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Multimember Districts

As of 1998, thirteen states still had multimember districts (MMD) in at least one of their legislative bodies. In the past, changes in the use of MMDs have been focused not on, "population-based apportionment but on the quality of representation," especially that of women and minorities (NCSL, 1999). What follows is a concise report of MMD advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages:

Matland and Studlar (1996), Darcy et al (1994), Moncrief and Thompson (1992) agree that MMD electoral systems have substantially higher percentages of female legislators than single-member district (SMD) systems. According to Darcy et al (1994), "overall, the proportion of women running (13.5%) and winning (13.4%) in the MMD was about double the proportion of those running (6.2%) and winning (7.4%) in the SMDs." By extension, Welch and Studlar (1990) hypothesized that the greater the magnitude of MMDs (number of members per district), then an increased proportion of women elected will result. However, their findings fail to support this hypothesis.

"Parties under MMDs will be more ideologically diverse, which may undermine the ability of party leaders to build coalitions and enforce bargains. If one's greatest concern in a local legislature is partisan gridlock, MMDs could potentially ease the partisan feuding by making each party more ideologically diverse. If, on the other hand, one sees party cohesion as an asset that can be used to build lasting coalitions on complicated, multi-faceted pieces of legislation, then perhaps MMDs are less desirable" (Adams, 1996).

Disadvantages

Studies find that representation of geographically concentrated minorities could suffer from MMD electoral systems (Moncrief and Thompson, 1992; Gerber et al, 1998). Minority votes are less diluted in SMDs than in MMDs (Gerber et al, 1998).

In terms of campaign finance, multimember districts "should not only have more expensive races than single-member districts but should also be districts in which campaign spending is a more important factor for winning" (Gierzynski 1998 p. 25, see also Hogan and Hamm 1998).

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