan animosity, lessen the power of party caucuses and leaders, and replace the “feudal theory of exclusive majority representation with the true ideas of representative government” (Rishel; Illinois Issues 1982).

Under cumulative voting, the number of legislators from a district can vary. Medill proposed three members per district, saying that two-member districts could provide too much minority representation and that more than three members might lead to the representation of more than two political parties.

The Convention supported Medill’s proposal, and voters approved cumulative voting in the same year. The system worked as intended. The second party in each section of the state was represented in greater numbers than before. The system also made it difficult for third parties to take root in the legislature. In 1906, for example, the Labor, Socialist, and Prohibition parties together received 15 percent of the votes cast for state representatives, yet they elected only three members (two percent).

Between 1870 and the Illinois Constitutional Convention of 1920, opposition to cumulative voting developed in some quarters because the majority party generally nominated two candidates and the minority party one, denying voters any choice in the three-member districts. Between 1916 and 1934, for example, 55 percent of the 510 House contests offered no or very little competition for voters (Illinois Issues 1982).

The final report of the 1920 Convention eliminated cumulative voting. Voters rejected the proposed new charter soundly, however, for a number of reasons that were more prominent than the cumulative voting issue.

In 1927, the Illinois Supreme Court added a new wrinkle to cumulative voting. The Court overrode the Illinois General Assembly’s wishes and ruled that three-vote cumulative voting had to be applied in the state’s new primary elections, even if a party made only two nominations. This wrinkle could not have been contemplated in 1870, of course, when representation of minority parties was the sole concern, and party caucuses rather than primaries were the accepted manner for making nominations.

“Opposition to cumulative voting developed in some quarters because the majority party generally nominated two candidates and the minority party one, denying voters any choice in the three-member districts.”

During the 1970 Constitutional Convention, an unlikely coalition of Chicago Democrats and Independents favored retaining cumulative voting in the proposed new charter. Republicans opposed this coalition, and argued that cumulative voting was confusing to voters, fostered intra-party conflict, and permitted inter-party collusion. Behind their position was the belief that single member districts would allow more Republicans to be elected to the House, as had been the case in the state Senate (Illinois Issues 1982). Proponents of cumulative voting argued that single-member districts would polarize the parties, with Chicago on the one side and its suburbs and downstate on the other (Rishel).

After much wrangling, the Convention voted to present the question of cumulative versus plurality voting to the electorate as a separate issue outside the proposed new constitution. Cumulative voting was retained, with 56 percent of those voting on the issue supporting it. Chicago support was especially heavy.

The 1970 Convention also made two significant changes to the Legislative Article of the Constitution, which the voters also adopted. To ensure competition in the general election, the first change prohibited political parties from limiting nominations for House seats to fewer than two for each district. As a result, from 1972 until cumulative voting was abolished a decade later, only four percent of House districts were formally uncontested in the general election. It must be added, however, that the principal minority-party legislator would sometimes arrange for only token effort by the second minority-party nominee.

The second change to the Legislative Article allowed voters to revise, via petition, the way they elect their representatives. In presenting the majority report of the Legislative Committee to the full convention, Delegate Louis Perona stated: "We feel it's unlikely that the legislature would propose an amendment to reduce the number of legislators or to change from cumulative voting ... to single-member districts."

Just three years later, in 1973-74, attorney Robert Bergstrom led an unsuccessful petition drive to seek voter elimination of cumulative voting. There appeared to be little public interest in the issue. A new petition drive was initiated in 1978, following a terribly bungled legislative pay raise fiasco that infuriated many citizens. In the closing days of the 1977-78 biennial legislative session, lawmakers adopted pay raises for a wide array of state officials, including a 40 percent increase for themselves (from \$20,000 to \$28,000). A salary study commission had held hearings to discuss the problems of inadequate compensation for state agency directors and other officials. Governor Thompson first favored the panel's recommended increases, but late in the November campaign for re-election, Thompson flew around the state to declare his opposition to pay increases of the size the panel ultimately adopted. Thus the legislative pay raise action at the end of November 1978 appeared to come in the dark of night, and citizens reacted strongly.

With this as the lightning rod, Bergstrom immediately initiated another drive to end cumulative voting. More important, Patrick Quinn and his Coalition for Political Honesty became the lead force in a drive that culminated in putting the dual issues of reducing the size of the House of Representatives and eliminating cumulative voting on the ballot in 1980. Opponents to the Quinn-led drive included former governors Richard Ogilvie and Sam Shapiro, major interest groups, and, of course, many legislators.

Efforts to thwart the drive included a change in state law that appeared both to invalidate many petition signatures collected before the change in law and to reject the State Board of Election's petition effort. In September of 1980, the Illinois Supreme Court overruled the elections unit and ordered the issue onto the November ballot.

The issue became known popularly as the 'Cutback Amendment,' which suggests that reduction in the size of the House was an easier and more compelling issue for the public to grasp than cumulative voting. For all the intensity of the forces favoring and opposing the issue, the election campaign on this issue was a modest affair. The Coalition for Political Honesty spent \$25,000 on radio ads. The opposition had an active speakers' bureau and flew in lawmakers from Massachusetts to argue before newspaper editorial boards that the cutback in that state had been a failure. But there were no huge expenditures like those often made, for example, in initiative efforts in California.

Only 44 percent of those going to the polls in 1980 voted on the 'Cutback Amendment,' but 69 percent of them approved it, and it went into effect with the 1982 election cycle.

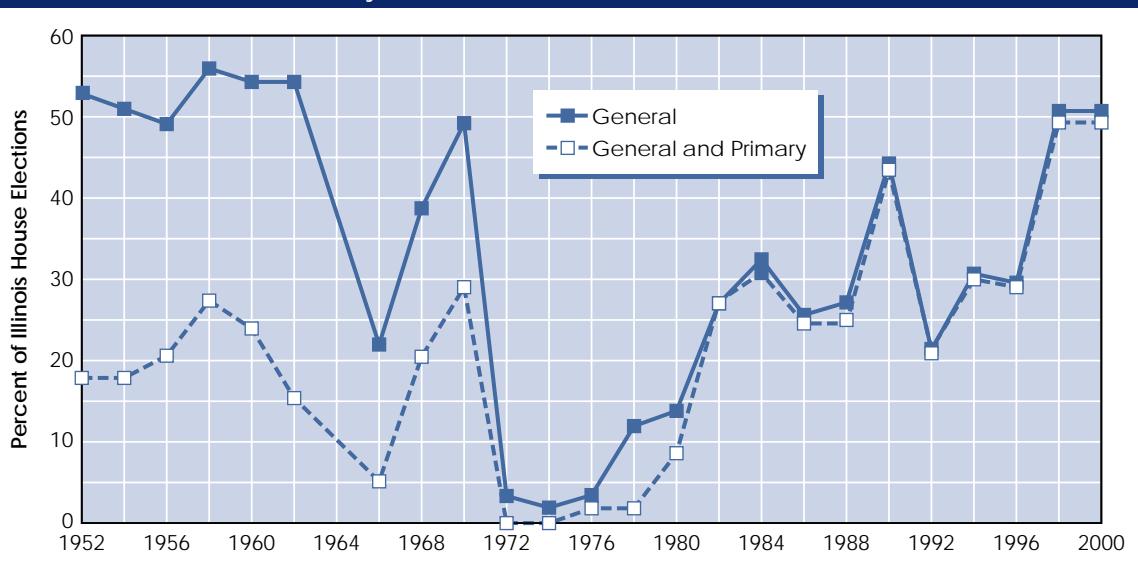
## LIMITED CHOICE AND THE LACK OF ELECTORAL COMPETITION

Lack of voter choice was one of the most compelling flaws in cumulative voting throughout most of the state's century-long experiment with the system. Half or more of the districts under cumulative voting in a typical general election offered only three candidates for three seats. Some observers countered that significant choice was offered instead at the primary elections, which were party elections, open to the voters of only one party. This was certainly true, as is illustrated here.

