



The Center for
Voting and Democracy

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To: The Ohio Constitutional Modernization Commission
From: FairVote
Re: Recommendation to Consider Alternative Methods of Legislative Redistricting
Date: October 27, 2014

Introduction

FairVote: The Center for Voting and Democracy is a national, non-partisan organization that studies the impact of our electoral rules on participation, representation and governance and advocates for election reform. We submit this testimony to recommend that this commission consider proposing **alternatives to single-winner** representation when deciding how Ohio's state legislature will be elected. Only a ranked choice voting system or a District Plus mixed system can simultaneously allow for compact districts, meaningful elections for all voters, districts that are consistent with the Voting Rights Act, and accurate statewide representation.

Policymakers face several competing priorities when drawing legislative districts. Districts that are safe for one party deprive voters of real choice and can reduce the accountability of that party's leadership. On the other hand, majority-minority districts that are politically uncompetitive can be a necessary tool to ensure racial minorities are fairly represented in the legislature under the requirements of the Voting Rights Act. Meanwhile, drawing districts with an eye to partisan competitiveness (both within districts and statewide) or adequate racial minority representation can compromise districts' geographic integrity, splitting or fusing communities unnaturally and leading to perceptions of unscrupulous gerrymandering. While a bipartisan or independent redistricting commission can help create fairer and/or more legitimate district maps by reducing one-sided partisanship in the districting process, such commissions are inevitably caught between the rocks and hard places imposed by the tradeoffs inherent to a system reliant only on single-winner-take-all districts.

These tradeoffs, however, can be substantially or completely mitigated simply by moving away from the idea that all representatives must represent only one district. In this memorandum we briefly describe two election methods which Ohio could implement separately or in tandem to increase the legitimacy and fairness of its redistricting processes: *multi-seat ranked choice voting* and "*Districts Plus.*" While our assumption is that these systems would be considered only for state legislative elections, they could be

used for congressional elections if Congress were amend a 1967 law that mandated use of single winner districts.

Multi-Seat Ranked Choice Voting

In each of Ohio's General Assembly districts and U.S. House districts, a single winner elected by simple plurality vote provides all representation for that districts' voters, whether he or she earns 51% of the vote or 80%. Voters who preferred other candidates must nonetheless be represented by a candidate they opposed.

In a multi-seat district with ranked choice voting, more than one candidate can win (we recommend electing five candidates in each district), and each could represent a different bloc of voters in that district, granting representation to the political left, right, and center of every geographic area across Ohio. Ohio in fact has a history of using this method (called "single transferable vote in state statute) in five of its cities.

The benefits of ranked choice voting in multi-seat districts is straightforward: it can allow an independent redistricting commission to draw straight-forward districts, and then allow voters to self-district by choosing their own nominees. With ranked choice voting, voters can [honestly rank all the candidates](#) in order of preference, and those rankings are used to help nearly every voter elect a candidate they support.

Multi-seat districts, moreover, encourage the nomination and election of women candidates. Of the ten states with the highest percentage of women elected to state legislature, six choose those legislatures in [multi-seat districts](#). Women's representation within the Ohio General Assembly has declined in recent years; women make up 23.5% of the General Assembly, which ranks Ohio 26th out 50 states. Please find attached FairVote's report on the state of women's representation in Ohio, excerpted from our *State of Women's Representation 2013-2014* [report](#).

Multi-seat districts have a long history in municipal and state legislative elections. Indeed, Ashtabula, Ohio was the first city to adopt multi-seat ranked choice voting for its city council, in 1915. Cincinnati, Cleveland, Hamilton and Toledo also used this system, with admirable results as reported by Kathleen Barber in her book [Proportional Representation and Election Reform in Ohio](#). A key reason for its being discontinued was election administration issues that are resolved with modern technology.

FairVote recommends that any redistricting commission be given the power to consider multi-seat district plans with ranked choice voting. At the very least, such plans should be strongly considered by a redistricting task force.

Please find attached FairVote's sample fair voting plan for Ohio's U.S. House districts, excerpted from our *Monopoly Politics 2014* report. Please also see the full *Monopoly Politics 2014 Report* at www.fairvoting.us for an in-depth introduction to the distortions imposed by single-winner-take-all districts and the remedies available through fair voting systems like ranked choice voting.

