

*Government  
Of, By and  
For the People*

a slide show presentation by  
*the Center for Voting and Democracy*

print version,  
plus other articles and information  
about proportional representation voting systems

(Actually, just the slide show. Sorry.)

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The Center for Voting and Democracy is a 501(c)(3) federal nonprofit organization that researches and disseminates information on voting systems that promote higher voter participation, fair representation and campaign finance reform. Founded in 1992 and funded primarily by individuals and small private grants, the Center is a resource for a growing number of organizations, voting rights attorneys, journalists, political scientists and political reformers that draw on the Center's resources and expertise.

Activities have included: three national conferences; several widely-distributed *Voting and Democracy Reports*; a state by state statistical analysis of the 1994 Congressional elections called *Dubious Democracy*; significant national and local media coverage; a national clearinghouse on voting system reform; serving as counsel to judges, plaintiffs and defendants in some of the most significant voting rights cases of our times, including *Shaw v. Reno* in North Carolina, *Miller v. Johnson* in Georgia, and other cases in Texas, Maryland, Louisiana and elsewhere; a special community education project involving the New York City Community School Board elections; assistance to Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney (D-Ga.) who introduced legislation on proportional systems for Congress; educational assistance to the government-created Elections Task Force of San Francisco; assistance to citizen groups in Seattle, Tacoma, Eugene OR, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, Santa Cruz, Santa Monica, Albany, Oakland, Berkeley, the states of Massachusetts, Illinois, Colorado, New Mexico, Florida and elsewhere, who are seeking voting system reform; and participation in a wide range of conferences, panels and charter commission deliberations.

The Center is governed by a broadly representative, fourteen-member Board of Directors which includes: former Member of Congress John Anderson (president); *New Yorker* magazine executive editor Hendrik Hertzberg; William Redpath (treasurer), ballot access chair, Libertarian Party; political consultant Cynthia Terrell (vice-president); Funding Exchange co-founder George Pillsbury; New World Foundation trustee George Friday; former Cincinnati NAACP president Marian Spencer; author Matthew Cossolotto (*Almanac of European Politics*) and professor of political science, Dr. Wilma Rule.

# Voting Systems: the Engine of a Democracy

## Introduction

This is an educational series about voting systems developed by the Center for Voting and Democracy. A lot of people might ask, “Oh, what’s such a big deal about voting systems? Voting is just something you do once a year, so what’s the big deal?”

But in fact a voting system is kind of like the engine of your car. You can have a beautiful exterior on your car, with nice hubcaps and fancy headlights and a nice interior inside, but if the engine of your car is sick, or if the engine of your car is a clunker, then the car isn’t going to run very well.

If you come away with nothing else from this presentation, what we would like you to come away with is the idea that *voting systems are not neutral*. That is to say, different voting systems give emphasis to different results. Representation of majority and minority voters, voter participation, costs of running for office, effectiveness of government, accountability, policies that reflect or ignore the “will of the majority”—all these qualities are greatly affected by the voting system that is used. Depending on which voting system you select for your local, state or national government, you are selecting certain attributes and excluding others. And you will get different results.

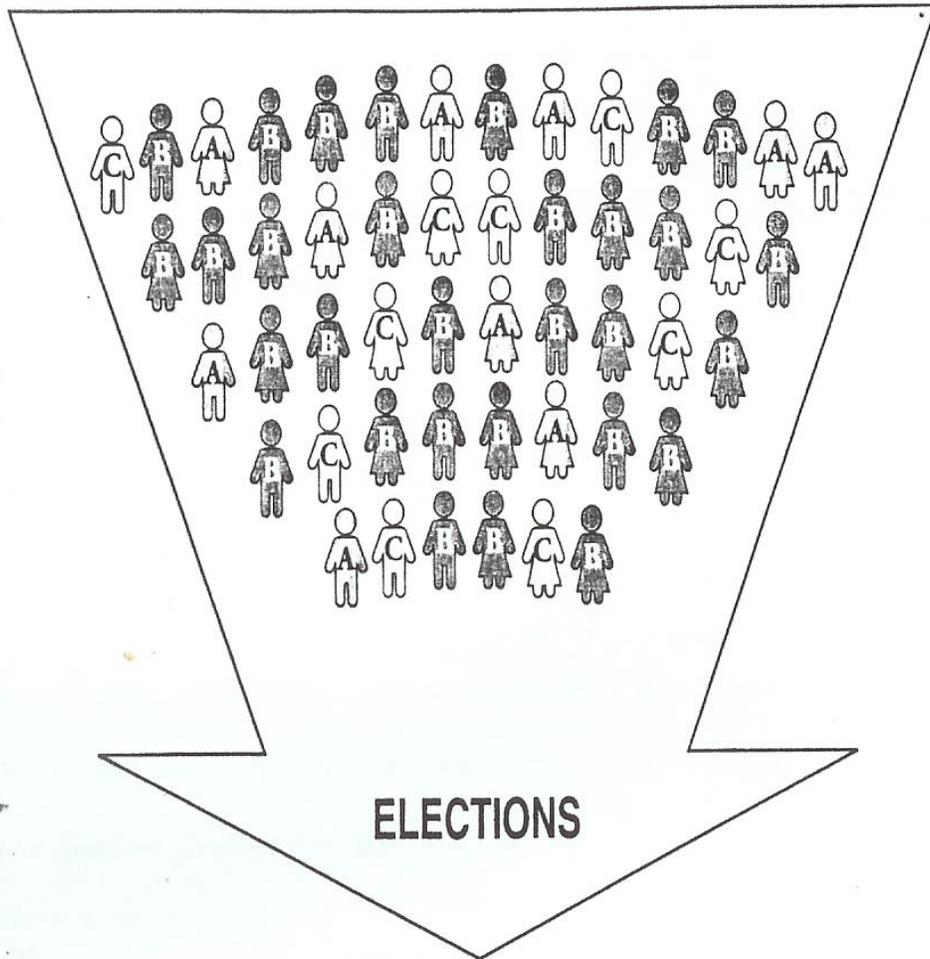
So, if you come away from this presentation with only this notion intact, it will have been a success – the idea that voting systems are *not* neutral.

What if I were to tell you that, starting tomorrow, the United States is switching to a brand new voting system, and the results of that voting system will be the following:

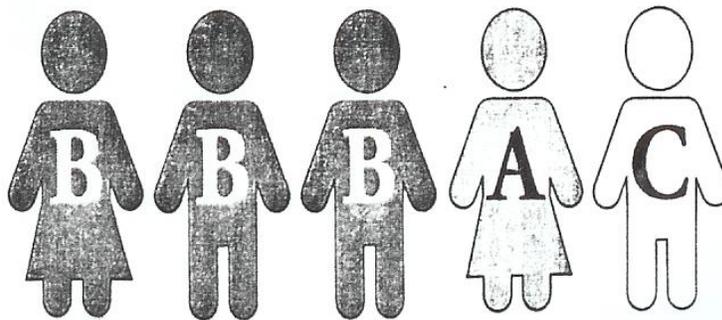
- ◆ less than half of eligible voters will participate in elections;
- ◆ only a quarter of all voters will cast a vote for a winning candidate;
- ◆ over 80 percent of voters will have only one choice of candidate that has any chance of winning;
- ◆ over 90 percent of incumbents will be re-elected on a regular basis

If that was going to be results of this new voting system, don’t you think citizens would be up in arms? Yet that is exactly the prevailing properties of U.S. democracy and its “winner take all” voting system. Most voter know something is wrong with the status quo, but they don’t know what to do about it. And they don’t yet realize that they have to repair the engine of this democracy—the voting system—in order to fix it.

# DEMOCRACY AT WORK



**ELECTIONS**



**REPRESENTATIVES**

30 B VOTERS ELECT 3 PEOPLE • 10 A VOTERS ELECT 1 PERSON • 10 C VOTERS ELECT 1 PERSON

### Democracy at Work

This presentation will walk you through a series of hypothetical elections, illustrating the different results achieved by different voting systems.

Illustration 1 shows our first hypothetical election. In this election there are fifty voters, signified by the fifty smaller figures up near the top of the page. Of the fifty smaller figures near the top of the page, thirty of them have a B in the middle of their torso, ten have an A and ten have a C. This is meant to signify three different perspectives of voters that are present in this election. The A's, the B's and the C's can correspond to virtually any perspective -- it could be a liberal perspective, or a conservative perspective, or African American or Latina. It could be a Democrat or a Republican, or Libertarian, Green, Reform or New Party supporter, or a member of the Christian Coalition or a gay/lesbian supporter. In this hypothetical election we are saying that there are three different perspectives. And besides that there is a *majority* perspective as represented by the thirty B's, and two *minority* perspectives, represented by the ten A's and the ten C's.

These fifty voters are electing a total of five representatives, as shown by the five larger figures at the bottom of the illustration. And if this were to be a fair election, in which voters gain representation in proportion to their strength at the polls, then you'd expect that the thirty B voters would be able to elect three of these representatives, ten A voters would be able to elect one representative, and the ten C voters would also be able to elect one representative. This would be a fair and representative election, since all voters are able to elect representation in proportion to the numbers that they voted in this election.

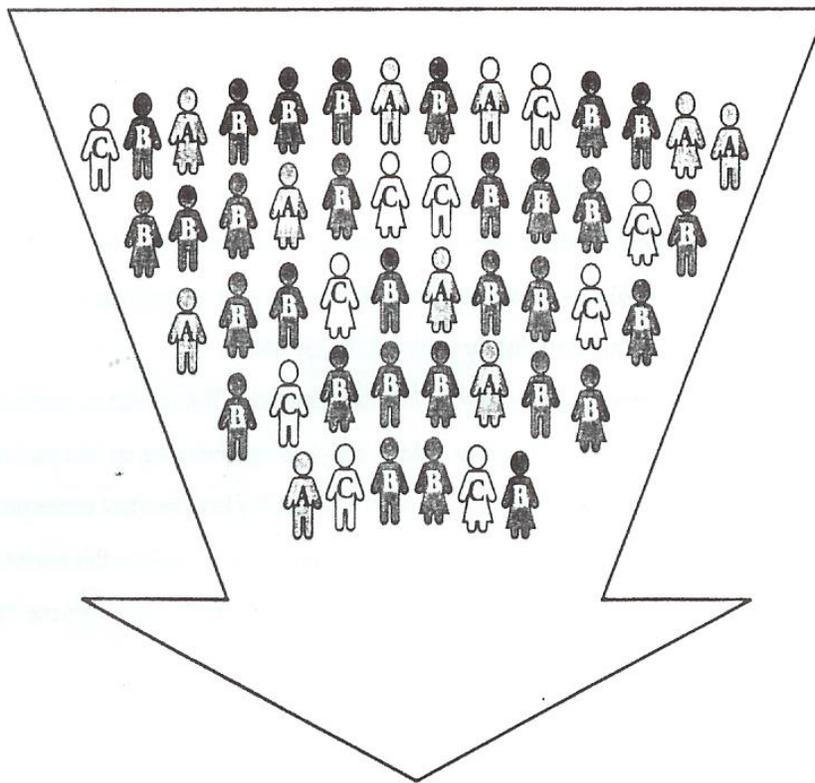
Real voters, of course, are not so easily plopped into rigid categories. But the fact is, voters are more predictable in their voting patterns than is commonly realized, self-dividing themselves up into partisan categories that exhibit remarkably consistent patterns over time. And this predictability has important consequences when trying to provide voters with fair representation. In the next few illustrations, we will run this same election using several different voting systems. By doing this, we will be able to analyze the differences between the voting systems.