Figure 1 shows the percent of House districts that lacked choice in the general elections from 1952-2000. About half of the districts were uncontested from 1952-70. The two elections

"The issue became known popularly as the 'Cutback Amendment,' which suggests that reduction in the size of the House was an easier and more compelling issue for the public to grasp than cumulative voting."

**Figure 1. Percent of Illinois House Districts That Were Uncontested in the General Election and in Both the General and Primary Elections, 1952 to 2000.**



of 1966 and 1968 are anomalies in that they followed, in the first case, the at-large “bedsheet” ballot election of House members in 1964 and, in the other, the subsequent redistricting in 1966. Including the primary elections for the period 1952-70, however, reveals that the number of districts lacking any competition was only around 20 percent, on average.

With adoption of the Constitution of 1970 came the mandate that there be at least two nominations for the House by each political party. In fact, there was choice (with at least four candidates seeking three seats in the general election) in nearly all House districts from 1972-78 and for all but eight percent of the districts in 1980. Inclusion of the mandate

appears to have achieved its objective of increasing voter choice, if not actual competition.

**“During the past two decades of experience with single-member-districts, voter choice has declined from that under cumulative voting.”**

During the past two decades of experience with single-member-districts, voter choice has declined from that under cumulative voting. On average, over the 1982-2000 period, 35 percent of the districts lacked any choice in both primary and general elections. Even more disturbing is the trend line, with competition declining sharply throughout the 1980s and 1990s, to the point that a good three-fourths of all 2000 House elections

had either no or only token competition. In five of every ten districts, voters had no choice in either the primary or general election.

However, the decline in voter choice cannot necessarily be attributed solely to the change from cumulative to plurality voting. Figure 2 displays the percent of Illinois Senate districts that lacked voter choice in both primary and general elections in the 1952-1998 period. The comparison of House with Senate districts is revealing, for the latter have always been single-member districts. Until 1974, most Senate districts provided at least some choice of candidates. Since then, however, choice has declined to levels similar to those for House districts. During the time period of 1974-present, the Illinois legislature was becoming a career-oriented, often full-time body, and re-election campaigns were becoming

Figure 2. Percent of Illinois Senate Districts That Were Uncontested in the General Election and in Both the General and Primary Elections, 1952 to 2000.



ever more expensive. Possibly as a result, incumbent lawmakers might have created, during the 1981 and 1991 redistricting processes, an unusually high number of “safe districts” for incumbents of both parties, where challenges would have been seen as futile.

What these data don’t show, of course, is that the creation of single-member House districts provided legislators opportunities to carve out safe House districts that cumulative voting might have precluded or at least restrained. Plurality voting with single-member districts is unquestionably more susceptible than cumulative voting to gerrymandering by incumbent legislators. It is also true that incumbents can more effectively “work” the relatively smaller single-member districts. This is reflected in Figures 1 and 2, which show that competitiveness in House races under single-member districts increases in the wake of the first election after redistricting but then declines thereafter during the remainder of the decade. Incumbents can utilize the resources of the office as well as personal skill to gain positive name recognition. Once they do, they essentially eliminate potential competition.

One of the best ways to put the preceding figures into perspective is to compare them with equivalent figures for other states (see Table 1). In recent years, especially, Illinois’ state legislative elections have been discernibly less competitive than legislative elections in many other states. In fact, when Illinois’ 2000 totals are put into the table (1996 data are the most recently available for other states), the lack of competition is particularly worrisome.

## LACK OF CHOICE AND VOTING TURNOUT

Voting in the United States is notoriously low when compared to other countries throughout the world. Moreover, turnout has been declining. In the past few presidential elections, for example, a bare 50 percent of the eligible electorate turned out to vote. The closeness of the 2000 presidential election did nothing to reverse the trend.

Low turnout, then, is not a problem unique to Illinois. Perhaps more bothersome is the connection between choice and competition on the one hand and voting in state legislative elections on the other. Figure 3 shows that from 1982-2000, voting for candidates to the Illinois House is associated with the competitiveness of the district races. For example, in races where one candidate dominated and received between 76 and 90 percent of the vote, 27,229 persons, on average, cast votes. However, in districts with

Table 1. Uncontested Legislative<sup>1</sup> Elections by State, 1996<sup>2</sup>

State	Percent Uncontested
Michigan	0
Minnesota	6
California	7
Ohio	10
Maine	10
North Dakota	12
South Dakota	16
Washington	16
Nevada	17
Alaska	20
Oregon	20
Iowa	21
New York	22
Hawaii	25
Vermont	25
Connecticut	25
Oklahoma	26
Wisconsin	29
Pennsylvania	29
Colorado	30
New Hampshire	30
Kansas	31
Indiana	31
West Virginia	32
Montana	33
<b>Illinois (1996)</b>	<b>34</b>
North Carolina	34
Missouri	34
Idaho	37
Delaware	39
Kentucky	40
New Mexico	41
Utah	42
Arizona	48
Tennessee	48
Wyoming	48
Rhode Island	49
<b>Illinois (2000)</b>	<b>50</b>
Florida	51
<b>Illinois (1998)</b>	<b>51</b>
South Carolina	55
Georgia	56
Texas	60
Arkansas	68
Massachusetts	69
Alabama	*
Louisiana	*
Maryland	*
Mississippi	*
Nebraska	*
New Jersey	*
Virginia	*

1. Percents include combined data for elections of both upper and lower chambers in each state.

2. Illinois data for 1998 and 2000 elections are included where indicated.

\* No legislative elections were held in 1996.

Sources: Illinois percentages computed by Institute of Government and Public Affairs, University of Illinois, from data in *State of Illinois Official Vote*, Illinois State Board of Elections, reports for 1996, 1998, and 2000. Percentages for all other states from The Center for Voting and Democracy, “Contested Legislative Seats: State Ranking; 1996 Elections, State Legislatures,” *Electing the People’s House*, August 1998.