Districts Plus

Under Districts Plus, most representatives are still elected from single winner districts, but a certain additional number of "accountability seats" are filled based on the number of votes each party's candidates received statewide. For example, Ohio's House of Representatives could consist of 80 standard seats elected from 80 districts and an additional 20 accountability seats. If Republican candidates for the Ohio House won 55% of the statewide vote and Democratic candidates won 45%, the accountability seats could ensure that Republicans would win 55 seats total and the Democrats would win 45 seats total. The single district winners would all take office, with the accountability seats filled to provide the parties with a fair complement of seats. The accountability seats would be elected from larger, overlapping "accountability districts" as a separate ballot line in the general election.

Districts Plus guarantees that when one party's candidates gets the most votes, that party wins the most seats. It also makes every vote meaningful: even when a district is a foregone conclusion for one party, every vote cast in that district counts towards the statewide total upon which the accountability seats are awarded; for that reason, districts can be drawn with a focus on traditional criteria like compactness and compliance with the Voting Rights Act, as they always will be competitive for purposes of the statewide vote. Districts Plus increases leadership accountability and gives parties incentives to field strong candidates in every district, no matter how imbalanced that district may be. Districts Plus could be implemented separate from or in addition to multi-seat districts with fair voting.

Please see FairVote's [Districts Plus Policy Guide](#) for more detail.

Conclusion

We strongly encourage the Ohio Constitutional Modernization Commission to empower any redistricting body to consider multi-seat districts with fair voting and Districts Plus as means to create fairer and more representative legislative districts. We thank you for your consideration of these recommendations and would be pleased to provide additional information.

FairVote is a non-partisan, non-profit research and advocacy group which advances structural reforms designed to make American democracy more functional, fair, and fully representative. Based in Takoma Park, MD, FairVote works locally, statewide and nationally, advising non-governmental organizations and policymakers at all levels of government.

Women's Representation in Ohio

Parity Ranking: 37th of 50

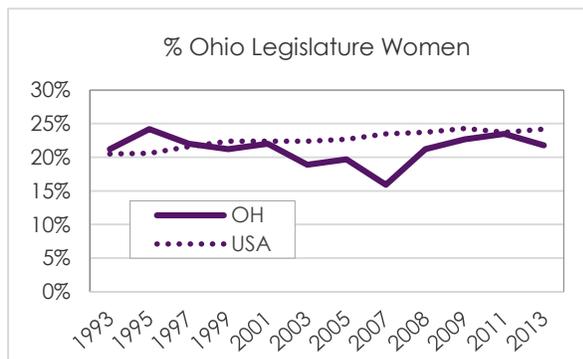
Score of 12: Two points for lieutenant governor, 3 points for its three women U.S. House members, and 7 for the percentage of state legislators who are women.

Quick Facts

Nancy Hollister was serving as Lt. Governor when Gov. George Voinovich resigned his office to take a seat in the U.S. Senate in 1998. She became governor upon his resignation, but served only for the 11 days that remained of his term. Thus far, she is Ohio's first and only woman governor. A woman has never been a major party candidate for governor in Ohio, and no woman is seeking a major party nomination for governor in 2014.

Trending

The percentage of women in Ohio's state legislature declined sharply in 2002 and today is only two percentage points higher than it was 20 years ago.



Source: Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University.

Elections to Watch

No women are running for governor, but Gov. John Kasich (R) will likely run again with Lieutenant Governor Mary Taylor in 2014. Nina Turner (D) is taking on incumbent Jon Husted (R) for Secretary of State. Ohio's three female U.S. House Members are projected to win in 2014; only one male incumbent is potentially vulnerable.

Levels of Government

Statewide Executives

Female governors: Nancy Hollister served for 11 days from 1998-1999 when the previous governor was sworn in as U.S. senator.

Statewide elected executives: 1 of 6 (lieutenant governor)

Number of women to have held statewide elected executive office: 9, two of whom were appointed.

Congress

U.S. Senate: 0 of 2 seats are held by women

U.S. House: 3 of 16 seats are held by women

In its history, Ohio has elected 11 women to Congress.

State Legislature

Percentage women: 23.5%

Rankings: 26th of 50

Senate: 8 of 33 (24.2%) are women

House: 23 of 99 (23.2%) are women

Method of election: Single-member districts

Local

None of Ohio's five largest cities and counties with elected executives has a woman mayor or county executive.

