

Gridlock!

The 2004 edition of

No-Contest Elections™

A report on the lack of competitiveness and voter control
in Minnesota's state legislative elections

Predicting the results of elections for the
state House of Representatives

By FairVote Minnesota

October 18, 2004

About FairVote Minnesota

FairVote Minnesota is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that educates the public about the effect our voting system has on the quality of our democracy and about alternative voting methods that may improve public life. Voter choice and control over election outcomes, majority rule, the ability of all voters to win representation, and incentives for elevated discourse and for civic participation emanating from the voting system are attributes of an improved public life and higher performing democracy promoted by the organization.

About the Author

Tony Anderson Solgård has been professionally active in public affairs for 20 years. He has authored dozens of published articles on agriculture, the environment, business, and public finance, as well as politics. His involvement in the study of voting systems originated with a 1991 study visit to Sweden during which he observed an election campaign. Since that time, he has spoken about voting systems to groups around the state, testified at the state legislature, and co-founded FairVote Minnesota, which he serves as president.

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What the analysts are saying about *Gridlock!: No-Contest Elections*[™] 2004

America's winner-take-all, two-party system together with the development of strongly Democratic or strongly Republican legislative districts over most of our nation and state have resulted in situations in which: a) minority party voters see little point in bothering to go to the polls; and b) elected officials see little point in responding to the concerns of their minority constituents. FairVote Minnesota's latest study, *Gridlock!* persuasively demonstrates how the current system subverts true democracy and suggests common-sense ways by which the problem can be effectively addressed.

Joseph E. (Joe) Schwartzberg. Joe is an Emeritus Professor of Geography at the University of Minnesota and taught political geography there and at the University of Pennsylvania for more than forty years. He is the author of the newly published *Revitalizing the United Nations: Reform through Weighted Voting*.

Executive Summary

This report is the third in a biennial series. Previous editions of the report detailed the problems stemming from noncompetitive elections. Since the 1999 report, much progress has been made on raising awareness of the problem of noncompetitive elections. The Ventura administration and the court panel in charge of redistricting led state government toward public accountability and increased competitiveness in the redistricting process.

But recent legislative sessions have experienced gridlock. A major contributor to gridlock is a state divided into one-party political regions. In such regions the minority party has no interest in representing the interests of areas controlled by the dominant party. This edition of *No-Contest Elections*TM highlights this problem of gridlock.

This report also identifies where swing voters may be found. Because Minnesota is considered a battleground state in the Presidential election, campaigns have searched the state for these swing voters.

Finally, the profile of the state in 2004 shows a shift in safe seats from Republicans to Democrats. The overall number of seats considered 'safe' increased significantly, due to a more aggressive analysis based on the experience of the two previous editions of this report. The DFL is predicted to pick up at least nine seats from the Republicans. The winner is not predicted in 19 seats.

Third party candidates could affect the results of the election in 34 districts. However, third party candidates have not filed in most of those contests. Swing voters in 46 districts could tip those elections one way or the other.

The Ten Most Untouchables list once again is made up of DFLers from the central cities and the northeast. The Ten Most Vulnerable representatives are largely Republicans in the I-35 corridor south of the Twin Cities, with pockets in the first-tier western suburbs and the northwest. The districts with the most swing voters are concentrated in the central part of the state around Saint Cloud. In spite of prevailing in its bid to keep its candidates on the ballot, the Independence Party is not running candidates in districts where it has its greatest strength, and is not likely to affect the outcome of more than three elections.

Drawing competitive districts, though helpful, is not a complete solution to the problem of gridlock. The plurality voting method must be replaced by a voting method designed to achieve proportional representation and to allow both parties to elect candidates from all parts of the state. This would be a major step toward breaking gridlock.

Sensible steps toward a better voting method include 1) a home rule city deciding to use an alternative voting method, serving as a laboratory of democracy; 2) the state requiring new voting equipment to be compatible with ranked ballots used in some alternative voting methods; and 3) a blue-ribbon commission evaluating various voting methods and making a recommendation about which would provide the greatest benefits.

Introduction

This is the third in the biennial series, *No-Contest Elections*TM. The inaugural 1999 report is available at www.fairvotemn.org/resources/publications/nce.pdf.

What's wrong with non-competitive elections?

Previous editions of the report identified the following faults of noncompetitive elections:

- Noncompetitive elections do not allow a shift in voter sentiment to result in a shift in how voters are represented. This insulates elected officials and keeps them structurally unaccountable to the voters. Over time, they can become unresponsive to voters' concerns.
- Noncompetitive elections give political power to those in the safest seats. This punishes areas where good candidates from both of the largest parties are coming and going with some regularity.
- Noncompetitive elections "Balkanize" the state into regions controlled by one party or the other. The interests of each region are pitted against each other as a result of partisanship. Republicans in Democratic areas (or Democrats in Republican areas) are permanently unrepresented, as are those who do not identify with either of these parties. Balkanization is highlighted in this "Gridlock" edition of the study.
- Noncompetitive elections direct the real campaign at swing voters in swing districts, leaving most voters feeling like politics is not about issues that affect them.
- Taken together, these effects of noncompetitive elections reduce voter turnout.
- Noncompetitive elections violate the spirit of the one-person, one-vote principle. No matter how many votes are piled up for the winning side, those votes can elect only one voice to represent each district at the legislature. Like-minded voters who are 'packed' into the same district could win more representation for themselves if they were spread among more districts.
- Noncompetitive elections in districts with high percentages of people of color concentrate the influence of those voters, diminishing their ability to win representation proportionate with their numbers.