# WINNER-TAKE-ALL AT-LARGE

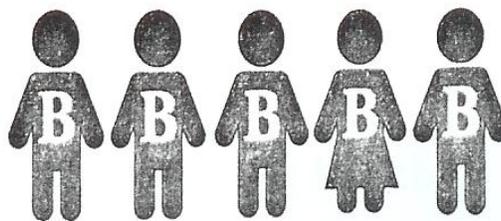
*MOST VOTES WINS ALL*



(VOTER GETS 5 VOTES, CAN GIVE ONE VOTE TO 5 DIFFERENT CANDIDATES)



②



30 B VOTERS ELECT 5 PEOPLE • 10 A VOTERS ELECT 0 PEOPLE • 10 C VOTERS ELECT 0 PEOPLE

### Winner Take All, At-large

Illustration 2 shows what happens to the representation when these same fifty voters elect five representatives by a system called “winner take all” at large. In such a system, voters have the same number of votes as there are contested seats, and the candidates with the most votes—called a plurality—win the seats. This system should be familiar to many cities such as San Francisco, Seattle, Cincinnati, Santa Monica and others that use it.

What happens in this type of election system is that, because every voter has the same number of votes as there are seats, the B perspective—the majority perspective with thirty voters in this scenario—is able to out-vote the ten A voters or the ten C voters for each one of these seats. Every time the voters step into the booth to vote for each seat, the B voters have thirty votes and the A and C voters only have 10 votes. As a result, the majority B perspective in a winner take all at-large system can usually win all the seats. Minority perspectives, whether they are racial, political or otherwise, have a great deal of difficulty winning representation under such a system.

The winner take all at-large system is the type that is used throughout the South, and has been the subject of numerous Voting Rights cases. In the South, you frequently have localities where there is a sizable black minority, say 30-40%, but they cannot win representation. This is due to racially polarized voting in a winner take all at-large voting system where the white majority can always outvote the black minority for every one of the seats.

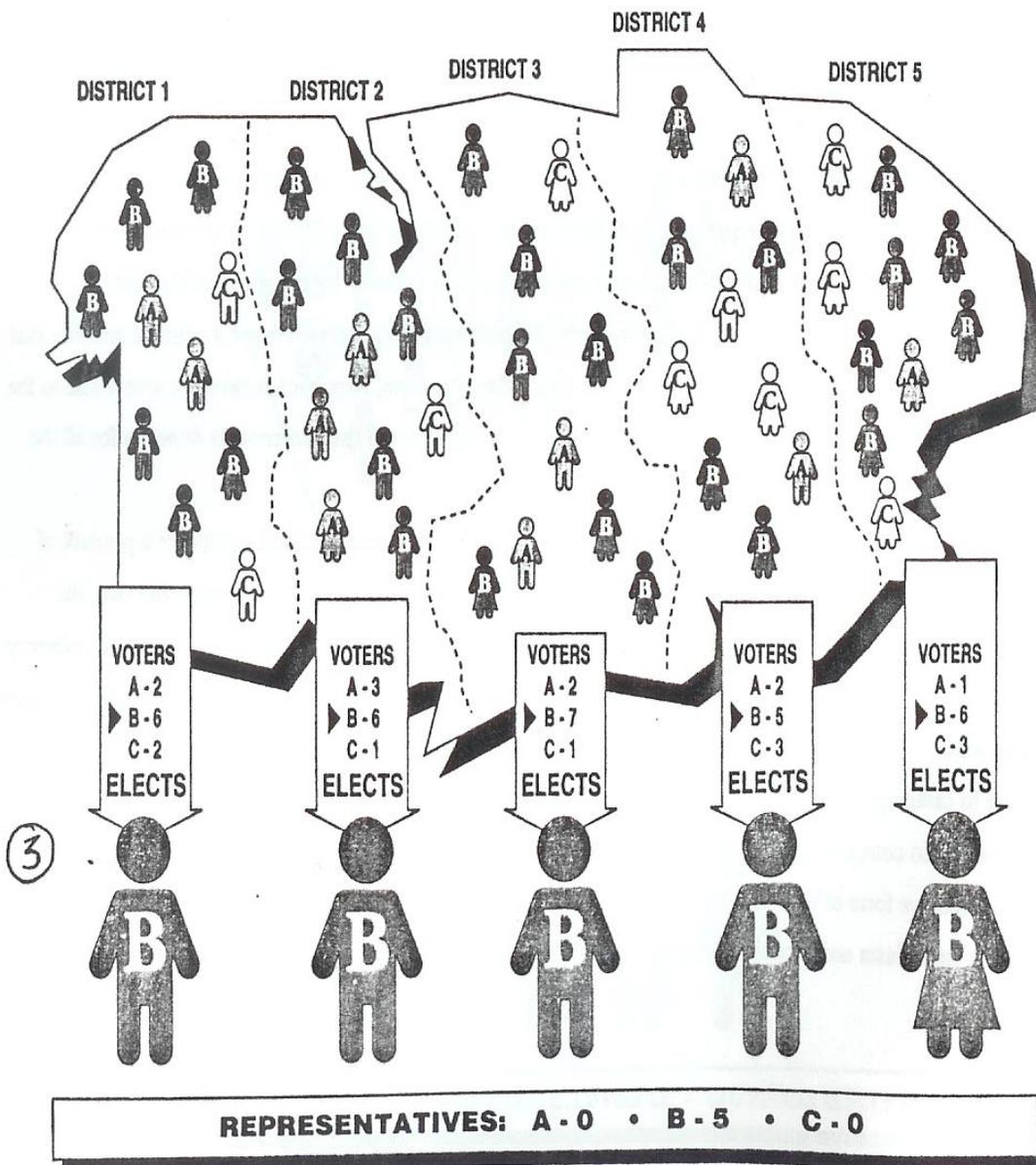
Also, in many U.S. cities using at-large systems, Republicans and conservatives are a political minority that find it difficult to win representation. For instance, in liberal San Francisco, Republicans have not won a seat to the Board of Supervisors in over 16 years, because the liberal majority outvotes the conservative minority for all the seats.

The important thing to note about this kind of an election is that these lop-sided results are a product of *every voter having the same number of votes as there are seats*. Whenever you have a situation like that, the majority perspective can out-vote the various minority perspectives (except with cumulative voting, when minority voters can concentrate or “cumulate” all their votes on one or more strongly favored candidates). In addition, these types of winner take all at-large elections typically take a lot of money for candidates to wage a campaign, because you have to campaign over the entire at-large area, making it difficult for minority perspectives to raise the type of money needed to compete against majority perspectives. For all these reasons, the winner take all at-large system is often a prohibitive form of democracy for political and racial minority voters and candidates. It has the effect of dampening enthusiasm and turnout among those voters who rarely elect their candidates.

# SINGLE-MEMBER DISTRICTS



(VOTER GETS 1 VOTE, FIVE DISTRICTS  
HAVE 1 REPRESENTATIVE EACH)



### Single-seat District elections

In order to correct for some of the limitations of the winner take all at-large system, some people favor what the next few illustrations show, which are single-seat district elections. In a district election every voter gets one vote that they can use to elect one representative that comes from their district. The idea behind district elections is to give representation to neighborhoods and geographic-based voters, and generally to make smaller constituencies than are represented in an at-large system. The hope is that this will bring greater accountability and closeness between the representatives and the voters, and that the smaller district will shrink the amount of money it takes to win an election.

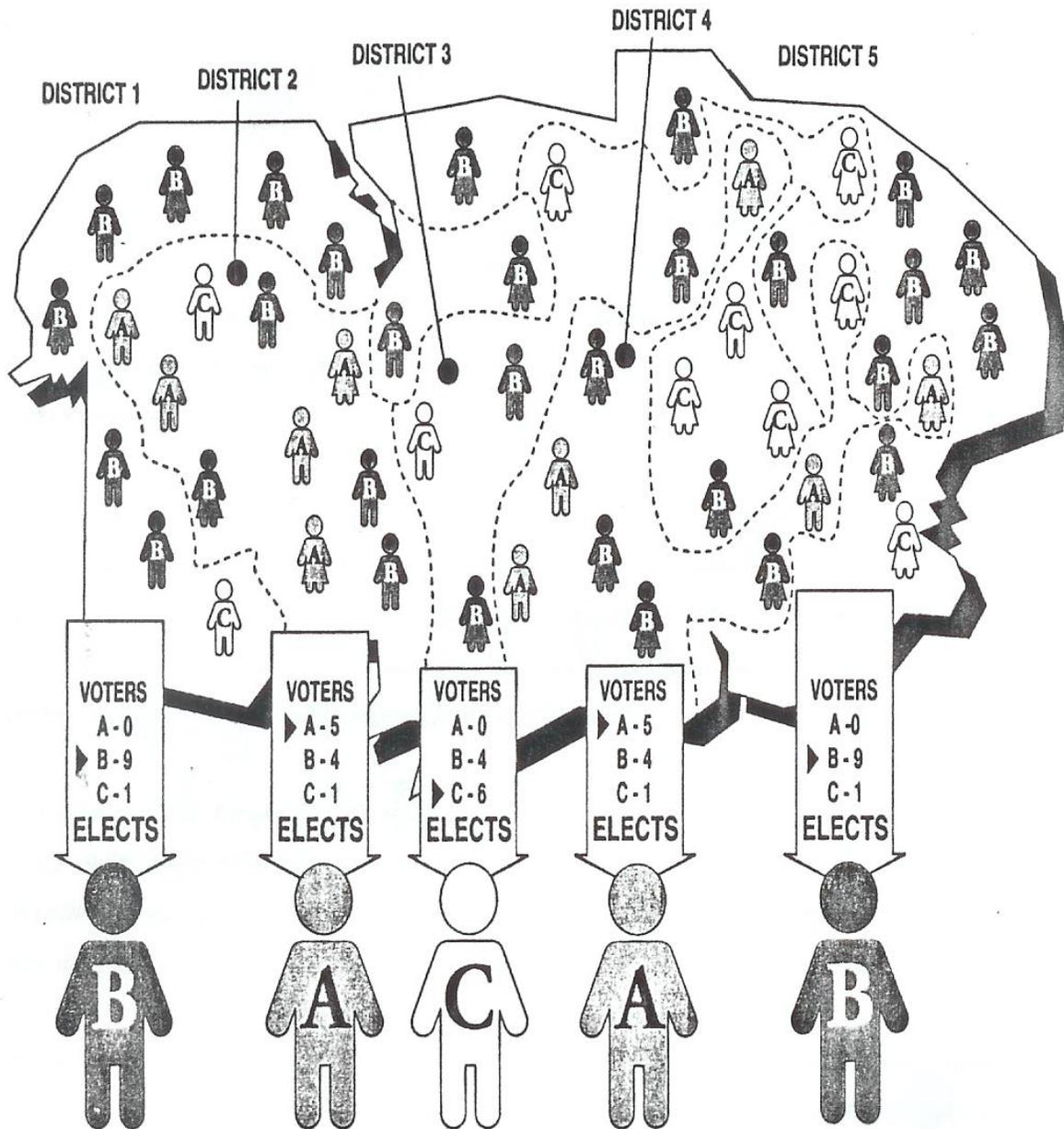
However, one of the problems with district elections, as Illustration 3 shows, is that often the A, the B and the C perspectives are dispersed pretty evenly throughout the city. So the B voters once again will be able to out-vote the A and the C voters for each district seat, and again end up with all the representation. This is particularly true in a city, town or region where the minority groups, either racial or political, are spread out and not concentrated in one geographic area. This prevents the possibility of drawing a district around that minority very easily to create what's known as a "majority-minority" district.