Figure 3. Average House Turnout for Illinois House Elections, 1982 to 2000, by Level of District Competition

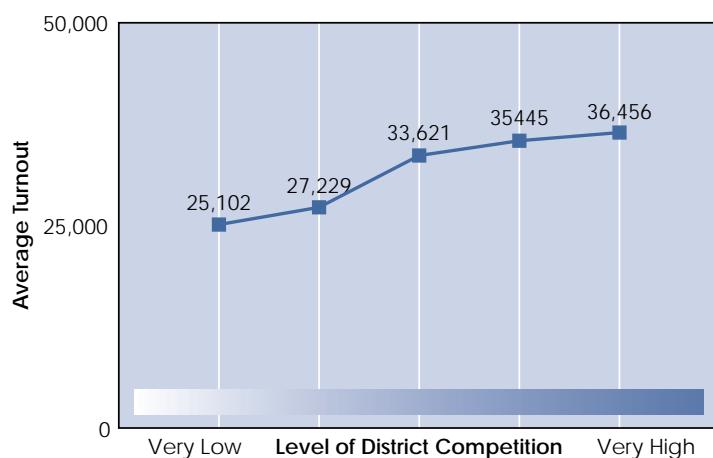


Figure 4. Average Drop-Off from Presidential Vote to House Vote, 1984, 1988, 1992, and 1996



close races (one candidate received 55 percent or less of the vote), 36,456 voters cast ballots. Because districts have nearly equal populations (and quite similar numbers of registered voters as well), this comparison is valid.

Closely related, as the competitiveness of Illinois House races decreases, voter “drop-off” from the top of the ticket (U.S. President) to the House races increases. Figure 4 shows that in races where one candidate received from 76-90 percent of the vote, 2,663 fewer voters, on average, cast votes for the House race than for the top-of-the-ticket contest. In contrast, drop-off was just 1,534 votes in the most competitive races (where no candidate received more than 55 percent of the vote).

These figures underline what is commonsensical, yet had not been analyzed earlier: real competition engages voter interest. What the figures do not show is the mutually-reinforcing and downward-spiraling effect: lack of competition reduces voting in House elections, which in turn reduces competition further, which in turn reduces voting further, etc.

## REPRESENTATION OF MINORITY PARTY INTERESTS

The objective of cumulative voting was to provide representation of the minority party in areas where it would not receive seats under single-member districts. Political scientists often analyze party representation in terms of the “seats-to-votes ratio.” This is based on the premise that the percent of legislative seats a party receives should be proportional to the percent of votes it garners. That is, if a party receives 42 percent of all the votes cast, it should receive 42 percent of the seats. A ratio of 1.0 signifies that a party received seats perfectly proportional to the percentage of the votes that citizens cast for it. The further the ratio is from one, the more one party is advantaged and the other disadvantaged.

Statewide, the ratio has generally been close to 1.0 most of the time. This masks substantial regional biases, however. Table 2 looks at the seats-to-votes ratios for Illinois House and Senate districts by reapportionment periods for the period, 1952-2000. Figures greater than 1.0 indicate that Republicans are advantaged, less than 1.0 that they are disadvantaged. Statewide, the seats-to-votes ratios are generally close to 1.0 throughout the

whole period , for both the House and Senate. Focusing on Cook County and the “collar counties” of DuPage, Kane,

**“Fewer votes were wasted under cumulative voting.”**

different story. Under cumulative voting during the 1952-1980 period, Republicans in Cook County as well as in the collar counties received seats fairly proportionate to the votes the electorate cast for them. This is not true in the 1982-2000 period, when the Democrats were advantaged in Cook County and the Republicans in the collar counties. Another way to interpret these findings is that Republican votes are wasted in Cook County while Democratic votes are wasted in the surrounding areas.

The Senate ratios must be read with great caution, since they often are based on only a few races (only one-third of the Senate is elected in an election year). Nonetheless, the figures show that Republicans were significantly under-represented in Cook County and over-represented in the collar counties throughout the whole period.

Practical politicians would credit some of the above to the leaders who drew the redistricting maps and their tactics of packing and diluting for maximum advantage. Nevertheless, it appears that it was more difficult under cumulative voting than under plurality voting to achieve partisan advantage in terms of the seats-to-votes ratio. Put another way, fewer votes were wasted under cumulative voting.

## RACIAL, ETHNIC, AND GENDER REPRESENTATION

During the debate surrounding the change from cumulative to plurality voting, proponents of the latter argued that it would increase racial, gender, and ethnic representation. This is a rather peculiar argument, since cumulative voting and proportional representation systems are generally viewed as being more favorable toward the representation of minority groups. In reality, neither cumulative nor plurality voting has produced Illinois state legislatures that mirror the racial, ethnic, and gender composition of the population.

The key question is whether racial, ethnic, and gender representation would be greater in the Illinois House today if cumulative voting were still in effect. Although it

Table 2. Seat-Votes Ratio\*, Illinois Legislature, 1952-2000

<i>Illinois House</i>		Cook County Districts SV Ratio	Collar County Districts SV Ratio	Other Districts SV Ratio
	Statewide SV Ratio			
1952	1.037	0.862	0.987	1.141
1954	1.039	0.906	0.982	1.094
1956	0.983	0.902	1.003	1.077
1958	1.076	0.939	1.071	1.097
1960	1.042	1.009	1.108	1.233
1962	1.009	0.975	1.078	1.034
1966	1.061	1.004	1.026	1.146
1968	1.044	1.057	1.006	1.055
1970	1.094	1.106	1.103	1.095
1972	1.000	0.918	1.110	1.090
1974	1.073	1.127	1.151	0.900
1976	1.000	1.000	1.120	0.990
1978	1.042	1.020	1.080	1.090
1980	1.020	1.020	1.040	1.100
<b>AVG</b>	<b>1.037</b>	<b>0.989</b>	<b>1.062</b>	<b>1.082</b>
1982	0.953	0.740	1.300	0.870
1984	0.878	0.630	1.060	0.990
1986	0.896	0.680	1.090	0.910
1988	0.915	0.700	1.180	0.950
1990	0.830	0.650	1.170	0.760
1992	0.977	0.800	1.340	0.820
1994	1.038	0.930	1.150	1.090
1996	1.021	0.780	1.260	1.070
1998	1.021	0.840	1.070	1.120
2000	0.992	0.876	1.130	1.029
<b>AVG</b>	<b>0.952</b>	<b>0.763</b>	<b>1.175</b>	<b>0.953</b>

<i>Illinois Senate</i>		Cook County Districts SV Ratio	Collar County Districts SV Ratio	Other Districts SV Ratio
	Statewide SV Ratio			
1952	1.573	0.687	1.509	1.668
1954	0.811	0.394	1.484	1.401
1956	1.422	1.235	1.515	1.510
1958	0.815	0.333	1.666	1.188
1960	1.402	1.094	1.700	1.475
1962	1.100	0.704	1.558	1.614
1966	1.214	0.996	1.448	1.400
1970	1.054	0.738	1.687	1.177
1972	1.020	0.804	1.556	1.050
1974	0.933	0.735	1.039	1.030
1976	0.955	0.760	1.390	1.180
1978	0.958	0.860	1.570	1.020
1980	0.942	0.760	1.240	1.240
1982	1.048	0.880	1.250	1.050
1984	1.000	1.000	0.940	1.050
1986	0.979	0.580	1.010	1.010
1988	0.940	0.880	1.000	0.940
1990	0.922	0.510	1.090	1.210
1992	1.227	1.040	1.370	1.290
1994	1.077	0.650	1.220	1.060
1996	1.178	1.160	1.200	1.180
1998	1.000	1.020	0.950	1.200
2000	1.073	1.279	1.180	0.862
<b>AVG</b>	<b>1.071</b>	<b>0.830</b>	<b>1.329</b>	<b>1.209</b>

1968 has been eliminated because there were only two Senate elections in 1968.