Progress made on competitiveness and accountability to the public

The 1999 report demonstrated that the 2000 legislative elections were so noncompetitive that two-thirds of the elections could be predicted a year ahead of time with 95 percent accuracy. If there are more voters in a district who prefer one party over others, the preferred party will have an advantage in electing its candidates. The greater the dominant party's advantage, the 'safer' the seat will be for that party's candidates.

Since the 1999 report was published, the administration of Governor Jesse Ventura took on legislative redistricting, championing the issue of competitiveness first introduced by FairVote Minnesota's *No-Contest Elections*TM. For the first time in history, a public entity evaluated

Minnesota's legislative plans for average party strength and made the results available to the general public.

It would appear that the court panel that ultimately came up with the final districting plan gave consideration to political competitiveness as a criterion in how it drew the new map. There are more competitive districts than there were in the 1990s districting plan. There are fewer "untouchable" districts where the dominant party has a lock on the seat. And the plan is more reflective of the partisan balance of the state.

Today, anyone with internet access can go to state-sponsored web sites and view a comparison of the overall political competitiveness of the proposed redistricting plans <http://www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/gis/html/legplancomp.pdf> and a district-by-district analysis of the final plan issued by the court panel <http://www.gis.leg.mn/html/12002/reports/house/compet.pdf>. Unfortunately, "political competitiveness" is not on the list of district level reports available for other redistricting plan proposals. The public interest has been well-served by these developments. Altogether, the state's efforts are a good step toward accountability to the public for the redistricting process.

Results are more predictable than previously thought

The experience of the two previous reports revealed that the correlation between a party's advantage in strength and the likelihood that a party will win an election remains strong down to almost no difference in party strength. The correlation for the 2000 election held firm for 90 percent of the districts with an accuracy rate of 90 percent, with the limit being a 3.3 percent difference in party strength. In 2002, 89 percent of the elections could be predicted with 89 percent accuracy, down to a 2.2 percent difference in party strength.

Due to this finding, this edition takes a more aggressive position in defining 'safe' districts. While the previous reports used a 10 percent difference as the threshold for 'safe,' this report sets that threshold at just a 3 percent difference and predicts over 85 percent of the contests.

Gridlock!

During the 2002 legislative session, leaders of the DFL and GOP seemed to find common cause in blaming Governor Jesse Ventura and three-party government for low performance at the legislature. Just give one of us the governorship, they seemed to say, and we'll show you how well we can get things done. The opening gavel of the 2003 session had barely fallen when their actions belied their words. The meetings of the legislature in the last two years have been widely regarded as the most do-nothing sessions in memory. The word for it? Gridlock!

The cornerstone of gridlock is "Balkanization," the division of the state into political regions dominated by one party or the other that comes from noncompetitive elections. Democrats dominate the inner cities and the northeast. Republicans dominate the outer suburbs and the southeast. Neither party is able to elect legislators out of regions controlled by the other party. Neither party has a political interest in addressing the needs of the areas where they do not elect anyone. "Why should we?" is the first question asked of any proposal. Transportation and education are issues recently caught in the cross hairs of Balkanization. Republicans control the state appropriations process and there are no elected Republicans from Minneapolis or St. Paul to represent transit or education needs at the legislature.

The public interest demands that the entire state receive equitable treatment from our government. This requires competitive elections so both parties have a political interest in representing all areas of the state.

Battleground

For the first time in decades, Minnesota is considered a swing state in the Presidential election. The nation is evenly divided on this contest and so is the state. The campaigns need to both mobilize their base of support and appeal to the undecided voters. This report will identify where both of those groups are concentrated.

Swing voters will also play a key role in several of the state legislative districts that are competitive. The analysis in this report reveals the districts where swing voters will be at least as important as mobilizing the base.

Methodology

Legislative district data for this report were compiled from precinct-level vote results provided by the Secretary of State's office.

Party Strength - This report uses party strength as the basis for assessing the level of competitiveness in Minnesota's legislative elections. The data are the average percent of the vote received in each district by Democratic-Farmer-Labor (DFL), Republican (GOP), Independence (IND), Green Party (GRN), and write-in candidates for the offices of Secretary of State, Auditor, and Attorney General in 2002.

DFL-GOP Party Strength Difference – The difference was calculated between the DFL party strength and the GOP party strength (DFL% minus GOP%).

Swing Voters – The sum of the maximum vote for each party minus the minimum vote for each party divided by the total number of votes cast.