Also, historically district elections have lent themselves to Boss Tweed/Tammany Hall-type "machine" politics. Given their dominance in many districts, well-funded political machines are able to strategically re-allocate money away from those races of their candidates that will be won by landslides into those races that are close. This strategy often serves to give the political machine a lock on representation. This dynamic tends to undercut two of the hoped-for benefits of smaller districts: accountability to voters, and needing less money for challengers and less-established candidates to win.

Note that all five B candidates win election with this district map. The next map will show that, without any changes in where voters reside, changing the district lines will result in completely different election results. Only two B candidates will win, depriving the majority B voters of a majority of representation. The impact of where and how district lines are drawn is immense, yet nearly everywhere in the United States we give that power to the very legislators who have a direct self-interest in the process. Sometimes that will mean a majority of voters won't elect a majority of seats. Sometimes it means that a significant minority won't win any seats. Every time it means that the voter's right to cast a meaningful vote is seriously weakened. The problems of legislative redistricting will be discussed more fully on pages 11-12.

# SINGLE-MEMBER DISTRICTS

*DIFFERENT LINES CAUSE DIFFERENT RESULTS*



④

**REPRESENTATIVES: A - 2 • B - 2 • C - 1**

### Gerrymandering the District

To correct for the previous problem of single-seat districts, sometimes we try to draw the lines in different ways so as to allow for a greater chance of minority representation. Illustration 4 shows what's called "gerrymandering" the district. By playing with the lines and playing with the districts, what we try to do is to draw them in such a way as to put a majority of a particular minority into the same district. This is called a "majority-minority" district.

However, there are still some drawbacks, even in a best-case scenario where you can draw a majority-minority district. They are the following:

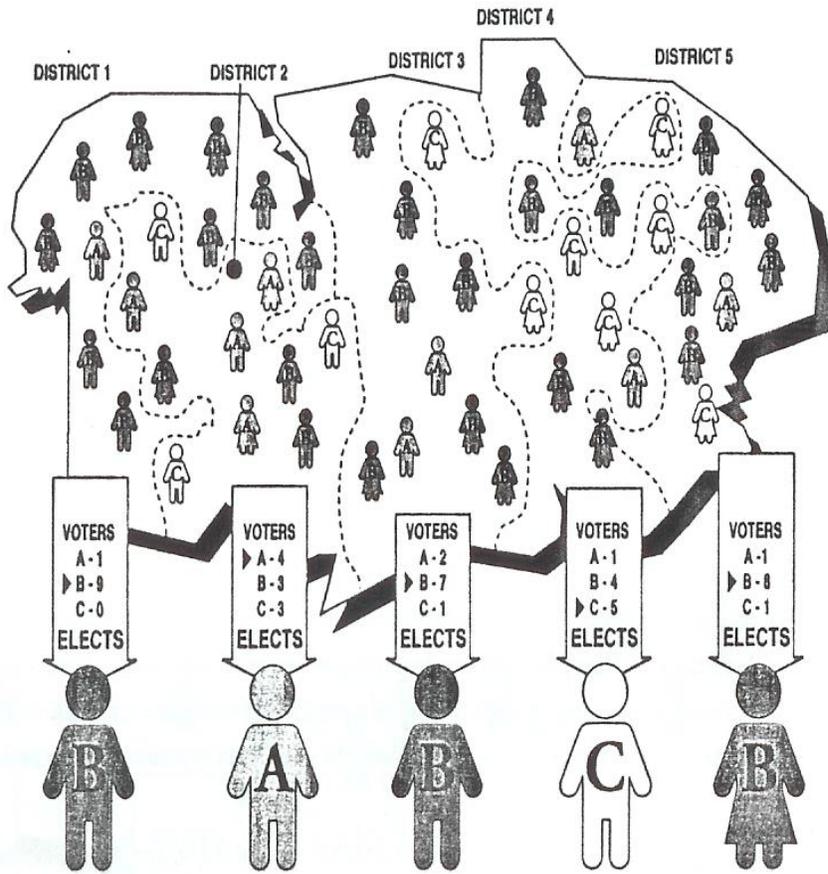
- ◆ Any minority individuals that don't live in the district that has been gerrymandered for their minority group are still disenfranchised;
- ◆ Other people who live within the district that has been gerrymandered for that minority, they now become the "minority" within their district, and so they too are disenfranchised.
- ◆ The process of redistricting is often very bitter. It tends to pit partisan and racial groups against each other. More and more, racial groups are butting up against each other, even suing each other as each one tries to get as big a chunk of the political pie as they can. The 1991 redistricting in New York City was particularly bitter. Chicago has spent over \$9 million defending its districts against legal challenges.
- ◆ In June of 1995 the U.S. Supreme Court made a ruling in *Miller v. Johnson* that "race-conscious" districts are unconstitutional. This ruling came at the end of a long line of rulings over the last few years in which the High Court weakened the Voting Rights Act that tries to give better representation to racial minorities.

Critics of racially gerrymandered districts have pointed to some of the bizarre shapes of the districts. For instance, one Congressional district in North Carolina was 160 miles long, and in some places it was no wider than the interstate. It was just opening and closing along Interstate 95 capturing blocks of African-American voters. There were other strangely shaped districts, such as the infamous Z-shaped district in Louisiana, districts shaped like dumbbells, another that was compared to the shape of a smashed mosquito, still another compared to the shape of splashed spaghetti sauce. The shapes of these districts have invited snickering by some, but it is important to point out two things:

- ◆ the shape of many incumbents' districts are just as bizarre, drawn to insure their re-election. Incumbents try to manipulate the redistricting process so that they can pick their voters long before the voters have a chance to pick them. Yet only the racially gerrymandered districts are under attack, as are other types of affirmative action.
- ◆ The shapes of the race conscious districts are not the fault of racial minorities, who just want political representation. It's the fault of a majoritarian winner take all voting system that can not give adequate representation to its various minority groups, since by virtue of being a minority it is extremely difficult to win a majority of votes unless you can draw a district around them.

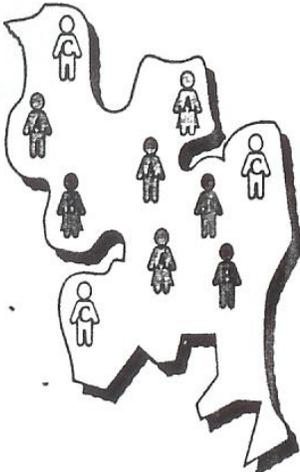
# SINGLE-MEMBER DISTRICTS

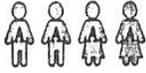
## PROBLEMS WITH A 'FAIR' GERRYMANDER

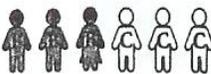


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### DISTRICT 2 VOTER BREAKDOWN



THOSE WHO PREFER THE WINNING CANDIDATE:    
(TOTAL: 4 VOTERS)

THOSE WHO WOULD PREFER ANOTHER REPRESENTATIVE:    
(TOTAL: 6 VOTERS)

**REPRESENTATIVES: A - 1 • B - 3 • C - 1**

### Wasted Votes -- More Problems with Districts

Illustration 5 shows a close-up of district 2. This illustration shows that, though the A minority was able to win the seat from district 2 with a plurality of four votes, in fact, there are actually more voters (six) in this district who preferred a candidate other than the A candidate. This illustrates a great problem that plagues winner take all elections, both at-large elections and single-seat district elections. It's called the problem of "wasted votes."

In district 2, the three B voters and the three C voters wasted their votes by putting them on a candidate who was not able to win. Another way of looking at this is that in a district where there is, say, a Democrat living next-door to a Republican, only one of them is going to be able to have a representative. And of course their next-door-neighbors who are Green Party or Reform Party supporters don't have a chance in any districts. One party is going to win, and all the others are going to lose. This becomes a tremendous disincentive for voters to participate in elections, particularly when, election after election, they already know beforehand whether their favorite candidate in their district stands a chance of winning or not. There are too many voters in the United States who rarely if ever vote for a winning congressional candidate.

Consider: in the 1996 U.S. House elections

- ◆ Only 44 percent of eligible voters participated. Yet not all participating voters cast a vote for a winner, in fact...
- ◆ Only 28 percent of eligible voters helped elect someone. But not too many of these had a lot of candidate choices to pick from because...
- ◆ A full 80 percent of U.S. House races were won by noncompetitive margins of 55% to 45%, two thirds of House races were won by landslide margins of 60 percent to 40 percent, and 95 percent of incumbents won re-election.

In other words, though we are used to saying that we have a two party system, in fact the frame of reference for most voters living in noncompetitive congressional districts is that of a one party system. State legislative races are even less competitive, with a whopping one third of state legislative races being uncontested by one of the major parties.

How have American elections come to be plagued by such noncompetitive races and lack of real choices for voters? Several factors play a role, including the influence of money and the ability of incumbents to raise huge campaign war chests. But even more important than the influence of money, this condition is produced by *the redistricting process itself*, in which incumbent politicians and their parties carve up the political map every 10 years to create safe, one-party district seats for themselves. The big bucks don't so much determine who will win as much as they flow to those candidates and parties who big donors *know in advance* are going to win because the districts have been gerrymandered to insure that outcome. Campaign contributors *respond* to high incumbent re-election rates more than they *cause* them, making donations to win better access in the legislative process—the most pressing reason for campaign finance reform, along with opening the field of candidates in party primaries.

The result is that, for perhaps 6-10 percent of eligible voters (those who bother to vote *and* who cast a vote for a winner *and* who also live in competitive districts) does it matter whether or not they showed up to the polls and voted. That's a very small number of Americans who have what we call a *meaningful vote*. Voting in the United States has become a frustrating and near-meaningless ritual. Compare that figure to countries that use proportional representation voting systems, where you generally have an eligible voter turnout of 75 to 95 percent, and 90 percent of participating voters cast a vote for a winner.

The 1990s have seen a replay of the bitter political battles that occurred over redistricting in the 1980s. After the 1990 census, Democrats and Republicans waged cartographic war using increasingly sophisticated computer technology. The Republicans won the redistricting battle, and as a result we have the following statistic: in the 1996 Congressional elections, the Republican Party won a majority of seats in the House of Representatives, even though they had *60,000 less votes nationally* than the Democrats. Such distortions happen frequently in "winner take all" elections. In California's 1994 House elections, Republican candidates received a combined 53 percent of the popular vote yet the Republicans won only 48 percent of California's seats. In the 1994 House elections in Washington state, Democratic candidates received 49 percent of the vote yet won only a paltry 22 percent of the seats. In Texas, the Democrats won only 42 percent of votes, yet walked off with 63 percent of the seats.

