

Fair Voting Elections in Illinois: Elections to the House, 1870 - 1980

In 2000-2001, an Illinois task force of leading political and civic leaders, co-chaired by Governor Jim Edgar (R) and former Congressman and federal Judge Abner Mikva (D), examined the effects of replacing use of cumulative voting for elections to the Illinois House of Representatives with winner-take-all elections. Cumulative voting is a fair voting method that makes it likely that large majorities of voters from across the spectrum will elect a preferred candidate.

Illinois used cumulative voting from 1870 to 1980 to elect members of the Illinois House until a constitutional amendment reduced the house size by a third and converted to winner-take-all voting in one-seat districts. The debate on the amendment focused primarily on the “cutback” provision in house size.

The task force called for a return to cumulative voting. Based on Illinois’ electoral history, members concluded that, as directly quoted in the report, cumulative voting:

- Offers greater choice for voters in primary and general elections.
- Provides prospective candidates easier access to the electoral system.
- Provides greater representation for the minority political party in districts dominated by the other party.
- Provides individual legislators greater independence from legislative leaders.
- Generates richer deliberations and statewide consensus among all legislators since both parties would be represented in all parts of the state.

The lessons from Illinois’ experience with a fair voting system are even more timely today. It’s no surprise that bringing back cumulative voting has earned bipartisan support in the state. Backers include the Democratic and Republican leaders of the state senate, the Republicans’ 2010 gubernatorial nominee Bill Brady and President Barack Obama, who in 2002 sponsored legislation to hold a statewide referendum to bring back cumulative voting.

Read the full [Institute for Government and Public Affairs report](#).