District Profile – Each district was categorized according to its party strength difference:

<u>Calculation of difference between DFL & GOP averages</u>			
20% <=	Untouchable DFL		
10% <=	Comfortable DFL	< 20%	
3% <=	Probable DFL	< 10%	
0% <	Leaning DFL	< 3%	
-3% <	Leaning GOP	< 0%	
-10% <	Probable GOP	<= -3%	
-20% <	Comfortable GOP	<= -10%	
	Untouchable GOP	<= -20%	

Predicted Winner – The elections for state representative and state senator in districts categorized as either 'Untouchable,' 'Comfortable,' or 'Probable' for a party were predicted to be won by that party. The results for districts categorized as 'Leaning' one way or the other were not predicted, or 'Not called.'

Third Party Potential Impact – Districts with potential for an Independence or Green Party candidate to influence the results were determined by subtracting the absolute value of ‘DFL-GOP Party Strength Difference’ from ‘Total Third Party Average %.’ Districts in which the difference between these two figures was greater than zero were determined to have the greatest potential for Independence Party impact. In these districts, the presence of an Independence or Green Party candidate would make it likely that the election would be decided by less than a majority of the voters. The winner might be different than if there were no third-party candidate in the race.

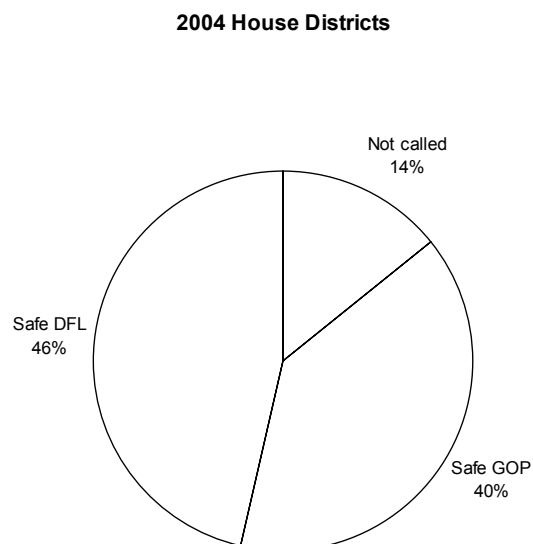
Findings

Minnesota profile

House districts have the following profile going into the 2004 elections:

<u>Profile (margin)</u>	2004 House Districts		
	<u>DFL</u>	<u>GOP</u>	<u>Total</u>
Leaning (less than 3% margin)	7	12	19
Probable (from 3% up to 10%)	18	21	39
Comfortable (from 10% up to 20%)	19	22	41
Untouchable (20% or greater margin)	25	10	35
Total	69	65	134

Graph. Minnesota profile



Overall predictions

Going into the 2004 elections, the situation is as follows:

	Incumbents in safe districts	Incumbents in districts leaning toward incumbent's party	Vulnerable incumbents (in districts safe for, or leaning toward, other party)	Party's incumbent not running or defeated	Total
DFL	45	2	3	3	53
GOP	46*	9	17	9	81
Total	91	11	20	12	134

* Republican incumbent Arlon Lindner is running as an independent candidate, but is counted here.

The following are predicted to be the results of the 2004 elections.

	Reelect own incumbents who are not vulnerable	Pick off other party's vulnerable incumbents	Win open seats	Total	Change from 2002 predictions
DFL	45	14	2	62	+32
GOP	46	2*	6	54	-35
Not called	11	5	3	19	-40
Total	102	21	11	134	

*As an independent candidate, Arlon Lindner is counted here as a vulnerable incumbent, likely to be picked off by the Republican nominee.

Number of districts affected by Third Party Impact	Number of affected districts with third party candidates running
51	34

Number of districts affected by swing voters (where percent of swing voters is greater than the difference between DFL strength and GOP strength)	46
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District profiles and predictions

The table in this section details our assessment of the competitiveness of each district and predicts the results of the November 2004 elections.