What if voters want to vote for a third party or independent candidate? What if voters decide they are tired of choosing the "lesser of two evils?" What are the chances for a third party's success in a winner take all system?

Out of the more than 7000 state senate and house seats scattered across the United States, only two are currently held by third parties. Out of 535 Congressional and U.S. Senate seats, only one is held by a third party or independent, that's Bernie Sanders from Vermont. In case you're thinking—well, that's just how things are now, it wasn't always that way—here's the bonus question: how many third parties have there been in the two hundred year history of the United States? How many? Fifty? A hundred? Two hundred? The answer is over a thousand. And how many of these have you ever heard of? They are only a memory now, for trivia junkies and TV game shows.

As a result of these disadvantages and distortions of winner take all elections, voters are forced to choose between the "lesser of two evils." We vote our fears, not our hopes. We do this out of necessity, not out of choice. There is no other choice. Having to always choose between the "lesser of two evils" is very corrosive on the democratic spirit. For this reason, winner take all elections are at the bottom of the barrel in terms of voter turn-out (see chart).

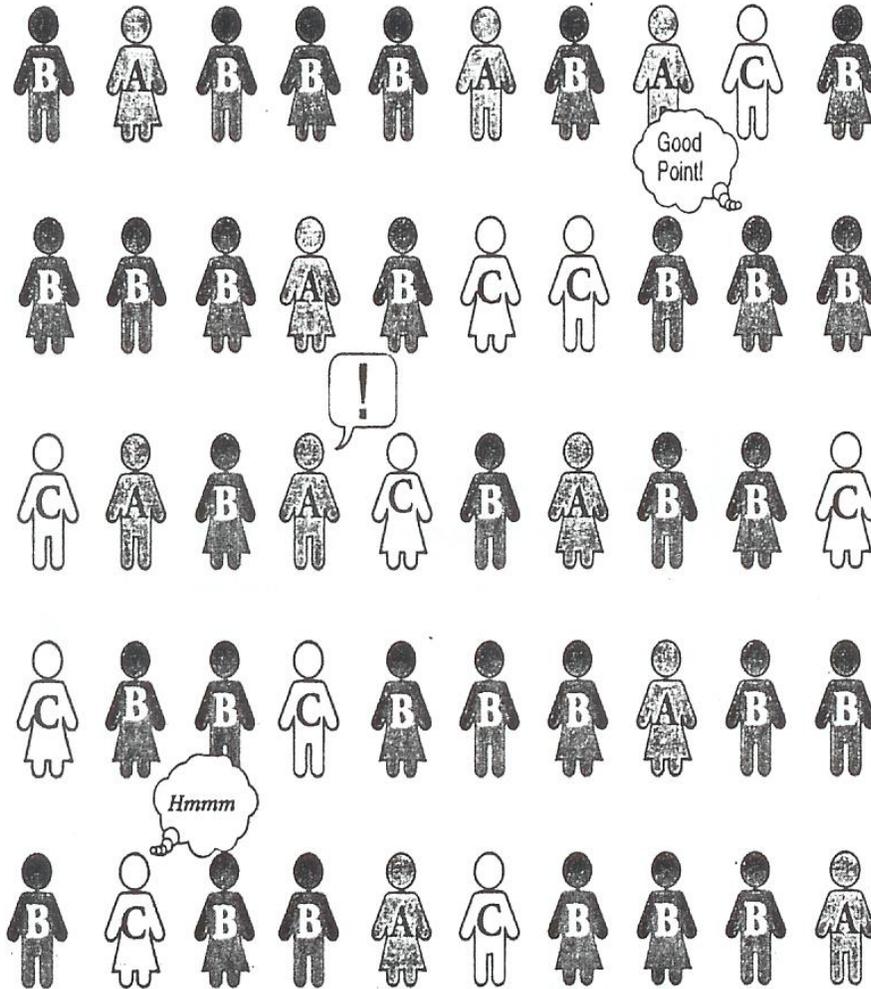
These statistics tell a bleak story. And the lesson of that story is this: winner take all voting systems too often lead to undemocratic results, and are notoriously hostile to the success of third parties, minority constituencies, and independent candidates. Voters have a sense that their vote doesn't count for much, because it doesn't. Most voters live in noncompetitive districts where it doesn't really matter whether they vote or not, because the races are decided every 10 years when the two major parties gerrymander the districts into safe seats for incumbents and their parties.

### Voter Turnout Comparisons

<u>Country</u>	<u>Voter Turnout</u>	<u>System</u>
Belgium	93%	PR
Turkey	92%	PR
Italy	89%	PR
Luxembourg	87%	Mixed (25% PR)
Austria	86%	PR
Iceland	86%	PR
Sweden	86%	PR
Denmark	83%	PR
Norway	83%	PR
Netherlands	80%	PR
Germany	78%	PR
Greece	77%	PR (50% single-seat election)
United Kingdom	76%	PR
Finland	72%	Plurality
Spain	70%	PR
Ireland	70%	PR
Portugal	69%	PR (preference voting)
France	68%	PR
Switzerland	47%	Majority run-off
United States (1994)	38%	PR
		Plurality

Source: *The Almanac of European Politics (Congressional Quarterly, 1995)*

# HOW CAN WE GIVE EVERYONE REPRESENTATION?



6

### How Can We Give Everyone Fair Representation?

To correct for these problems with the winner take all elections (both at-large and single-seat districts), there are some other voting systems that have been invented. These systems are known under the category of proportional representation voting systems, also known as pro rep or simply PR. Proportional representation came along later than winner take all elections as a reform to the types of difficulties created by winner take all elections.

What is proportional representation? Proportional representation (PR) is the voting system used by *MOST* of the world's established democracies. Under PR, representatives are elected from multi-seat districts *in proportion* to the number of votes received. For example, in one type of PR -- there are several, both for partisan and nonpartisan elections -- if there are ten legislative seats up for election in a multi-seat district, and if a political party wins thirty percent of the popular vote, they win thirty percent -- three -- of the ten seats. Ten percent of the popular vote wins one seat, fifty percent of the popular vote wins five seats, and so on (whereas in a winner take all election that same ten or thirty percent wins zero seats).

PR assures that political parties and blocs of voters will win the percent of legislative seats that reflects their public support. *A party or candidate need not come in first to win seats.*

Here is a quick outline of some of the advantages of proportional representation voting systems generally recognized by political scientists.

- ◆ **Greater voter turn-out** (typically 75-95%)
- ◆ **More choices:** third, fourth, fifth parties and more. For non-partisan elections, more candidates from diverse perspectives usually stand a chance of winning.
- ◆ **More women elected:** 41% women in Sweden, 39% in Finland, 36% in Norway, 29% in The Netherlands, 26% in Germany and 24% in South Africa. That's compared to 12% in the U.S. House of and 9% in the U.S. Senate. In state and local legislatures in the U.S., women average one out of every five legislators. According to United Nation reports, the United States ranks 24th of 54 western democracies in terms of women's representation in national legislatures.
- ◆ **More minorities elected without gerrymandering district lines.** In South Africa's first proportional elections, representation was won by the black majority, the white minority, as well as various black ethnic minorities. The main parties reached out to voters of both races by running *multiracial slates* of candidates, so rather than polarizing the nation along racial lines, the proportional election helped unify a fragile democracy. Ethnic minorities in Germany, Israel and elsewhere routinely win their fair share of seats.
- ◆ **Reduces mud-slinging.** Proportional representation elections have a tendency to clean up campaigns, and produce more issue-oriented campaigns. That's because in a two party system there is a lot more pressure for one party to say, "Everything my party does is right, and everything your party does is wrong." If my party can drive up your negatives, then voters have only one other place to go -- to my party.
- ◆ **Consensus policies.** Proportional elections produce policies that better reflect the majority's will because more people have representation and input into policy-making

- ◆ **More inclusive legislatures.** Proportional elections produce governing bodies in which diverse viewpoints are fairly represented without the pitfalls of gerrymandered districts.

Under “winner take all,” there is no incentive for candidates to campaign on issues, because every time they take a stand on an issue it can potentially alienate a bloc of voters. Don’t forget, candidates need a plurality and often a majority to elect them, which is a lot of votes. The optimum campaign strategy in a winner take all system becomes slinging mud at your opponent to drive up their negatives, and taking as few stands on the issues as possible.

Similarly for the dynamic within the legislatures themselves. If there are only two parties, and my party is in the opposition, then I have incentive to obstruct, gut and sabotage legislation. If I can keep your party from governing, then I can say your party is ineffective and so the voters should vote for my party. *Gridlock is rewarded under a two party winner take all system.*

But the dynamic changes dramatically once you introduce third and fourth parties and independent candidates. Suddenly, if my party slings mud at your party and drives up your negatives, there’s no guarantee that your loss of support will translate into a gain for me. Voters might be disgusted with me for slinging the mud, so their support might go to yet another party.

- ◆ Another beneficial feature of proportional representation is that it is a form of *campaign finance reform*.

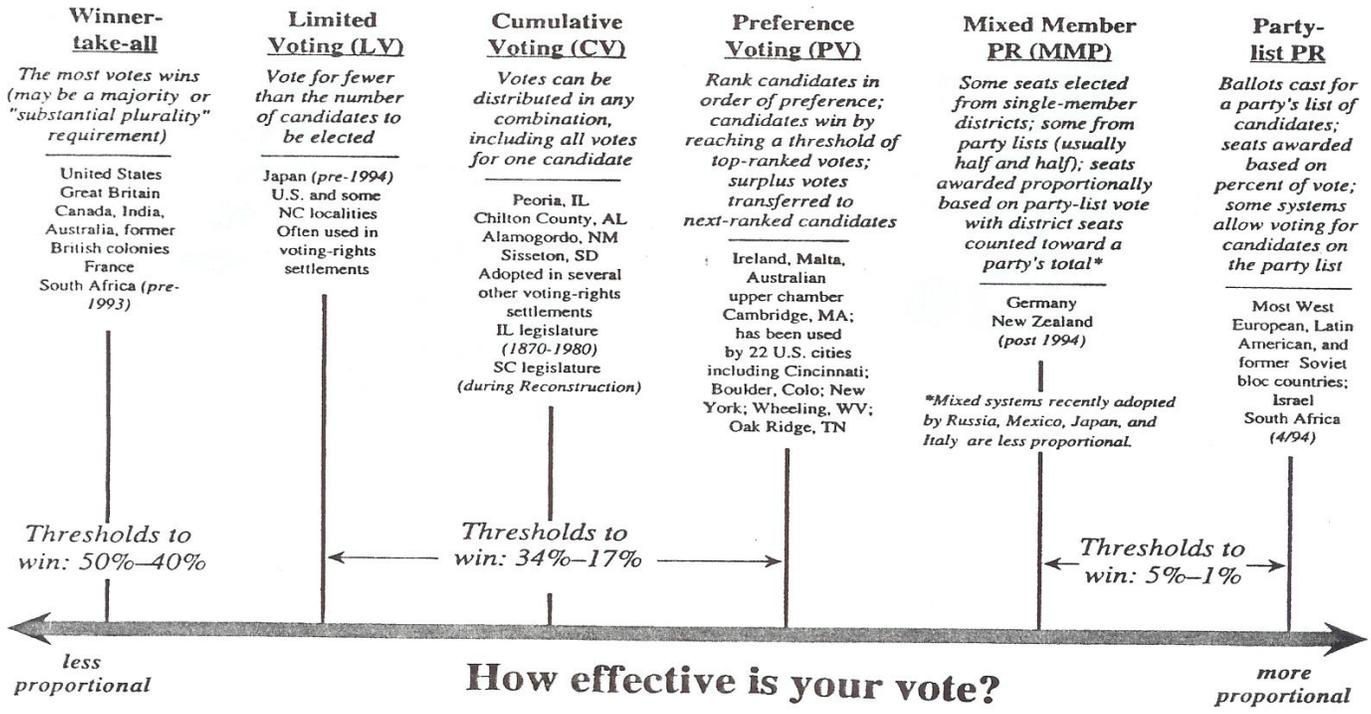
Compared to winner take all systems, PR actually *reduces* the number of votes a candidate or party needs to win to get elected. Because you need less votes, you don’t need to spend so much money to win those votes. You can do targeted campaigning, you can run as the candidate or party of a particular issue or constituency, rather than the big money candidate for party buying TV ads directed at swing voters. You can try and build a coalition to back you that is along much more concretely defined lines and issues than you can with a winner take all system. This in turn increases *accountability*.