\*Ratio greater than 1.0 indicates a Republican advantage. Ratio less than 1.0 indicates a Democratic advantage. For the purpose of this analysis, districts were classified on the basis of where the majority of the district is located. For example, a district where the majority of the population is in Cook County, but part of the district is in one of the collar counties, was classified as a Cook County district.

**"**Nearly 70 percent of Illinois citizens expressed a preference for an electoral system in which two legislators—one Democrat and one Republican—are elected to office.**"**

is difficult to answer this counterfactual satisfactorily, there is reason to think it would.

By all accounts, group identity and consciousness have grown during the last two decades. Women, more than ever before, identify with women's issues, blacks and other ethnic groups with minority issues. This implies that bloc voting might be more prevalent than it was in earlier years if members of the various groups felt they could rally successfully around a candidate. Such a feeling of efficacy is far more likely under cumulative than plurality voting.

## VOTER ATTITUDES

In April 2000, the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois conducted a state survey on campaign finance reform. The survey asked three questions relevant to the Task Force's study. The first was:

"Have you ever voted under Illinois's old electoral system, known as cumulative voting, which allowed voters to cast three ballots?"

Some 61 percent said they had not, 24 percent said they had, and 15 percent could not remember. A large majority of Illinois citizens are unfamiliar with cumulative voting, despite its central place in the history of Illinois elections.

The two other questions were designed to identify people's attitudes toward representation without evoking formal terms such as plurality and cumulative voting. One asked:

"Imagine a legislative district in which two-thirds of the voters are Democrats and one-third are Republicans. Do you think such a district should be represented by a single Democratic legislator or by both a Democratic and Republican legislator?"

The other question simply reversed the percentages, so that two-thirds of the voters were Republicans and one-third Democrats.

In both cases, nearly 70 percent of the respondents expressed a preference for an electoral system in which two legislators—one Democrat and one Republican—are elected to office. Less than 20 percent preferred electing a single legislator. About five percent said it would make no difference. In short, when asked in rather abstract terms whether they would prefer something akin to plurality voting or something akin to cumulative voting, an overwhelming majority chooses the latter.

## PARTY VOTING AND DELIBERATION IN THE ILLINOIS LEGISLATURE

Some observers believe that a good seats-to-votes ratio in a state that is balanced politically tends to create a problem of razor-thin, unstable majorities. Further, diversity of representation within a party caucus (Chicagoans in the Republican caucus and suburbanites in Democratic Party confabs) tends to reduce party unity, or discipline, which some political scientists have long considered a virtue for policymaking.

The switch to single-member districts in the House, and the gerrymandering it fostered, has created larger party majorities and greater party unity. Figure 5 shows that party majorities were relatively small between 1952-1980, became much larger from 1980 until

Figure 5. Percent of Illinois House Seats Held by Democrats, 1952 to 2000

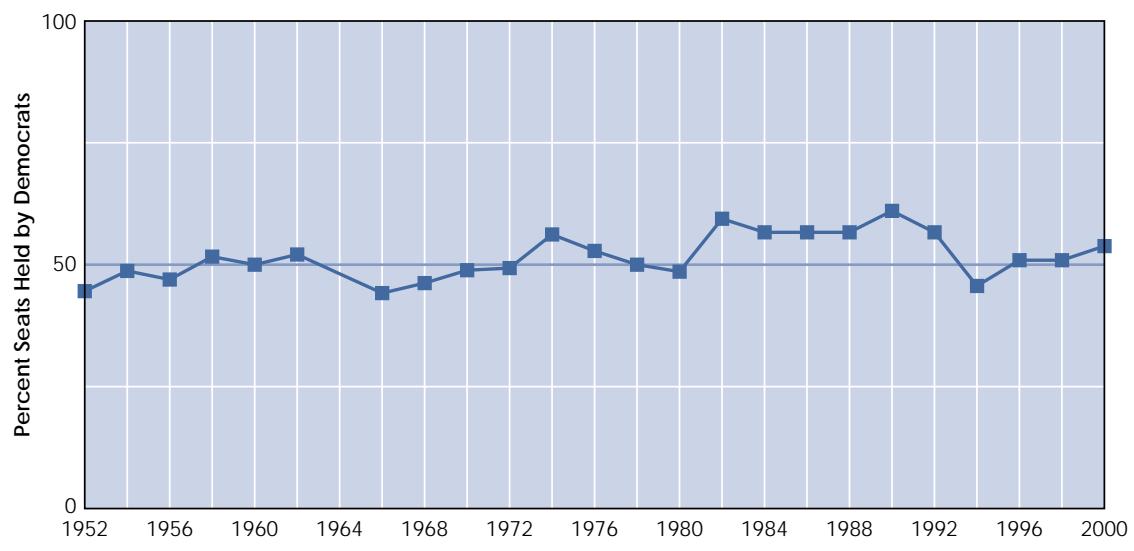
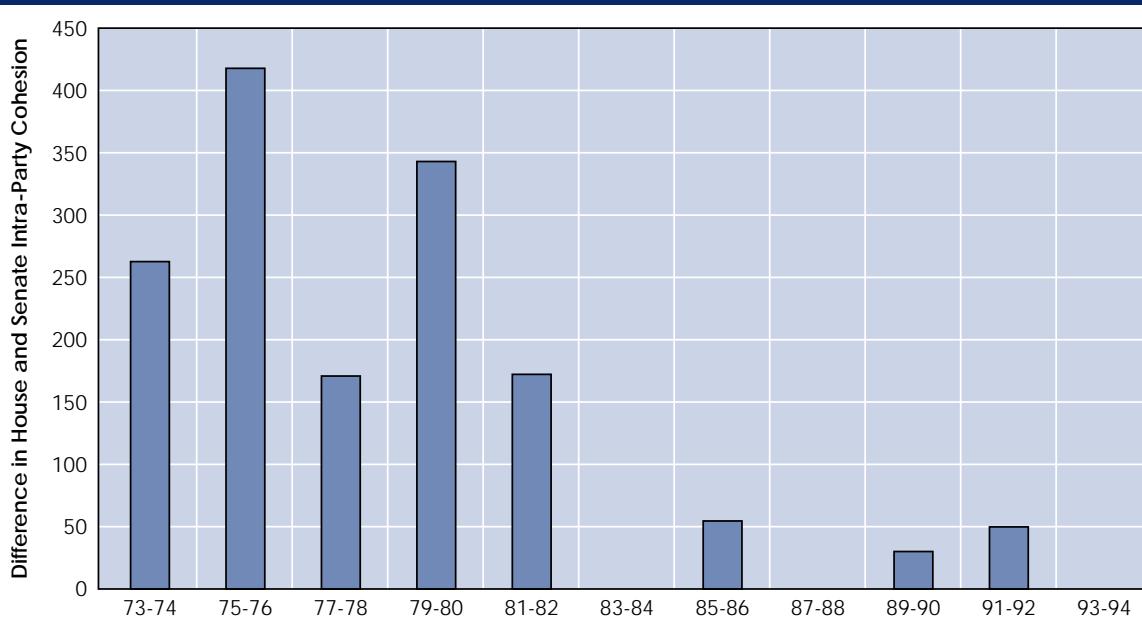