Table. 2004 election predictions: Minnesota House of Representatives by district

District	DFL Avg %	GOP Avg %	Total 3rd Party %	DFL-GOP Difference	Swing Voters %	District Profile	Predicted Winner	Third Party Impact?
01A	49.68%	44.57%	5.72%	5.11%	4.51%	Probable DFL	DFL	Yes
01B	55.20%	38.95%	5.73%	16.25%	3.23%	Comfortable DFL	DFL	
02A	51.25%	41.32%	7.29%	9.92%	4.91%	Probable DFL	DFL	
02B	48.66%	44.66%	6.63%	4.00%	5.21%	Probable DFL	DFL	Yes
03A	58.51%	33.52%	7.76%	24.99%	7.69%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
03B	51.99%	40.09%	7.80%	11.90%	7.82%	Comfortable DFL	DFL	
04A	48.76%	43.57%	7.56%	5.19%	5.84%	Probable DFL	DFL	Yes
04B	42.24%	50.12%	7.60%	-7.88%	7.47%	Probable GOP	GOP	
05A	72.64%	21.16%	5.96%	51.48%	7.65%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
05B	67.99%	25.18%	6.56%	42.81%	7.15%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
06A	59.11%	31.50%	9.28%	27.60%	8.72%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
06B	61.79%	31.00%	7.11%	30.79%	8.54%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
07A	57.08%	33.01%	9.78%	24.07%	10.30%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
07B	68.52%	21.82%	9.54%	46.70%	8.07%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
08A	62.27%	30.19%	7.48%	32.07%	7.21%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
08B	48.31%	44.00%	7.58%	4.31%	6.80%	Probable DFL	DFL	Yes
09A	51.61%	41.13%	7.00%	10.49%	5.02%	Comfortable DFL	DFL	
09B	49.87%	43.62%	6.27%	6.25%	5.62%	Probable DFL	DFL	Yes
10A	42.11%	52.06%	5.76%	-9.95%	6.44%	Probable GOP	GOP	
10B	42.24%	51.37%	6.33%	-9.13%	6.46%	Probable GOP	GOP	
11A	45.68%	47.66%	6.53%	-1.97%	7.09%	Leaning GOP	Not called	Yes
11B	44.75%	47.36%	7.84%	-2.61%	8.44%	Leaning GOP	Not called	Yes
12A	46.48%	46.20%	7.25%	0.27%	7.76%	Leaning DFL	Not called	Yes
12B	45.84%	46.96%	7.20%	-1.12%	12.41%	Leaning GOP	Not called	Yes
13A	45.55%	47.46%	6.95%	-1.91%	9.08%	Leaning GOP	Not called	Yes
13B	47.38%	46.30%	6.27%	1.08%	7.63%	Leaning DFL	Not called	Yes
14A	43.13%	50.00%	6.81%	-6.86%	11.73%	Probable GOP	GOP	
14B	42.98%	48.64%	8.29%	-5.66%	11.60%	Probable GOP	GOP	Yes
15A	43.53%	49.41%	6.98%	-5.88%	12.62%	Probable GOP	GOP	Yes
15B	48.83%	41.50%	9.56%	7.34%	10.16%	Probable DFL	DFL	Yes
16A	43.97%	48.36%	7.62%	-4.40%	10.03%	Probable GOP	GOP	Yes
16B	36.03%	57.48%	6.44%	-21.45%	11.33%	Untouchable GOP	GOP	
17A	44.49%	47.89%	7.54%	-3.40%	6.58%	Probable GOP	GOP	Yes
17B	43.46%	49.29%	7.14%	-5.83%	7.36%	Probable GOP	GOP	Yes
18A	38.73%	53.49%	7.71%	-14.76%	8.77%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
18B	42.17%	50.04%	7.73%	-7.86%	7.78%	Probable GOP	GOP	
19A	38.94%	54.57%	6.38%	-15.63%	7.16%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
19B	36.54%	56.61%	6.72%	-20.06%	7.14%	Untouchable GOP	GOP	
20A	55.06%	38.40%	6.50%	16.66%	6.13%	Comfortable DFL	DFL	
20B	52.88%	39.54%	7.52%	13.34%	8.35%	Comfortable DFL	DFL	
21A	44.28%	48.98%	6.66%	-4.70%	6.90%	Probable GOP	GOP	Yes
21B	42.28%	49.54%	8.17%	-7.26%	6.84%	Probable GOP	GOP	Yes
22A	48.41%	45.49%	6.05%	2.92%	2.75%	Leaning DFL	Not called	Yes
22B	49.26%	44.43%	6.26%	4.83%	4.85%	Probable DFL	DFL	Yes
23A	47.60%	44.44%	7.90%	3.16%	6.97%	Probable DFL	DFL	Yes
23B	48.81%	41.42%	9.69%	7.39%	5.64%	Probable DFL	DFL	Yes
24A	45.35%	46.81%	7.80%	-1.46%	8.18%	Leaning GOP	Not called	Yes
24B	46.85%	43.24%	9.87%	3.61%	7.36%	Probable DFL	DFL	Yes
25A	46.58%	44.67%	8.62%	1.91%	8.02%	Leaning DFL	Not called	Yes
25B	49.49%	41.65%	8.78%	7.83%	8.26%	Probable DFL	DFL	Yes
26A	42.11%	48.08%	9.74%	-5.97%	7.59%	Probable GOP	GOP	Yes
26B	51.35%	39.96%	8.58%	11.39%	8.47%	Comfortable DFL	DFL	
27A	52.62%	37.45%	9.82%	15.17%	6.80%	Comfortable DFL	DFL	
27B	55.82%	36.14%	7.93%	19.68%	5.10%	Comfortable DFL	DFL	
28A	47.87%	43.64%	8.41%	4.23%	8.29%	Probable DFL	DFL	Yes
28B	43.38%	47.63%	8.92%	-4.25%	6.38%	Probable GOP	GOP	Yes
29A	39.68%	50.53%	9.73%	-10.85%	7.01%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
29B	40.30%	50.84%	8.71%	-10.54%	7.16%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
30A	43.82%	44.71%	11.27%	-0.88%	6.72%	Leaning GOP	Not called	Yes
30B	38.22%	51.75%	9.86%	-13.52%	6.66%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
31A	47.83%	42.46%	9.66%	5.37%	4.73%	Probable DFL	DFL	Yes
31B	46.39%	44.84%	8.72%	1.55%	3.59%	Leaning DFL	Not called	Yes
32A	33.34%	60.38%	6.24%	-27.04%	8.53%	Untouchable GOP	GOP	