All of these effects of proportional representation systems are very great advantages for modern democracies. No wonder then, that PR is used by *MOST* of the world’s major democracies, including:

- ◆ Germany Sweden Switzerland Belgium Denmark Holland Spain Austria
- ◆ Australia (Senate) Mexico Portugal Japan Italy Ireland Israel Poland
- ◆ Hungary Iceland Brazil Nicaragua El Salvador Norway Finland
- ◆ Venezuela Greece Russia New Zealand and more...

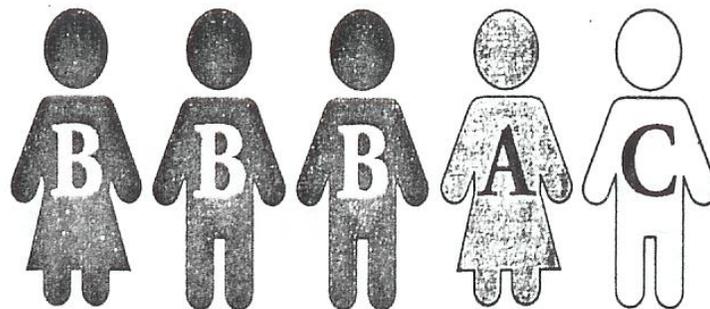
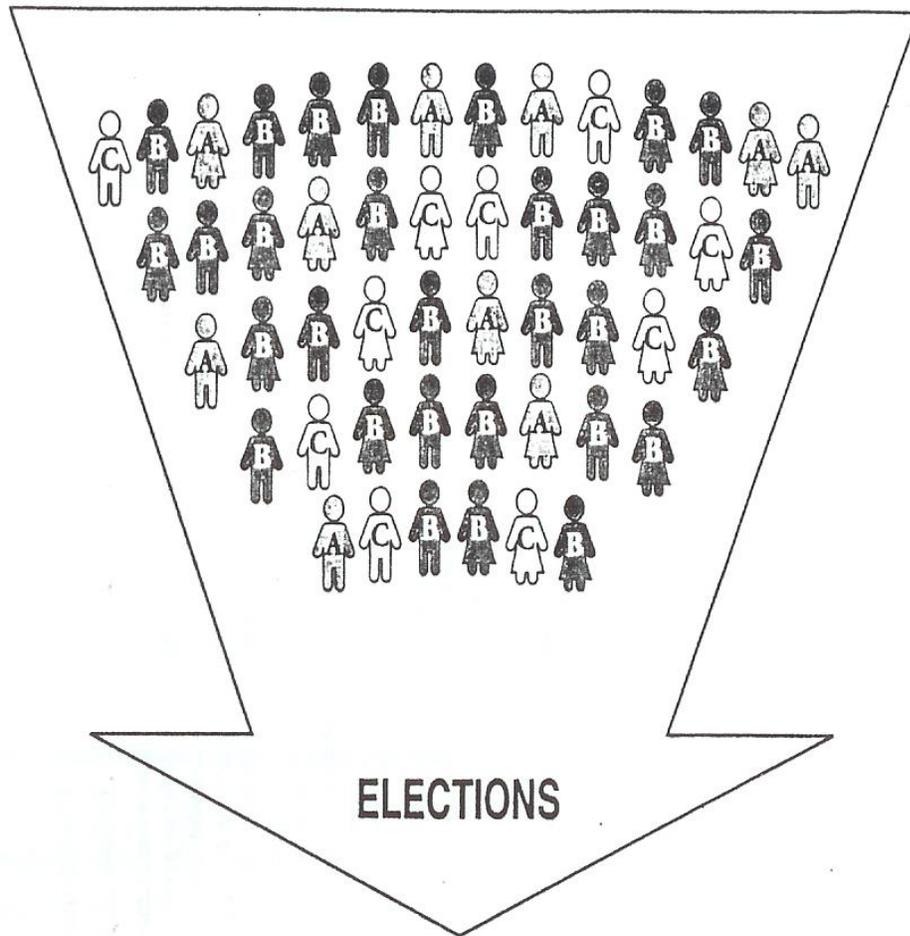
“Winner take all” elections are still used in France, Serbia Great Britain and some of Britain’s former colonies, including the U.S., Canada, India, Pakistan, Zimbabwe and some Caribbean islands.

# Voting Methods around the World



The Center for Voting and Democracy

# TYPES OF PR – LIST SYSTEM



REPRESENTATIVES

8

30 B VOTERS ELECT 3 PEOPLE • 10 A VOTERS ELECT 1 PERSON • 10 C VOTERS ELECT 1 PERSON

### Types of Proportional Representation -- the List System

Illustration 8, about a type of proportional representation known as the *list system*, takes us back to the very first illustration of this presentation. If you remember, there were fifty voters electing five representatives. The thirty B voters elected three representatives, and the groups of ten A and ten C voters each elected one representative. Imagine the A, B and C perspectives corresponding to parties, say the Democrats, the Republicans and the Green Party. Voters vote for a political party instead of individual candidates by putting an 'x' next to the party they want. Whatever percentage of the popular vote a party wins, that's the percentage of seats from a multi-seat district they receive in the legislature. The parties fill the seats they have won by holding a party primary prior to the general election, in which they elect their party's list. If a party wins three seats, the top three names on their list fill those seats.

In the elections for California state assembly, typically 200,000 voters or more vote for parties other than the Democrats or Republicans -- either the Green, Peace and Freedom, Reform, Natural Law, Libertarian, or American Independent Parties. If these third party voters lived in the same district, they could elect a representative or two or three. Because they are scattered throughout the state and throughout many single-seat districts, they can't elect anyone.

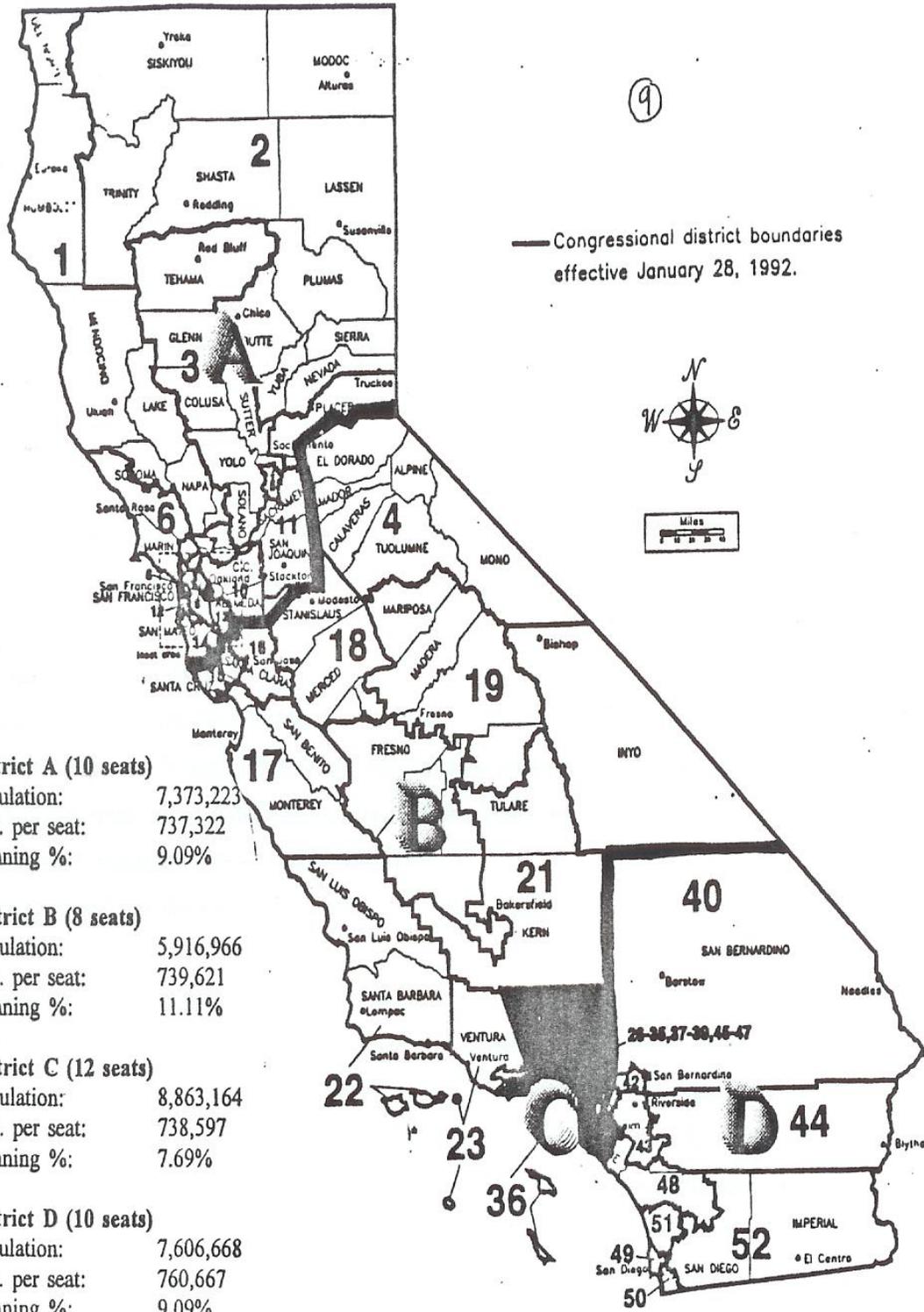
But what if, instead of electing one representative from each district, we enlarged the districts so that we elected ten representatives from a super-district? And what if each party needed only 10% of the vote to win a seat, instead of the current 45-50%? Instead of electing 40 state senate representatives from 40 districts, Californians could elect them from four super-districts with ten representatives each (see California map, Illustration 9). Now, if the Greens or Reform Party won 10% of the vote in one of these super-districts—drawing support from the whole area, not just one small district—they would win one seat; thirty percent of the vote would win three seats, and so on.

Californians also elect 52 Congresspeople, one per winner take all single-seat district. Instead, they could elect thirteen Congresspeople from four super-districts. Each party would need 7.7% of the popular vote to win a seat (100% of the vote divided by 13 seats = 7.7% of the vote per seat). This system is best for party-based elections.