Figure 6. Difference in Illinois House and Senate Intra-Party Cohesion, 1973-1994



Source: Greg D. Adams, "Legislative Effects of single-Member Vs. Multi-Member Districts," *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 40 no. 1, February 1996.

about 1994, and since then have once again shrunk in size. Moreover, Figure 6, which is based on interest group ratings, shows that, during the decade prior to the shift to single-member districts, House members were more likely to vary in their roll-call votes within their respective parties than their Senate colleagues were. After the change to single-member districts in the House, the within-party cohesion looks very similar across chambers. In short, there was much greater philosophical diversity of party membership in

---

**"**Deliberation of major issues is considerably more limited, in two senses, than it was under cumulative voting. First, the time given to any particular issue is less today, on average, than it was 30 years ago and, second, deliberation is limited largely to the four legislative leaders of the state legislature.**"**

---

the cumulative voting period than there has been under plurality voting.

These two trends—larger party majorities (until very recently) and greater party cohesion—have had an effect on state legislative policymaking. In 1989, under single-member districts, House Speaker Michael Madigan (D-Chicago) was able to introduce and pass an income tax proposal out of the House in one day. In 1995, Speaker Lee Daniels (R-DuPage County) pushed through the House a series of dramatic tort liability changes, reform of the Chicago school system, reorganization of the system of higher education, major changes in the Cook County property tax assessment system, and other controversial legislation. These kinds of actions, and certainly the swiftness of these actions, would have been highly unlikely under cumulative voting.

On the other hand, such rapid action has come at a cost.

Deliberation of major issues is considerably more limited, in two senses, than it was under cumulative voting. First, the time given to any particular issue is less today, on average, than it was 30 years ago and, second, deliberation is limited largely to the four leaders of the state legislature.

## PRINCIPAL SOURCES

Douglas Amy. "Behind the Ballot Box: A Citizen's Guide to Voting Systems." Manuscript, 2000.

George S. Blair. *Cumulative Voting, An Effective Electoral Device in Illinois Politics*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1960.

David H. Everson and Joan A. Parker. "Legislative Elections: Reviving an Old Partnership." *Illinois Issues*, March 1983.

David H. Everson. "The Cutback at 10: Illinois House without Cumulative Voting and 59 Members." *Illinois Issues*, July 1991.

David H. Fremon. "Where Are They Now?" *Illinois Issues*, Dec. 1986.

Barbara Hipsman and Bob Springer. "First Fruits of Cutback: Homogenization." *Illinois Issues*, June 1983.

"Special Report: The Cutback Amendment." *Illinois Issues*, 1982.

George Fox Rishel. "Illinois' Experience with Cumulative Voting." *Journal of Election Administration*, Volume 18, 1997.

Robert B. Schaller. "The 'Cutback Amendment' and Diversity in the House." *Illinois Issues*, Nov. 1980.

Charles N. Wheeler. "Two Myths Bite the Dust." *Illinois Issues*, May 1984.

# PARTICIPANTS, ILLINOIS ASSEMBLY ON POLITICAL REPRESENTATION & ALTERNATIVE ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

## **Mary-Lou Aagaard**

Election Laws Specialist,  
Co-Chair, League of Women Voters, Illinois  
Alternative Elections Study  
League of Women Voters of Illinois  
Glenview, Illinois

## **Tobias G. Barry\***

Consultant, Aplington Kaufman McClintock  
Steele & Barry  
Representative, Illinois General Assembly,  
1961-1974  
Justice, Illinois Third District Appellate  
Court, 1974-1994  
La Salle, Illinois

## **Suzanne Bassi**

Representative, Illinois General Assembly,  
1999-2001  
Palatine, Illinois

## **David Bennett**

Executive Director  
Illinois Press Association  
Springfield, Illinois

## **Woods Bowman**

Professor, DePaul University  
Representative, Illinois General Assembly,  
1977-1991  
Chicago, Illinois

## **Cindi Canary\***

Project Director  
Illinois Campaign for Political Reform  
Chicago, Illinois

## **Bruce Clark\***

County Clerk  
Kankakee County  
Kankakee, Illinois

## **Rich Clemons**

Government Affairs Director  
Illinois Farm Bureau  
Bloomington, Illinois

## **Alice Cottingham**

Executive Director  
Fund for Immigrants and Refugees  
Chicago, Illinois

## **Daphne Duame**

Vice President, League of Women Voters,  
Chicago  
Chicago, Illinois

## **Jim Edgar, Task Force Co-chair\***

Distinguished Fellow  
Representative, Illinois General Assembly,  
1977-1981  
Secretary of State, State of Illinois, 1981-1991  
Governor, State of Illinois, 1991-1999  
Urbana, Illinois

## **Judy Erwin\***

Representative, Illinois General Assembly,  
1991-2001  
Chicago, Illinois

## **Jan Flapan\***

President  
League of Women Voters of Illinois  
Chicago, Illinois

## **Barbara Flynn Currie**

Representative, Illinois General Assembly,  
1979-2001  
Chicago, Illinois

## **John Foreman\***

Editor and General Manager  
The News-Gazette  
Champaign, Illinois

\* Member of the Illinois Task Force on Political Representation and Alternative Electoral Systems. Task Force members Jacky Grimshaw, John Jackson, Patricia Lindner, and Maria Valdez were unable to attend the Assembly.