District	DFL Avg %	GOP Avg %	Total 3rd Party %	DFL-GOP Difference	Swing Voters %	District Profile	Predicted Winner	Third Party Impact?
32B	40.78%	52.32%	6.85%	-11.54%	8.93%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
33A	34.86%	58.32%	6.78%	-23.46%	7.78%	Untouchable GOP	GOP	
33B	33.45%	59.20%	7.30%	-25.74%	8.20%	Untouchable GOP	GOP	
34A	34.22%	58.86%	6.86%	-24.64%	7.85%	Untouchable GOP	GOP	
34B	34.94%	58.85%	6.15%	-23.91%	8.25%	Untouchable GOP	GOP	
35A	38.89%	54.14%	6.95%	-15.25%	8.21%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
35B	35.49%	58.02%	6.44%	-22.52%	7.82%	Untouchable GOP	GOP	
36A	35.22%	58.84%	5.89%	-23.62%	8.24%	Untouchable GOP	GOP	
36B	40.71%	52.37%	6.86%	-11.65%	7.92%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
37A	40.78%	52.80%	6.39%	-12.02%	8.46%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
37B	41.00%	52.58%	6.37%	-11.58%	8.85%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
38A	43.38%	49.31%	7.24%	-5.93%	9.46%	Probable GOP	GOP	Yes
38B	40.10%	53.05%	6.78%	-12.95%	8.74%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
39A	47.79%	45.47%	6.66%	2.32%	8.32%	Leaning DFL	Not called	Yes
39B	48.01%	45.24%	6.65%	2.77%	8.87%	Leaning DFL	Not called	Yes
40A	42.80%	50.29%	6.85%	-7.49%	9.74%	Probable GOP	GOP	
40B	45.91%	47.41%	6.61%	-1.50%	8.49%	Leaning GOP	Not called	Yes
41A	37.52%	55.53%	6.89%	-18.01%	9.04%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
41B	38.33%	55.07%	6.56%	-16.74%	9.55%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
42A	38.79%	53.30%	7.86%	-14.50%	9.04%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
42B	34.37%	58.98%	6.59%	-24.62%	7.94%	Untouchable GOP	GOP	
43A	38.38%	55.18%	6.39%	-16.80%	7.85%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
43B	42.94%	49.46%	7.54%	-6.52%	8.37%	Probable GOP	GOP	Yes
44A	52.36%	38.87%	8.70%	13.50%	6.52%	Comfortable DFL	DFL	
44B	55.12%	36.90%	7.88%	18.22%	6.94%	Comfortable DFL	DFL	
45A	48.96%	44.30%	6.63%	4.66%	7.50%	Probable DFL	DFL	Yes
45B	52.01%	39.90%	8.03%	12.10%	7.47%	Comfortable DFL	DFL	
46A	51.86%	40.74%	7.35%	11.11%	7.37%	Comfortable DFL	DFL	
46B	53.21%	39.11%	7.63%	14.10%	7.29%	Comfortable DFL	DFL	
47A	43.11%	50.16%	6.65%	-7.05%	9.03%	Probable GOP	GOP	
47B	45.55%	47.90%	6.46%	-2.35%	8.25%	Leaning GOP	Not called	Yes
48A	39.58%	53.31%	7.06%	-13.73%	8.31%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
48B	42.72%	50.05%	7.18%	-7.33%	8.78%	Probable GOP	GOP	
49A	38.38%	55.83%	5.73%	-17.45%	8.33%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
49B	45.79%	47.40%	6.76%	-1.61%	7.66%	Leaning GOP	Not called	Yes
50A	55.48%	36.58%	7.85%	18.89%	7.33%	Comfortable DFL	DFL	
50B	44.09%	49.13%	6.71%	-5.04%	8.06%	Probable GOP	GOP	Yes
51A	46.15%	47.29%	6.48%	-1.14%	7.24%	Leaning GOP	Not called	Yes
51B	50.85%	41.83%	7.25%	9.02%	7.27%	Probable DFL	DFL	
52A	40.59%	52.75%	6.63%	-12.15%	8.15%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
52B	40.95%	51.82%	7.18%	-10.87%	7.49%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
53A	40.75%	53.11%	6.10%	-12.36%	9.02%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
53B	44.68%	48.68%	6.59%	-4.00%	8.33%	Probable GOP	GOP	Yes
54A	48.40%	44.21%	7.32%	4.19%	8.03%	Probable DFL	DFL	Yes
54B	46.15%	47.38%	6.44%	-1.22%	7.75%	Leaning GOP	Not called	Yes
55A	51.93%	41.06%	6.91%	10.87%	7.26%	Comfortable DFL	DFL	
55B	49.02%	44.77%	6.14%	4.26%	7.45%	Probable DFL	DFL	Yes
56A	41.37%	51.94%	6.64%	-10.57%	7.93%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
56B	39.98%	54.62%	5.34%	-14.64%	7.78%	Comfortable GOP	GOP	
57A	52.91%	39.72%	7.27%	13.19%	7.27%	Comfortable DFL	DFL	
57B	46.32%	46.59%	7.03%	-0.27%	8.14%	Leaning GOP	Not called	Yes
58A	65.55%	24.19%	10.12%	41.36%	5.52%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
58B	72.61%	17.72%	9.42%	54.89%	4.20%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
59A	62.11%	24.80%	12.94%	37.31%	7.13%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
59B	61.04%	22.93%	15.75%	38.12%	7.77%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
60A	60.33%	24.72%	14.77%	35.61%	7.93%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
60B	61.77%	24.92%	13.18%	36.85%	8.07%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
61A	66.74%	15.09%	17.95%	51.64%	8.15%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
61B	71.26%	13.92%	14.60%	57.35%	6.27%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
62A	65.48%	19.55%	14.86%	45.93%	7.08%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
62B	60.01%	29.18%	10.71%	30.82%	7.39%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
63A	54.01%	36.98%	8.93%	17.03%	8.24%	Comfortable DFL	DFL	
63B	52.61%	39.67%	7.64%	12.94%	7.43%	Comfortable DFL	DFL	
64A	59.80%	26.91%	13.13%	32.89%	7.93%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
64B	55.00%	35.78%	9.12%	19.23%	8.04%	Comfortable DFL	DFL	
65A	71.33%	19.23%	9.33%	52.11%	4.08%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	