How many seats should we have per super-district? The general rule of thumb is that the more seats you elect at once, the lower you make what's called the "threshold of exclusion," and the more you end up with representative results. Most PR countries have thresholds of about 4-5%.

As voters realized that voting for third parties was not a "wasted vote," more of them might stop selecting the "lesser of two evils" and pick their top choice. Voters might start voting their hopes, instead of their fears.

# CALIFORNIA



**District A (10 seats)**  
 Population: 7,373,223  
 Pop. per seat: 737,322  
 Winning %: 9.09%

**District B (8 seats)**  
 Population: 5,916,966  
 Pop. per seat: 739,621  
 Winning %: 11.11%

**District C (12 seats)**  
 Population: 8,863,164  
 Pop. per seat: 738,597  
 Winning %: 7.69%

**District D (10 seats)**  
 Population: 7,606,668  
 Pop. per seat: 760,667  
 Winning %: 9.09%

VAP = Voting Age Population

*(Note: The winning threshold is the percentage of voters necessary to ensure election of one representative using a proportional voting system.)*

The Center for Voting and Democracy

California: 4 Districts, 40 Seats

**District A (10 seats)**

Population: 7,373,223  
Pop. per seat: 737,322  
Winning %: 9.09%  
Non-white VAP: 30.71%  
    *Black VAP:* 7.57%  
    *Asian VAP:* 10.60%  
    *Latino VAP:* 11.59%  
    *Other VAP:* 0.96%  
1992 Presidential Results:  
    *Clinton:* 51.83%  
    *Bush:* 28.58%  
    *Other:* 19.59%

**District D (10 seats)**

Population: 7,606,668  
Pop. per seat: 760,667  
Winning %: 9.09%  
Non-white VAP: 32.50%  
    *Black VAP:* 4.33%  
    *Asian VAP:* 6.54%  
    *Latino VAP:* 20.89%  
    *Other VAP:* 0.74%  
1992 Presidential Results:  
    *Clinton:* 35.84%  
    *Bush:* 38.93%  
    *Other:* 25.24%

**District B (8 seats)**

Population: 5,916,966  
Pop. per seat: 739,621  
Winning %: 11.11%  
Non-white VAP: 33.80%  
    *Black VAP:* 3.19%  
    *Asian VAP:* 7.35%  
    *Latino VAP:* 22.38%  
    *Other VAP:* 0.87%  
1992 Presidential Results:  
    *Clinton:* 42.67%  
    *Bush:* 34.71%  
    *Other:* 22.62%

VAP = Voting Age Population

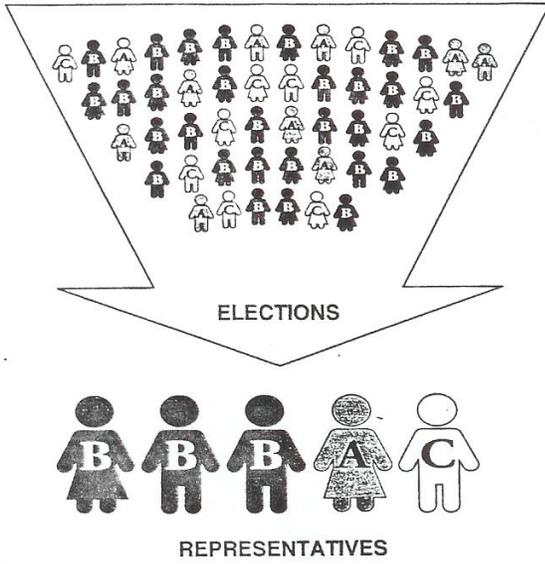
*(Note: The winning threshold is the percentage of voters necessary to ensure election of one representative using a proportional voting system.)*

**District C (12 seats)**

Population: 8,863,164  
Pop. per seat: 738,597  
Winning %: 7.69%  
Non-white VAP: 54.40%  
    *Black VAP:* 10.20%  
    *Asian VAP:* 10.30%  
    *Latino VAP:* 33.30%  
    *Other VAP:* 0.60%  
1992 Presidential Results:  
    *Clinton:* 52.54%  
    *Bush:* 29.04%  
    *Other:* 18.42%

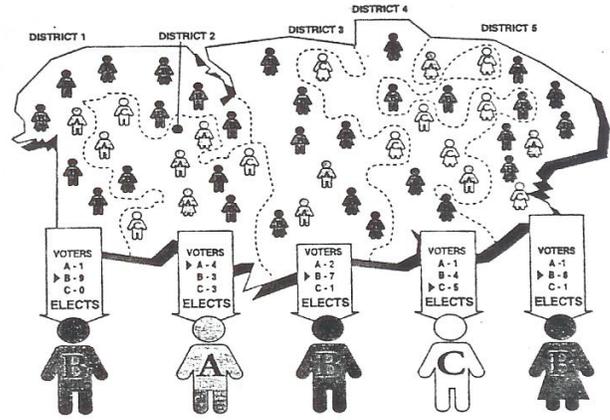
# TYPES OF PR – MIXED MEMBER SYSTEM

## TYPES OF PR – LIST SYSTEM



30 B VOTERS ELECT 3 PEOPLE • 10 A VOTERS ELECT 1 PERSON • 10 C VOTERS ELECT 1 PERSON

## SINGLE-MEMBER DISTRICTS



### Types of Proportional Representation -- Mixed Member System

Illustration 10 shows the “mixed member” PR system, which is used by Germany and some other countries. This voting system actually combines the list system explained previously with single-seat winner take all elections. It may make a nice transitional system for the United States, with our strong tradition of geographic-based representation, since it would allow us to retain what we already have, yet add to it something new that will open up our democracy to more points of view and produce policy that better reflects the will of the majority.

Here’s how the mixed member system works:

In Germany, voters actually have two votes when they go into the voter’s booth. One vote is for their district representative, and the other vote is for their favorite political party. Half of the members of Germany’s national and state legislatures are elected via a list proportional vote, and the other half by winner take all districts. Overall the representation of the parties in the legislature are proportional to the popular vote as indicated by the list vote taken for the parties. But some of the representatives come from single-seat winner take all districts, and the others are elected from the party lists.

Interestingly enough, the two major parties in Germany are usually the only ones who win seats in the winner take all districts. These elections are two party affairs, just the way they are in the U.S. and other winner take all democracies. The smaller parties like the Greens and others almost always win their seats in the proportional list vote. Also, in Germany’s 1994 federal elections women candidates won 13% of the seats in the “winner take all” district elections, about the same as women in the U.S. But German women won three times as many seats in the list proportional vote, 39%. That 3-to-1 proportion has occurred in recent elections of two other democracies—Italy and New Zealand—using mixed member PR.

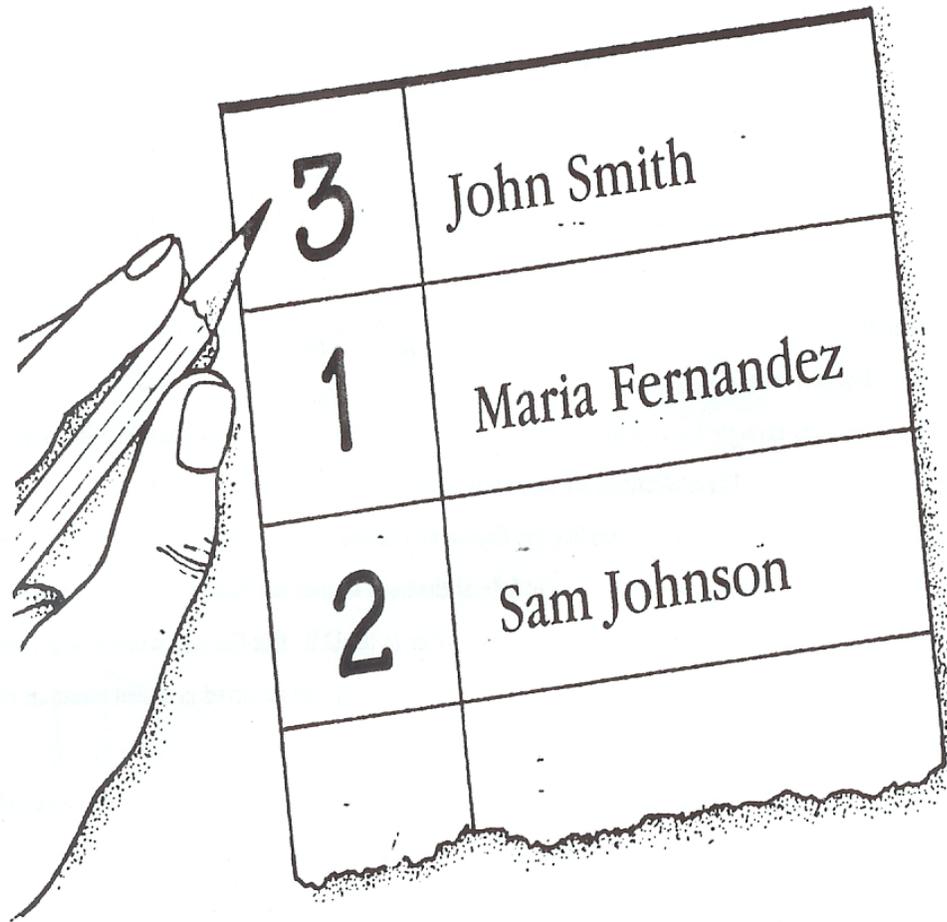
The German-style mixed member system is growing increasingly popular. In 1993, New Zealand adopted a mixed member PR system in a national referendum after using a U.S.-style “winner take all” system for 140 years. PR won despite opposition by most incumbents and a 10-to-1 spending disadvantage during the campaign. Victory was greatly helped by a whopping 92 % to 8% vote in favor of PR by student voters.

Russia and Japan have also recently adopted a semi-proportional version of the mixed member system, and Italy changed its pure list system to a semi-proportional mixed system.

# HOW YOU VOTE

FOR VOTERS, AS EASY AS 1, 2, 3

## YOUR BALLOT



## PRINCIPLES OF PREFERENCE VOTING

(11)

1. YOU RANK CANDIDATES IN ORDER OF PREFERENCE.
2. YOUR TOP CANDIDATES HAVE THE BEST CHANCE TO WIN.
3. A LOWER CHOICE CAN'T DEFEAT A HIGHER CHOICE.
4. AS MANY VOTERS AS POSSIBLE WILL HELP ELECT CANDIDATES.

### Types of Proportional Representation -- Preference Voting

Illustration 11 will demonstrate a form of proportional representation called preference voting. Preference voting is a type of PR that may be used for non-partisan races like city councils, union officers, boards of directors, etc., as well as for party-based elections. It has four unique features that correct for the problems that we've examined with winner take all systems. For this reason, some of its proponents refer to preference voting as "state-of-the-art" democracy.

- ◆ it allows voters to *rank candidates* in their order of preference, 1,2,3,4, etc., as the illustration shows
- ◆ It includes what is called a *transferable ballot*, so that if a voter's first choice doesn't win, their vote *transfers* to their second choice, third choice, and so on. This keeps constituencies from splitting their vote among several competing candidates, or having to settle for the "lesser of two evils."
- ◆ Like all proportional systems, preference voting also *reduces the number of votes* needed to win a seat compared to winner take all systems. This opens up the races to candidates representing racial, sexual or political minorities without having to gerrymander district lines. Preference voting elects diverse legislatures, allowing minority representation as well as majority rule.
- ◆ Because it reduces the number of votes needed to win, it also *tends to reduce the amount of money* a candidate needs to spend to win the reduced number of votes.