\*\* Academic Advisory Committee and Support Staff

<b>Roberta Friedman</b> Co-Chair of League of Women Voters, Illinois Alternative Elections Study, Former Member League of Women Voters, Illinois Board of Directors Wilmette, Illinois	<b>Nancy Kaszak</b> Executive Director, Corlands Representative, Illinois General Assembly, 1993-1997 Chicago, Illinois
<b>Randy Fritz</b> President, Citizens' Utility Board of Illinois Williamsfield, Illinois	<b>Harold Katz</b> Managing Partner, Katz Friedman Eagle Eisenstein & Johnson Representative, Illinois General Assembly, 1965-1983 Chicago, Illinois
<b>Samuel K. Gove,**</b> Director Emeritus, Institute of Government and Public Affairs Urbana, Illinois	<b>Norton Kay</b> Public Affairs Consultant, The Haymarket Group Chicago, Illinois
<b>Larry Hansen**</b> Vice President, Joyce Foundation Chicago, Illinois	<b>James F. Keane</b> Consultant, Keane & Associates Representative, Illinois General Assembly, 1979-1993 Chicago, Illinois
<b>Ross Harano</b> Chairman, Asian-Pacific American Democratic Council of Illinois Chicago, Illinois	<b>Priscilla Kersten</b> President, League of Women Voters of Chicago Chicago, Illinois
<b>Linda Harlan</b> Program Director, Chicago Foundation for Women Chicago, Illinois	<b>Jack H. Knott**</b> Director, Institute of Government and Public Affairs Chicago, Illinois
<b>William C. Harris</b> Commissioner of Banks and Trust Companies, State of Illinois, 1977-1990 Representative, Illinois General Assembly, 1955-1961 Senator, Illinois General Assembly, 1961- 1977 Pontiac, Illinois	<b>Scott Koeneman**</b> Communications Manager Institute of Government and Public Affairs Urbana, Illinois
<b>Susan R. Hartter**</b> Assistant Director Institute of Government and Public Affairs Champaign, Illinois	<b>James H. Kuklinski**</b> Professor, Political Science and Institute of Government and Public Affairs Urbana, Illinois
<b>John S. Jackson*</b> Chancellor, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Illinois	<b>Jeff Ladd</b> Senior Partner, Bell Boyd & Lloyd Chicago, Illinois
<b>Dan Johnson-Weinberger</b> Executive Director, Midwest Democracy Center Chicago, Illinois	<b>John J. Lanigan</b> John J. Lanigan & Associates Senator, Illinois General Assembly, 1965-1971 Hometown, Illinois

**Tuyet Le**  
Director, Asian American Institute  
Chicago, Illinois

**Sharon Legenza**  
Staff Attorney, Fair Housing Project  
Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil  
Rights Under Law  
Chicago, Illinois

**Patricia Lindner\***  
Representative, Illinois General Assembly,  
1993-2001  
Sugar Grove, Illinois

**Richard Lockhart**  
President, Social Engineering Associates  
Chicago, Illinois

**Ann Lousin**  
Professor, John Marshall Law School  
Chicago, Illinois

**Sheila Luecht**  
Director of Communications, AAUW-Illinois  
Crystal Lake, Illinois

**John W. Maitland**  
Senator, Illinois General Assembly, 1979-  
2001  
Bloomington, Illinois

**Vasyl Markus**  
Vice President of Public Impact, Planned  
Parenthood  
Chicago, Illinois

**Robert Marx**  
Rabbi, Congregation Hakafa  
Glencoe, Illinois

**Michael McCormick\*\***  
Special Assistant, Institute of Government  
and Public Affairs  
Urbana, Illinois

**Kenneth McMillan**  
Assistant Professor of Political Economy and  
Commerce, Monmouth College  
Senator, Illinois General Assembly, 1977-  
1983  
Monmouth, Illinois

**Ronald Michaelson\***  
Executive Director, Illinois State Board of  
Elections  
Springfield, Illinois

**Abner Mikva**, Task Force Co-chair\*  
Visiting Professor, University of Chicago  
Law School  
Representative, Illinois General Assembly,  
1957-1967  
Representative, U.S. Congress, 1967-1978  
Judge, District of Columbia Circuit, U.S.  
Court of Appeals, 1979-1990  
Chief Judge, District of Columbia Circuit,  
U.S. Court of Appeals, 1979-1990  
Chicago, Illinois

**Calvin Morris**  
Executive Director, Community Renewal  
Society  
Chicago, Illinois

**Dawn Clark Netsch\***  
Professor of Law Emerita  
Northwestern University School of Law  
Senator, Illinois General Assembly, 1973-  
1991  
Comptroller, State of Illinois, 1991-1995  
Chicago, Illinois

**Diana Nelson\***  
Director of Public Affairs  
Union League Club of Chicago  
Representative, Illinois General Assembly,  
1981-1985  
Chicago, Illinois

**James D. Nowlan\*\***  
Senior Fellow, Institute of Government and  
Public Affairs  
Representative, Illinois General Assembly,  
1969-1973  
Toulon, Illinois

---

\* Member of the Illinois Task Force on Political Representation and Alternative Electoral Systems. Task Force members Jacky Grimshaw, John Jackson, Patricia Lindner, and Maria Valdez were unable to attend the Assembly.

\*\* Academic Advisory Committee and Support Staff

<b>David Orr</b> County Clerk, Cook County Chicago, Illinois	<b>Len Small</b> President, Small Newspapers Kankakee, Illinois
<b>Alice Palmer</b> Research Associate Professor, Urban Planning & Public Affairs University of Illinois at Chicago Senator, Illinois General Assembly, 1991-1997 Chicago, Illinois	<b>Earl Struck*</b> President/CEO, Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives Springfield, Illinois
<b>Joan Parker</b> Manager, KPMG Chicago, Illinois	<b>Joe Tecson</b> Partner, Chuhak and Tecson Riverside, Illinois
<b>Diane Pinderhughes</b> Professor, Political Science University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Urbana, Illinois	<b>Art Turner</b> Representative, Illinois General Assembly, 1981-2001 Chicago, Illinois
<b>Geoff Poor</b> Citizen Champaign, Illinois	<b>David Vaught</b> Financial Advisor, Mitchell, Vaught & Walker Inc. Naperville, Illinois
<b>Ann Poor</b> Citizen Champaign, Illinois	<b>Joseph Vosicky Jr.*</b> Partner, Law Offices of Joseph F. Vosicky Jr. Wheaton, Illinois
<b>Patrick Quinn</b> Attorney, Law Offices of Patrick Quinn Treasurer, State of Illinois, 1991-1995 Chicago, Illinois	<b>Richard A. Walsh</b> River Forest Republican Committeeman Representative, Illinois General Assembly, 1963-1975 Senator, Illinois General Assembly, 1977-1983 River Forest, Illinois
<b>David Ransburg*</b> Chairman and CEO, L. R. Nelson Corporation Peoria, Illinois	<b>Cynthia Wilson</b> IGPA Fellow University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Urbana, Illinois
<b>Dennis A. Rendleman</b> General Counsel, Illinois State Bar Association Springfield, Illinois	<b>Randall Witter</b> President, Cook-Witter Inc. Springfield, Illinois
<b>Deborah Rugg</b> Citizen Urbana, Illinois	<b>Paula Wolff*</b> Senior Executive, Chicago Metropolis 2020 Chicago, Illinois

\* Member of the Illinois Task Force on Political Representation and Alternative Electoral Systems. Task Force members Jacky Grimshaw, John Jackson, Patricia Lindner, and Maria Valdez were unable to attend the Assembly.

\*\* Academic Advisory Committee and Support Staff

# APPENDIX. A COMPARISON OF SELECTED ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

T

he principal purpose of this section is to propose and evaluate four electoral systems, including the current plurality system, that conceivably could be used to elect members to the Illinois House of Representatives.