District	DFL Avg %	GOP Avg %	Total 3rd Party %	DFL-GOP Difference	Swing Voters %	District Profile	Predicted Winner	Third Party Impact?
65B	62.13%	26.17%	11.55%	35.96%	6.44%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
66A	61.26%	29.76%	8.84%	31.51%	5.73%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
66B	59.04%	29.20%	11.64%	29.85%	7.16%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
67A	60.15%	31.47%	8.28%	28.69%	5.84%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	
67B	57.48%	33.70%	8.72%	23.78%	6.27%	Untouchable DFL	DFL	

'Top ten lists'

10 Most 'Untouchable' Representatives				10 Most Vulnerable Representatives				10 Representatives Most Affected by Swing Voters			
District	Predicted winner		Safety margin	District	Incumbent		Risk margin	District	Incumbent		Influence margin
61B	Neva Walker	D	57%	27B	Jeff Anderson	R	20%	12B	Greg Blaine	R	11%
58B	Keith Ellison	D	55%	27A	Dan Dorman	R	15%	57B	Denny McNamara	R	8%
65A	Cy Thao	D	52%	44A	Jim Rhodes	R	13%	12A	Open		7%
61A	Karen Clark	D	52%	26B	Lynda Boudreau	R	11%	13A	Bud Heidgerken	R	7%
05A	Tom Rukavina	D	51%	52B	Rebecca Otto	D	11%	40B	Ann Lenczewski	D	7%
07B	Mike Jaros	D	47%	09A	Morrie Lanning	R	10%	15A	Jim Knobloch	R	7%
62A	Jim Davnie	D	46%	25B	Ray Cox	R	8%	24A	Bob Gunther	R	7%
05B	Anthony Sertich	D	43%	04A	Doug Fuller	R	5%	13B	Al Juhnke	D	7%
58A	Joe Mullery	D	41%	01A	Maxine Penas	R	5%	54B	Open		7%
59B	Phyllis Kahn	D	38%	45A	Lynne Osterman	R	5%	25A	Laura Brod	R	6%