Preference voting is used in Cambridge, MA to elect the city council and school boards; in New York City to elect community school boards; in Ireland and Australia to elect national and local legislatures; at several universities to elect student government; and to elect the five finalists in each major category of the Academy Awards!

Let's examine preference voting a bit more closely. As this illustration shows, this voter preferred Maria Fernandez as his or her first choice, Sam Johnson as their second choice, and John Smith as their third choice. And what's going to happen with this ballot is that if Maria Fernandez does not win a seat, this voter's vote will transfer to Sam Johnson. And if Sam Johnson does not win, this voter's vote will transfer to John Smith. This transferable ballot does away with having to vote for the "lesser of two evils." So often in winner take all elections, we go through a mental process where we say, "I like candidate A over here, but they don't stand a chance of winning, so I'm going to vote for candidate B over there." We select the lesser of two evils. Well, with preference voting you don't have to engage in this lesser-of-two-evils mentality; you can put whomever you want first. You can put your aunt first, because you think your aunt is really honest and sincere and would make a really great representative. If your aunt doesn't win, your vote is going to transfer to your second choice and to your third choice, on down the line until it can help elect someone.

## HOW YOU WIN

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### *DETERMINING THE WINNING THRESHOLD*

**WINNING THRESHOLD = Votes/Seats**

**ELECTION FOR 5 SEATS WITH 50 VOTERS**

**WINNING THRESHOLD = Votes / Seats**  
**= 50/5**  
**= 10 votes = 20% of vote**

12

### The Winning Threshold

How do we know how many votes will be needed to win a seat in a proportional voting system? We know that by figuring out what is called the “the winning threshold.” Illustration 12 shows how we figure this out, and why it is so important in order to realize fair results and representation for the maximum number of voters.

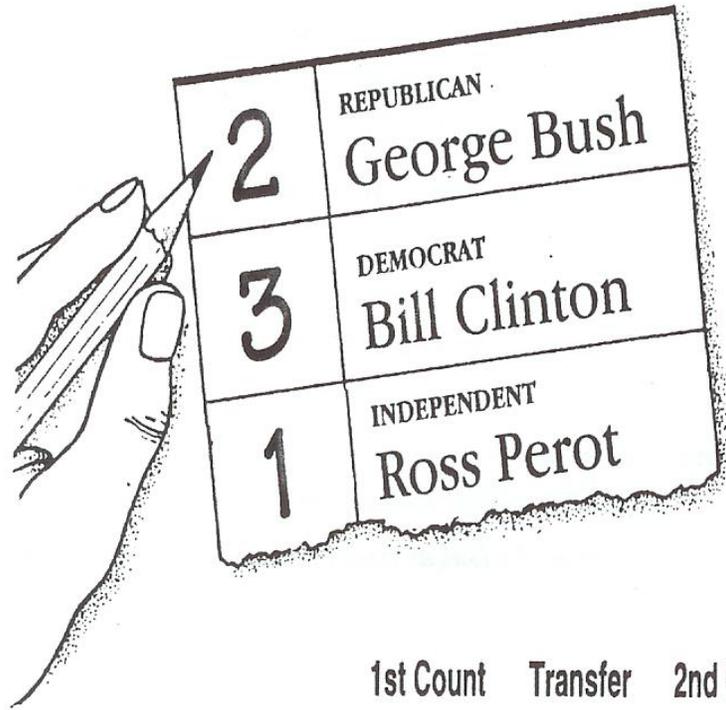
To figure out the winning threshold, you simply divide the number of contested seats into the total number of votes that have been cast for that election. So for instance, in our mock election, we have fifty voters and five seats. That gives us a threshold of 10 votes per seat. If there were two-hundred thousand votes cast in an election, and there were five seats open, each seat would be worth forty-thousand votes. When a candidate reaches the forty-thousand vote plateau, they are declared a winner.

Using the city of San Francisco as an example, in the 1994 elections for five seats on the Board of Supervisors, a winning candidate in the winner take all at-large system needed a minimum of about 90,000 votes (about 37 percent of the vote). Preference voting would have reduced that ninety thousand votes down to a winning threshold of thirty five thousand votes (about 16 percent of the vote). That’s less than half as many votes.

An important component of preference voting, like all proportional systems (including the list system and mixed member system), is that, compared to winner take all elections, it actually *reduces* the number of votes a candidate needs to get elected. By reducing the threshold—the number of votes a candidate needs to win a seat—the races are made more competitive. The races are opened up to various perspectives without having to gerrymander a single district.

# PREFERENCE VOTING IN SINGLE WINNER RACE

## ELECTING A MAJORITY PRESIDENT



	1st Count	Transfer	2nd Count
BUSH:	38	+9	47
CLINTON:	43	+10	53 ✓
PEROT:	19	-19	X

**Absolute majority required to win: 50% + 1**

### Instant runoff Voting

Illustration 13 shows how transferable ballots work in a single winner race. It shows a form of preference voting called *instant runoff voting* that can be used to elect single candidates, say a mayor, governor, or president, or even a Congressperson or Senator from a single district. Whenever you are electing a single office, you can use instant runoff voting.

This illustration shows one voter's ballot who voted for Ross Perot first on their ballot, George Bush second, and Bill Clinton third. Let's say that after all the first place ballots are counted up, after all the millions and millions of ballots from people who voted for president, let's say the results show that Ross Perot had the least number of first place votes. At that point Ross Perot is eliminated from the race. But those who voted for him do not have their votes thrown away. All of those voters who voted for Ross Perot first on their ballot, their vote now transfers to their second choice on their individual ballot, which would have been either George Bush or Bill Clinton. After all the transfers are complete, either George Bush or Bill Clinton will end up with a majority of votes. If we had done this in the 1992 presidential election, we would have ended up with a president who truly had a majority of voters supporting him. It's like having a runoff, but doing it all with one ballot.

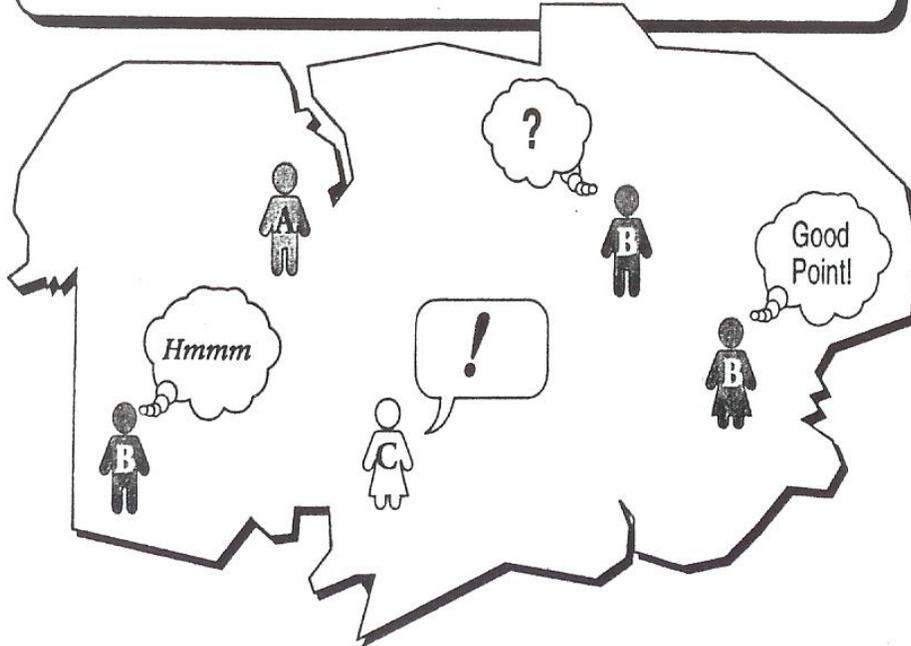
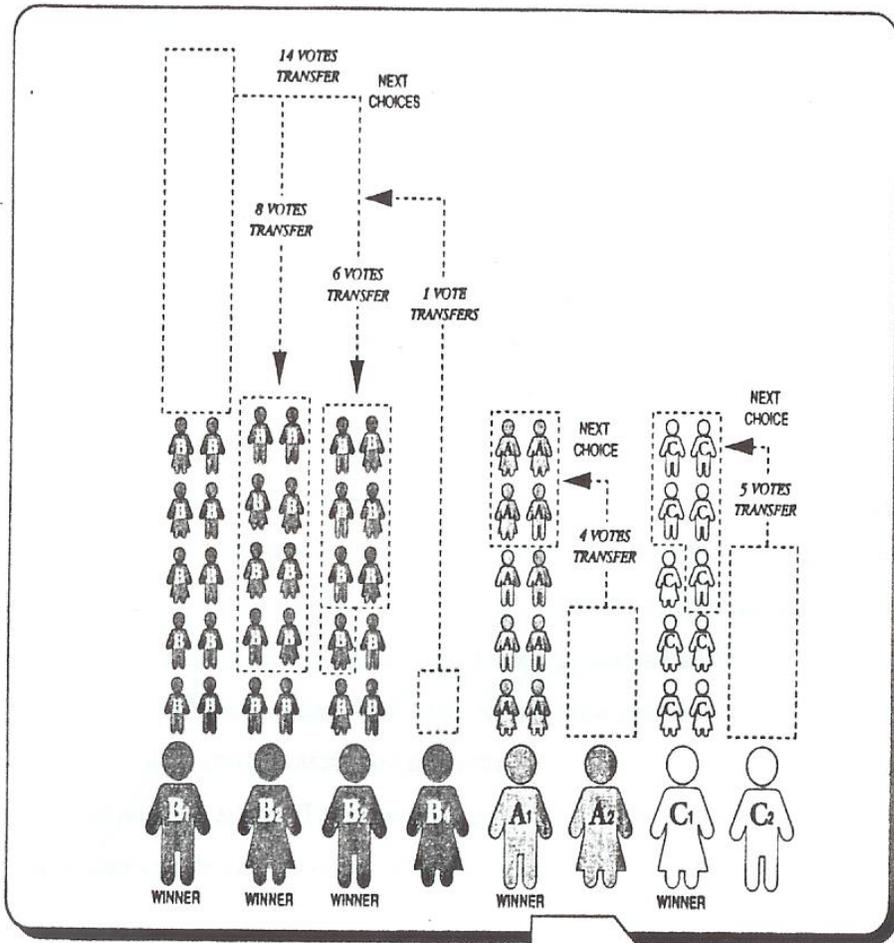
The 1994 governor's race in New Mexico is a good example of one where instant runoff voting might have made a difference. The 11% of voters who voted for Green Party candidate Roberto Mondragon could have listed the Democratic candidate as their second choice, rather than Republican candidate Gary Johnson. When Mondragon was eliminated, these votes would have transferred to the Democrat. Because there was no transferable ballot, Mondragon's supporters couldn't give their vote to the Democrat, who ended up losing to the Republican by 9% of the vote.