Notable Recent Election

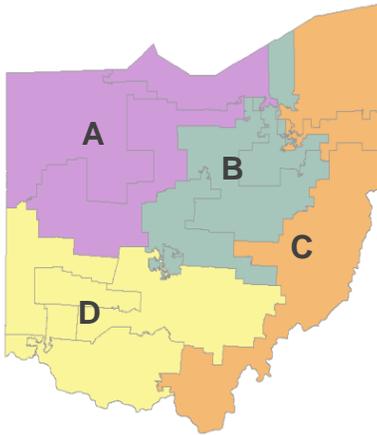
In 2013, Cincinnati Vice Mayor Roxanne Qualls lost her bid for mayor against John Cranley by 16 points.

Words of Wisdom

"A few of [the party leaders] opposed my nomination, but most of them thought it would be a graceful gesture which would do them no harm since they were sure I would get tired of politics in a few months, and flit on to something else." - Frances Bolton, U.S. representative from Ohio (1940-1969)

Ohio's Fair Representation Voting Plan

Super District (w/current Cong. Dist. #s)	# of Seats	Pop. Per Seat	% to Win (plus 1 vote)	Partisanship (D/R %)	Current Rep.: 12 R, 4 D	Super District Rep.: 7 R, 7 D, 2 ?
A (CDs – 4, 5, 9)	3	721,032	25%	50 / 50	2 R, 1 D	1 R, 1 D, 1 ?
B (CDs – 3, 7, 11, 12, 16)	5	721,031	16.7%	56 / 44	3 R, 2 D	2 R, 3 D
C (CDs – 6, 13, 14)	3	721,031	25%	50 / 50	2 R, 1 D	1 R, 1 D, 1 ?
D (CDs – 1, 2, 8, 10, 15)	5	721,031	16.7%	43 / 57	5 R	3 R, 2 D



Partisan and Racial Impact: This fair voting plan would correct the severe partisan imbalance of the current gerrymandered map, providing both major parties with an equal opportunity to win a majority of Ohio's seats. Seven seats would typically be won by Democrats, seven by Republicans, and two would swing between the parties. Black voters would have the opportunity to elect a candidate of choice in super district B.

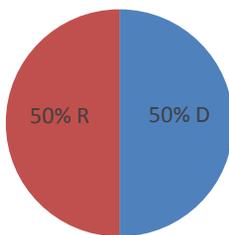
How Does Fair Representation Voting Work?

Fair representation voting methods such as ranked choice voting describe American forms of proportional representation with a history in local and state elections. They uphold American electoral traditions, such as voting for candidates rather than parties. They ensure all voters participate in competitive elections and ensure more accurate representation, with the majority of voters likely to elect most seats and backers of both major parties likely to elect preferred candidates.

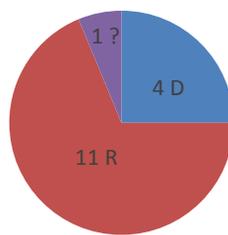
Instead of 16 individual congressional districts, our fair voting plan combines these districts into four larger "super districts" with three or five representatives. Any candidate who is the first choice of more than a quarter of voters in a three-seat district will win a seat. Any candidate who is the first choice of more than a sixth of voters in a five-seat district will win a seat.

Comparing a Fair Representation Voting Plan to Ohio's Current Districts

Statewide Partisanship



2014 Projections



FairVote's Plan



Partisanship is an indicator of voters' underlying preference for Democrats or Republicans. See our Methodology section to learn how Partisanship is determined.

Benefits of a Fair Representation Voting Plan

More accurate representation: Congressional delegations more faithfully reflect the preferences of all voters. Supporters of both major parties elect candidates in each district, with accurate balance of each district's left, right, and center.

More voter choice and competition: Third parties, independents and major party innovators have better chances, as there is a lower threshold for candidates to win a seat. Because voters have a range of choices, candidates must compete to win voter support.

Better representation of racial minorities: Racial minority candidates have a lower threshold to earn seats, even when not geographically concentrated. More voters of all races are in a position to elect candidates.

More women: More women are likely to run and win. Single-member districts often stifle potential candidates.

View more fair voting plans at FairVotingUS.com

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