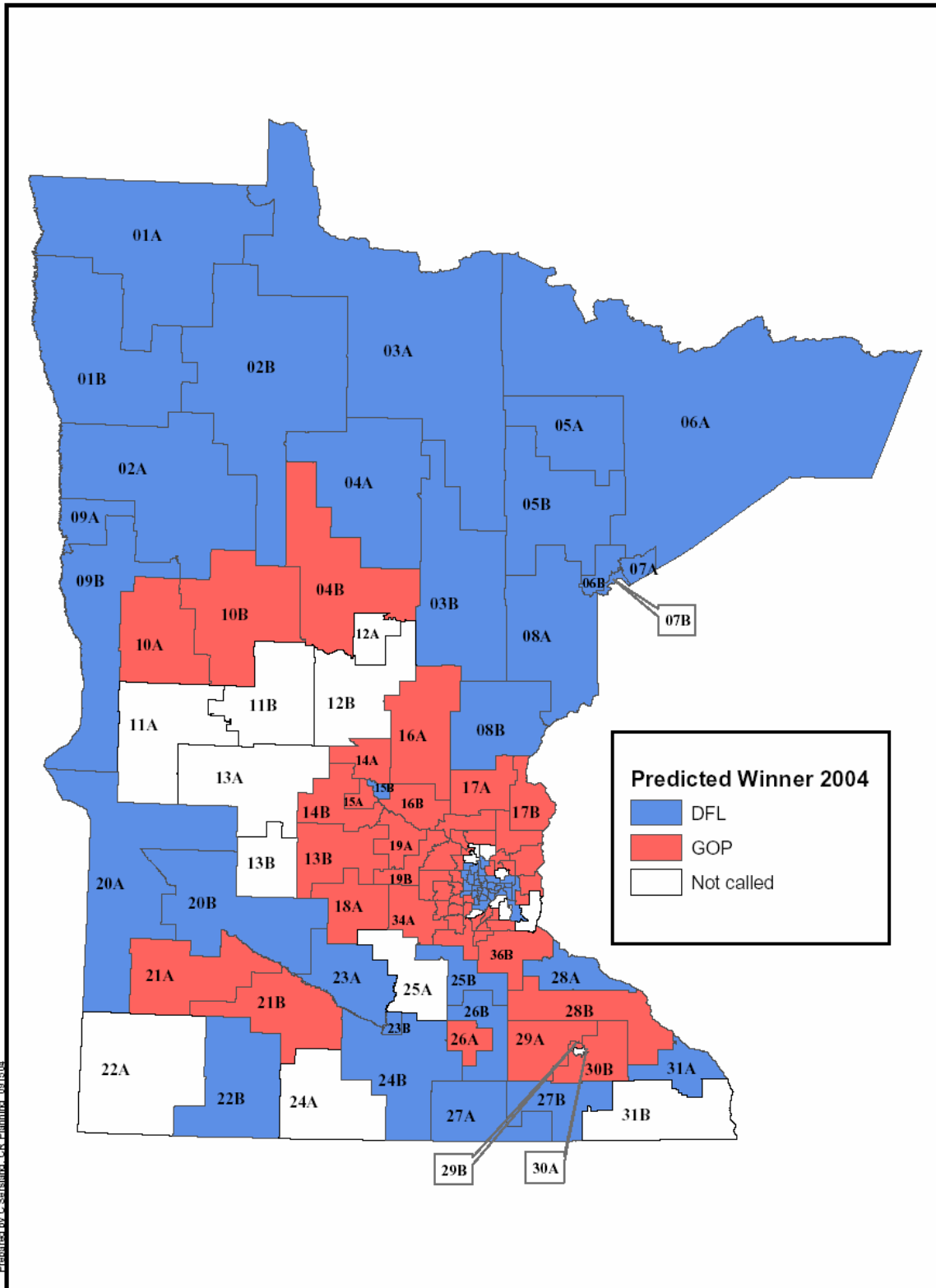
'Safety margin' refers to the amount by which a safe incumbent's party strength exceeds his/her rival party's strength.

'Risk margin' means the amount by which an incumbent party's strength is less than the rival party's strength.

'Influence margin' is the amount by which the percent of swing voters exceeds the difference between the two parties average party strength.