Instant runoff voting, with its transferable ballot, has many attributes to recommend it for electing mayors, governors, presidents, etc. It is fair to all political sides, and prevents majorities from splitting their vote. It allows voters to express their support for a favorite candidate, rather than being forced to choose the "lesser of two evils." Yet voters who select a losing candidate can still see their vote transfer and help elect another candidate. Finally, because runoffs or primaries are no longer necessary to determine the winner, the taxpayers save money by not having to hold the second election.

However, it is important to note that instant runoff voting does not give proportional representation, because we are only electing one seat. In order to get proportional representation you need to be electing three seats or more. But this illustration shows how transferable ballots work, how votes transfer when a voter's top choice gets eliminated. It simply transfers to the next choice, right on down the line.

# REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY AT ITS BEST

MAJORITY DECIDES, MINORITY EARN'S ITS FAIR SHARE



14

### Representative Democracy At Its Best

In Illustration 14, we see that both the B majority and the A and C minorities are able to win their fair share of seats as a result of using preference voting. As a result of

- ◆ the transferable ballot
- ◆ allowing voters to rank candidates in their order of preference, and
- ◆ the lower threshold

up to 85 to 90 percent of voters in a preference voting election typically help to elect someone. By comparison, in a winner take all system, say with two candidates running in a district election, up to 49.9 percent of voters may vote for a losing candidate and waste their votes. If there are three candidates running, up to two-thirds of voters may vote for a losing candidate and waste their votes. In the 1994 U.S. Congressional elections, only *twenty three percent* of eligible voters—that's fewer than one in four—elected someone. In the 1994 elections in Germany and South Africa, more than three in four eligible voters elected someone, and every voter in Germany and South Africa had a meaningful choice at the polls. That's because the number of wasted votes under a proportional system like preference voting, list system or mixed member system is a much lower figure.

When voters can vote for their favorite candidate or party, and when their favorite candidates or party actually has a chance of winning, this has a tendency to inject a lot of enthusiasm into the electorate. This is one of the reasons that proportional representation systems have such higher voter turn-out (75-95% of eligible voters), compared to winner take all systems (37% in 1994 Congressional elections, 44% in 1996 Congressional elections)—because there are more choices on the ballot for voters to choose from that actually have a chance of winning. With proportional representation, we get a legislature that reflects the make-up of our society. We get minority representation *as well as* majority rule.

### Proportional representation as a form of campaign finance reform

Many people don't realize that proportional systems are a form of campaign finance reform. Firstly, because candidates in PR systems need less votes to win a seat, it means candidates don't have to spend so much money to win that seat. Secondly, candidates can do targeted campaigning to specific constituencies, thereby reducing the area they have to cover and the amount of money it takes to win their seat. The way this works is, say that you are a Republican candidate and you want to win votes from that constituency. Then you go to those parts of the city where Republican voters live. If you consider yourself a labor candidate, or a law and order advocate, or a Latino candidate, you go to those parts of the city and you only mail out mailers to those houses that are identified as those supporters. You don't have to campaign all over the city, you don't have to plaster your name all over every billboard, bumper sticker, and television and radio commercial in the city. With preference voting, you can do targeted campaigning and thereby reduce the amount of money it takes to win a seat.

This also is true for neighborhood candidates. A candidate can decide to win their thirty thousand votes in two or three neighborhoods, and they can run very strongly in those neighborhoods, going door-to-door, shaking hands, meeting people, and running as a neighborhood candidate. They can spend less money by just spending money in those neighborhoods, just like you would with a district election system. Cambridge, Massachusetts uses preference voting to elect its city council and school boards, and several of the winning candidates usually have a strong backing in the neighborhoods.

So proportional representation can give a lot of the advantages of winner take all district elections without the disadvantages of having to draw district lines, and the other drawbacks of districts noted earlier. Proportional representation allows voters to "district themselves" by defining what constituency or geographic area they think they're from. With winner take all districts, the district lines are drawn by some bureaucrats or political appointees who get together in a room and carve up the lines, pressing this grid down upon the city. The city is stuck with these lines for the next ten years, even if the demographics shift.

But proportional representation allows for shifting demographics and generally gives representation based on what a voter *thinks*, rather than where they live. However, in those cases where a voter's locality truly has a great deal to do with how they think, whether they're from a neighborhood or from a rural area or wherever, then those voters will get to express their geographical interest via proportional representation. It can do that just as well as single seat district elections, but it does many other things much better than district elections.

Also, traditional approaches to campaign finance reform will not make it substantially easier for a third party candidate to run against the established two party monopoly. That's because *third parties lose due to their minority status* within single seat districts and plurality elections, not from their lack of money. After all, third parties rarely win at local levels, where costs are not prohibitive. Third parties are minority parties, and minorities by definition cannot win a majority or even a plurality of the vote. A majority is a majority, no matter how small the locale.

So if the goal is to have a multiparty democracy where voters have a range of viable choices, then proportional representation is the most important reform of all.

# A FAIR RESULT

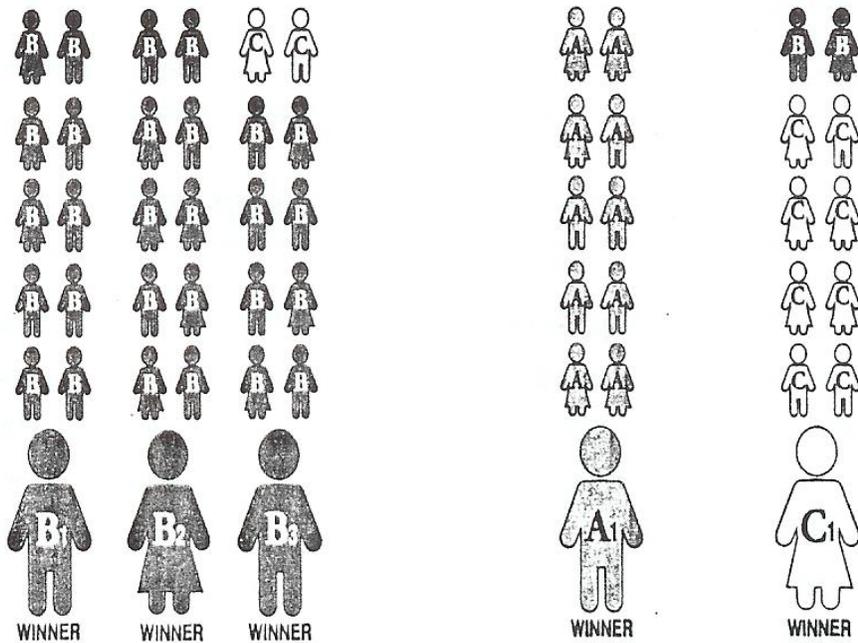
*MOST VOTERS ARE WINNERS*

## SUMMARY

A CANDIDATES: 10 VOTERS ON FIRST COUNT → 1 SEAT

B CANDIDATES: 30 VOTERS ON FIRST COUNT → 3 SEATS

C CANDIDATES: 10 VOTERS ON FIRST COUNT → 1 SEAT



15

**REPRESENTATIVES: A - 1 • B - 3 • C - 1**

## A Fair Result

Illustration 15 is the last illustration. Let's summarize some of our main points:

- ◆ Voting systems are not neutral. They have certain attributes and they bring with them certain strengths and weaknesses.
- ◆ Winner take all systems are majoritarian systems. They allow majorities to dominate representation to the point of almost always excluding minority perspectives, whether that's a political or racial minority, unless you can gerrymander a district around that minority. As a result of recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings, that practice is in jeopardy for racial minorities.
- ◆ Proportional representation systems reduce the number of votes a candidate or party needs to win a seat. This opens up the races to various minority perspectives, whether racial or political, without having to gerrymander district lines. Proportional representation also elects more women candidates.
- ◆ Because you need less votes to get elected with PR, this makes it possible to spend less money and still win a seat. That's why proportional representation is a form of *campaign finance reform*.
- ◆ Proportional representation significantly increases voter turnout because voters have more choices and don't have to vote for the "lesser of two evils." Voters can vote their hopes, not their fears.
- ◆ Proportional representation and multi-party democracy has a tendency to clean up campaigns, reduce mud-slinging, produce more issue-oriented campaigns, and lessen legislative gridlock.
- ◆ Proportional representation and multi-party democracy produce policies that better reflect the majority's will, because more people have representation and input into policy-making

To implement proportional representation does not require any changes to the U.S. Constitution. All that is required are changes to applicable local, state and -- for the U.S. House -- one federal law. Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney (Democrat, Georgia) has introduced the Voters' Choice Act that will modify a 1967 federal law mandating single-seat districts so that states can elect their Congressional delegations from multi-seat districts via proportional representation. If passed, Rep. McKinney's bill will allow states to avoid the pitfalls of race-conscious districting for the U.S. House of Representatives, which was declared unconstitutional by a recent Supreme Court ruling. At the same time the McKinney Bill would give more electoral opportunity to women candidates, third parties and independent candidates.

Winner take all systems are over two-hundred years old. At the time when we adopted it in this country it was virtually the only type of democracy known. Proportional and semi-proportional representation systems came along a hundred or so years later as a *reform* to the problems with the antiquated winner take all system.

Proportional voting allows both majority and minority perspectives to win seats in fair, open and competitive elections, without having to draw controversial gerrymandered district lines. Proportional representation allows minority perspectives to win a seat at the table of legislative bargaining, and by doing that draws minority perspectives back into the realm of electoral politics. This makes for a much more stable democracy, because the decisions and policies that are arrived at are more consensual decisions decided by wider segments of the society. It's not any coincidence that the winner take all systems are mostly at the bottom of the barrel in terms of voter turnout, while the proportional systems are mostly at the top.

For this reason and more, the trend in the world is clearly changing away from winner take all systems and toward proportional systems. In fact proportional voting systems are now used by most of the major democracies in the world. Most recently, New Zealand, which used the winner take all system for a hundred and forty years, converted to a proportional representation system. Almost all of the countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union chose to use proportional representation when they became democracies. South Africa, which recently threw off the chains of apartheid and became a multi-racial democracy, specifically rejected the winner take all voting system in favor of the list system of PR because they knew that in order to stabilize their country, they had to give representation to the white minority. If they had used a winner take all system, the black majority would have shut out the white minority. That would have fueled unrest among some of the white minority who were calling for secession. That might have plunged South Africa into civil war, like their winner take all neighbor to the north, Angola. So it was a conscious policy on the part of Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress to adopt a proportional system and give fair representation to the white minority, as a way to make their democracy more stable.

In South Africa's first election, the white minority won its fair share of seats without a single gerrymandered district. Moreover, the main parties reached out to voters of both races by running *multiracial slates* of candidates. Rather than polarize the nation along racial lines, the proportional election helped unify a fragile democracy.

Meanwhile, in the U.S. we continue to cling to a two-hundred year old majoritarian winner take all system that systematically denies representation to minority perspectives, racial, political or otherwise. Then we try to graft onto that antiquated system a few gerrymandered districts for racial representation, a practice that is under increasing fire by the courts. This is an outdated way to form a multi-racial and multi-partisan democracy.

Voters and non-voters alike are telling us loud and clear that "the system is broke." There's a more sensible approach -- proportional representation. It is better adapted to a multi-racial and multi-partisan democracy in the twenty-first century. Proportional representation really is "state-of-the art" democracy, as most of the established democracies have already discovered. ♦