The discussion is divided into three parts:

- (1) an enumeration of nine criteria to evaluate electoral systems;
- (2) a summary of the four electoral systems; and
- (3) an evaluation of the systems using the nine criteria.

## PROPOSED CRITERIA FOR JUDGING AN ELECTORAL SYSTEM

We all have an idea or two about what makes for a good electoral system. A Republican might prefer majority voting, for example, because he or she knows that most people in the state are Republicans. Or independents might favor proportional representation because it helps minor parties win legislative seats. A truly systematic evaluation, however, requires an explicit, inclusive, and exhaustive list of general criteria that can be applied to any electoral system of interest.

Scholars and practitioners have spent considerable time setting forth such criteria. Building on past efforts, the task force concluded that the following nine criteria should be used to evaluate an electoral system:

1. Does it encourage citizen participation in the electoral process?
2. Does it encourage competition and offer citizens a real choice in the selection of legislative representatives?
3. Does it simplify the voting task and enhance voter understanding of that task?
4. Does it ensure that the partisan division of elected legislators closely resembles the overall pattern of partisan votes in the electorate?
5. Does it provide fair regional representation in the legislature?
6. Does it provide significant racial, ethnic, and gender representation in the legislature?
7. Does it enhance the accountability of legislators to their constituents?
8. Does it foster decisiveness in the legislative process?
9. Does it encourage cooperation and the effective participation of all legislators?

We take the first three criteria—encourages citizen participation, offers citizens a real choice, and simplifies the voting task—to be uncontested. Any electoral system that fails to meet these three criteria does not serve its citizens well. Debate is more likely to center on the remaining criteria. This is not because any particular criterion is undesirable—most students of electoral systems endorse them all—but because meeting one criterion often conflicts with meeting another. For example, ensuring that the partisan division of elected legislators closely resembles the partisan vote (criterion 4) is not likely to be compatible with ensuring significant racial, ethnic, and gender representation in the legislature (criterion 6). An electoral system designed to maximize the representation of women,

Hispanics, and African-Americans almost never will produce a legislature that accurately represents the partisan split in the vote. Similarly, encouraging decisiveness in the legislative process (criterion 8) likely will conflict with encouraging the effective participation of all legislators (criterion 9).

Most political disagreements about the choice of electoral systems are over one or both of two issues. We just discussed the first: which of the conflicting criteria are more important. The second—how well a particular system meets the criteria—will become evident when we try to apply the nine criteria to several systems. We will do that shortly. First, however, we need to identify the systems and then briefly discuss them.

## FOUR ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

### *Single-Member District Plurality Voting*

Single-member district plurality voting (SMD) is the system most commonly used for legislative elections in the United States. Also known as “first-past-the-post,” SMD is the system currently used to elect state legislators to the Illinois House and Senate. All of the candidates appear on the ballot—the list typically is winnowed to two, one from each of the two dominant parties, via primary elections—and each voter votes for one of them. The winner is the candidate with the most votes, whether or not that candidate’s votes are a majority of the total.

Two of the most often cited advantages of this system are its simplicity and its low administrative costs. It is also seen as a system that promotes close ties between legislator and constituency, in that the districts are relatively small and constituents know whom to contact in time of need. It promotes a two-party system because third-party candidates rarely win. Critics are quick to note that SMD wastes all the votes cast for the losing candidate(s) and denies representation to third parties. It also encourages gerrymandering, which in turn leads to a decline in competitive districts, often to the extent that there is only a single candidate from which to choose.

### *Instant Run-Off Voting*

A variation of plurality voting is instant run-off voting (IRV). Just as in plurality voting, all candidates are listed on the ballot. But instead of voting for only one candidate, voters rank the candidates in order of their preference (“1” for first choice, “2” for second, etc.). The counting is also different from plurality voting. A computer scans and tabulates the ballots. First, all the number one preferences of the voters are counted. If a candidate receives over 50 percent of the first choice votes, he or she is declared elected. If no candidate receives a majority of the first-place votes, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated. The ballots of supporters of this candidate are then transferred to whichever of the remaining candidates was marked as the number-two choice. The vote is then recounted to see if any one candidate now receives a majority. This process continues until one candidate receives a majority of the vote, which consists of his or her first-place votes plus the needed number of continuing votes.

Advocates of IRV believe that it has two notable advantages over first-past-the-post voting. First, the winning candidate will have the meaningful support of a majority of the voters, which increases his or her legitimacy. Second, IRV ensures that an independent or a third-party candidate will not play spoiler and throw the election to the one of the two

major-party candidates who in fact was not the electorate's overall first choice. On the other hand, IRV is more administratively complex. Closely related, summing the continuing votes to identify a winning candidate can lead to perverse outcomes when many voters do not identify second and third choices.

## **Cumulative Voting**

Cumulative voting (CV) was used to elect members to the Illinois House until 1982. In the United States, CV is the most talked about form of semi-proportional representation. It currently is not used in any country outside the United States; and within the United States, it is used at the local level.

The cumulative voting system retains the plurality, first-past-the-post part of SMD. Candidates run in multi-member districts. Voters have as many votes as there are seats. Voters cast their votes for individual candidates and the winners are the ones with the most votes. The major difference from SMD systems is that voters can "cumulate" or combine their votes, instead of just having to cast one vote for one candidate. In other words, voters can distribute their votes among candidates in any way they prefer.

Proponents of CV see it as an especially effective way to ensure minority party representation. Many also believe that it can increase the chances for racial and ethnic minorities to win representation and thus see it as the best alternative to race- and ethnic-conscious districting. Cumulative voting also discourages gerrymandering, or at least makes it more difficult. On the other hand, a large number of candidates, especially in the primary election, can overwhelm citizens' ability to make rational choices. Critics of cumulative voting as it existed in Illinois argue that party control over candidate selection was much greater than met the eye. They also contend that the actual act of voting was too complicated for many voters.

## **Party-List Voting**

Party-list Voting (PLV) is a form of proportional voting, which is the main rival to plurality-majority voting. Among advanced Western democracies, proportional representation (PR) has become the predominant system. In Western Europe, for example, 21 of the 28 countries use PR. These include Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. PR operates on a simple principle: the number of seats a political party or group wins should be in proportion to the legislature support it garnered among voters. So, if a political party (or group) wins 30 percent of the vote, it should receive 30 percent of the seats.

Under PLV systems, legislators are elected in large, multi-member districts. Each party puts up a list or slate of candidates equal to the number of seats in the district. Independent candidates can also run, and they are listed separately on the ballot as if they were their own party. On the ballot, voters indicate their preference for a particular party and the parties then receive seats in proportion to their share of the vote. So, in a five-member district, if the Democrats win 40 percent of the vote, they would win two of five seats. The two winning Democratic candidates would be chosen according to their position on the list. There are two broad types of list systems: closed list and open list. In a closed list system, the party fixes the order in which candidates are listed and elected, and the voter simply casts a vote for the party as a whole. That is, winning candidates are selected in the exact

order that the parties put them on the list. Most European democracies now use the open list form of party voting. This approach allows voters to express a preference for particular candidates, not just parties. It is designed to give voters some say over the order of the list and thus which candidates get elected. Voters are presented with unordered or random lists of candidates chosen in party primaries. Voters cannot vote for a party directly, but must cast a vote for an individual candidate. This vote counts for the specific candidate as well as for the party. So the order of the final list used to choose legislators completely depends on the number of votes won by each candidate on the list. For example, if the Democrats win two of five seats, and Joe and Mary receive the most Democratic votes, Joe and Mary are elected.

PLV and proportional representation (PR) systems more generally tend to be friendlier than other systems to minority parties. They also waste fewer votes and afford better representation of racial, ethnic, and gender minorities. The districts tend to be more competitive, and representation of diverse interests in the legislature is relatively good. PR systems also reduce gerrymandering and encourage greater discussion of issues in campaigns. On the other hand, PR systems can foster unstable legislative coalitions and legislative gridlock. Some critics feel that, in a multi-party system (which PR encourages), small parties have too much power and get too many concessions. If the multi-member districts become too large, it weakens constituency-legislator relationships. Closed lists encourage parties to select diverse candidates, while open lists give more power to voters. Open lists also can become highly complicated and can intensify intra-party rivalries, since candidates often end up campaigning against other candidates of the same party.

### *A Hypothetical Example*

To see how different electoral systems can lead to different outcomes, consider two types of district. In the first, the district is split 70-30 between X and Y, where X and Y can stand for Democrat and Republican, white and non-white, men and women, etc. Under both plurality and instant run-off voting, the X candidate wins. Under cumulative and party list voting, there will be more winning X than winning Y candidates, but both types will be elected to the legislature. The difference in the cumulative and party listing voting outcomes will depend on the extent to which the candidates included in the party list differ from those who would run on their own.

Next consider a very different district: one that is split 34, 33, and 33 percent among three interests. Designate these interests, respectively, as X, Y, and Z. Under plurality voting, the X candidate wins. Under instant run-off, in contrast, any of the three candidates can win, depending on how voters' second preferences are configured across the three candidates. Whereas the plurality and instant run-off voting systems led to similar outcomes in the first example, they do not here. Under cumulative and party list voting, at least one candidate X will be elected to office. How the other two seats will be allocated (assuming there are three in total) under cumulative voting is not clear. Under party list voting, it is almost certain that one X, one Y, and one Z candidate will be elected to office.

Not everyone will agree on the most desirable system. No one can deny, however, that the choice of an electoral system has considerable consequences for the way that citizens' votes are translated into legislative seats.

## AN EVALUATION OF THE FOUR ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

We have delineated nine criteria and briefly summarized four electoral systems. How, then, do the four systems stand up vis-a-vis the criteria? To answer this question, we have done the following. For each criterion, we have placed the four systems along a 10-point scale, ranging from very poor to very good. Thus, on any given criterion, one can quickly compare the performance of the four systems.

Two notes of caution are in order. First, not everyone will agree with our conclusions. Indeed, our principal purpose is to encourage discussion of the systems vis-à-vis the criteria, not to impose our own conclusions. Second, any evaluation requires simplifying what is in reality a very complex political phenomenon. The consequences of different electoral systems depend on a host of factors: how the population is distributed, who controls the financing of campaigns (which itself can depend on the type of electoral system that is being used), and what factors citizens consider most important (party versus racial and ethnic identification, for example).

With these caveats duly noted, our evaluations appear in the box on the next page. Following is a brief discussion of our rationale for the alignment of systems on each of the nine criteria.

### ***Criteria 1 and 2: Encourages Citizen Participation and Offers Citizens a Real Choice***

Plurality and instant-run-off voting fare poorly on these two criteria because both systems encourage gerrymandering, which in turn reduces competition and thus voting turnout. In contrast, cumulative and party-list-voting systems typically afford citizens meaningful choices and thus do better at encouraging citizens to vote.

### ***Criterion 3: Simplifies the Voting Task***

Plurality voting systems excel in meeting this criterion. Typically, at least in general elections, voters are asked to choose between two candidates who run on the two major-party labels. All three of the other systems, in contrast, require the voter to make more complicated choices. Sometimes the task before the voter can be formidable and lead to confusion.

### ***Criterion 4: Ensures Accurate Translation of Partisan Votes into Legislative Seats***

Plurality voting does relatively poorly on this criterion because all of the votes in a district that go to other than the winning candidate are wasted. Instant run-off voting performs better because voters' second and third preferences are taken into account if no candidate receives a majority of the votes on the first ballot. Cumulative and party list voting are designed to provide a fairly accurate translation of the partisan vote shares into shares of the legislative seats.

---

### *Criterion 5: Provides Fair Regional Representation in the Legislature*

Illinois historically has divided into three political regions: Cook County, the surrounding collar counties, and downstate. None of the systems would be extremely poor at representing all three regions. However, cumulative and party-list voting do better at ensuring that all regions receive majority and minority party representation in the legislature. Both also do better at ensuring the representation of various groups across all three regions.

### *Criterion 6: Provides Significant Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Representation.*

Any form of proportional or semi-proportional representation (party-list and cumulative voting, respectively) potentially will achieve this goal more fully than plurality and majority systems will. Indeed, the goal of group representation is usually the rallying cry for implementation of the former systems.

### *Criterion 7: Enhances Accountability of Legislators to Constituents*

Plurality voting fares poorly on this criterion because it affords parties the opportunity to carve out legislative districts in a way that reduces if not eliminates competition. Cumulative and party-list voting strengthen the accountability of representatives to certain parts of the constituency.

### *Criterion 8: Fosters Decisiveness in the Legislative Process*

Relative to plurality voting, cumulative and party-list voting weaken decisive legislative decision-making. Under the most extreme of circumstances, when party list voting leads to a fragmented party system, minor party legislators can stall and sometimes stop legislative policymaking.

### *Criterion 9: Encourages Effective Participation of All Legislators*

Cumulative voting is an especially effective vehicle by which to ensure that all legislators effectively participate in the policy process. At the other extreme, plurality voting and single-member districts increase the opportunities for leaders to gain power over the rank-and-file.

## Evaluation of Four Electoral Systems

SMD, Single-Member District Plurality Voting  
 CV, Cumulative Voting

IRV, Instant Run-Off Voting  
 PLV, Party-List Voting

CRITERION	RANKING								
	1 VERY POOR	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 VERY GOOD
Encourages Citizen Participation	SMD		IRV			CV	PLV		
Offers Citizens a Real Choice	SMD		IRV			CV	PLV		
Simplifies the Voting Task	CV	PLV	IRV					SMD	
Ensures Accurate Translation of Partisan Votes into Legislative Seats	SMD		IRV			CV	PLV		
Provides Fair Regional Representation in Legislature			SMD	IRV		CV	PLV		
Provides Significant Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Representation	SMD	IRV				CV	PLV		
Enhances Accountability of Legislators to Constituents	SMD		IRV			CV	PLV		
Fosters Decisiveness in Legislative Process	PLV	CV			IRV	SMD			
Encourages Effective Participation of All Legislators	SMD		IRV		PLV		CV		