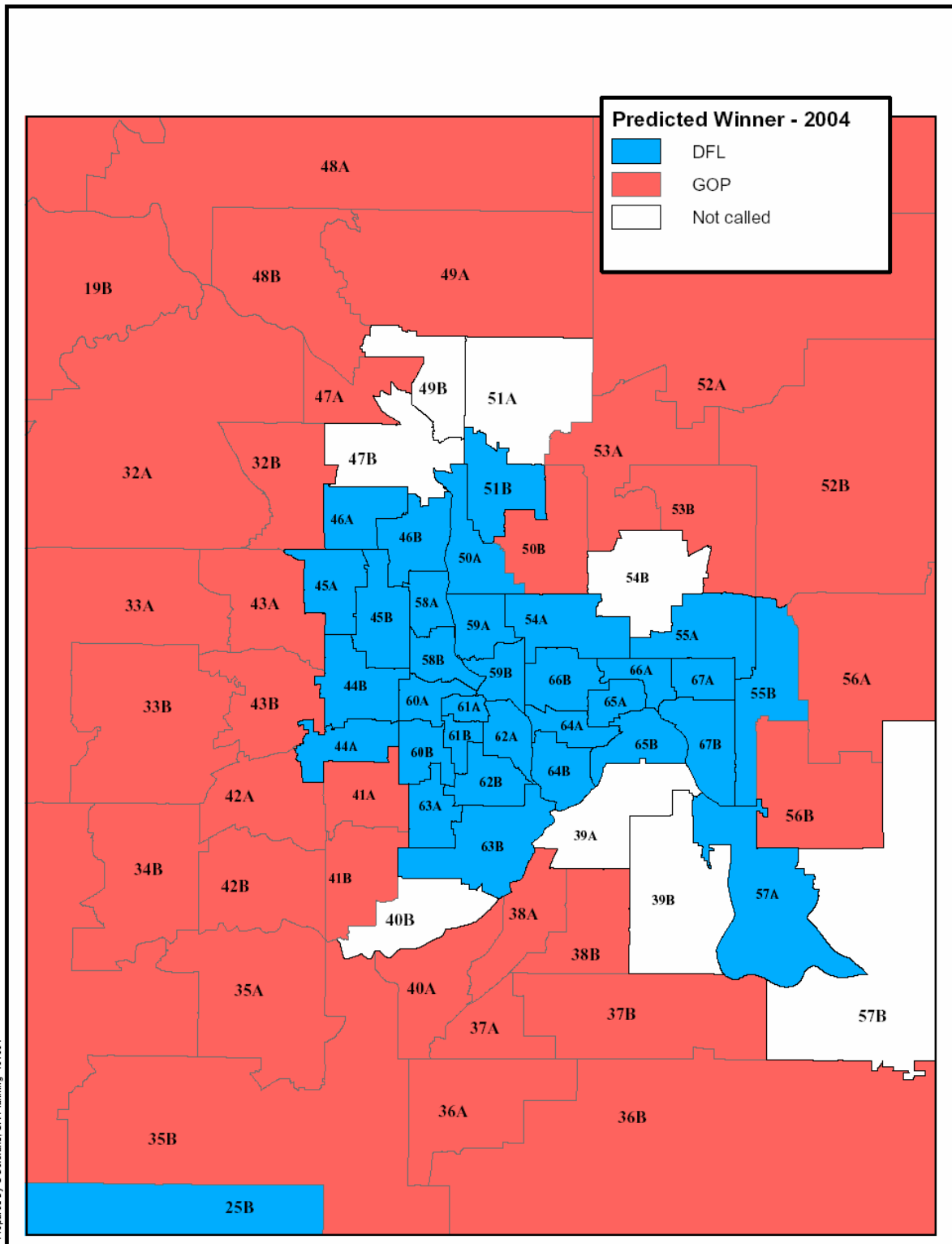
Top Ten Districts Where Presidential Candidates Should Look For Swing Voters			
District	Incumbent	Incumbent's Party	% of Voters
15A	Jim Knobloch	R	13%
12B	Greg Blaine	R	12%
14A	Dan Severson	R	12%
14B	Open		12%
16B	Mark Olson	R	11%
07A	Thomas Huntley	D	10%
15B	Joe Opatz	D	10%
16A	Sondra Erickson	R	10%
40A	Duke Powell	R	10%
41B	Open		10%

Map. 2004 election predictions: Minnesota House of Representatives by district – state view



Prepared by G. Saraland, CR Planning, 09/15/04

Map. 2004 election predictions: Minnesota House of Representatives by district – metro view



Prepared by C.Sesland, CR Planning 101604

Discussion

Profile change from 2002

Due to the experience of the two previous editions of No-Contest Elections, this edition takes a much more aggressive approach to profiling districts as ‘safe.’ While the 2002 profile found 56 percent of the seats to be ‘safe,’ this report identifies nearly 86 percent of the seats to be almost a sure victory for the dominant party.

Safe seats: GOP’s loss is DFL’s gain

A noteworthy change is the loss of safe seats for Republicans and the gain in safe seats for Democrats. The DFL is likely to add at least nine seats to its caucus membership come January.

Still ‘No-Contest’ in most districts

The portion of elections in which the result is a foregone conclusion grows to over 85 percent of the total. Voters in the vast majority of districts are left without a decision of consequence in the elections.

Top 10 ‘Untouchables’

Two years ago, we said Keith Ellison and Cy Thao were a shoo-in for election even though they were running for the first time. They won and are back in the Top Ten Untouchables list. In fact, nearly all of 2002’s Top Ten Untouchables are back again this year. Losing their place on this list are Erik Paulsen and Barb Sykora. They are replaced by Joe Mullery and Phyllis Kahn. Once again the Top Ten Untouchables represent northeastern Minnesota and central cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul.

Top 10 Vulnerables

Seven of 2002’s Top Ten Vulnerable Representatives are gone from the legislature. Democrats Ann Lenczewski and Mary Ellen Otremba were reelected but have dropped off the Most Vulnerable list for 2004. Republican Maxine Penas is the sole legislator returning to the list, having defied the odds and winning reelection despite residing in a Democrat-leaning but still competitive district. Most of the list is made up of Republicans from districts along the I-35 corridor south of the Twin Cities. Rebecca Otto, in an outer-ring northeast suburban district, is the only Democrat on the Ten Most Vulnerable list.

Third party impact?

The Independence Party convinced the Minnesota Supreme Court to reverse a ruling based on an obscure law that knocked all of its state House and Congressional candidates off the ballot. Unfortunately for the party, even though it prevailed in keeping its ballot line, its candidates are unlikely to win any of the contests. Only three of its 20 candidates are running in the 20 districts where they have their greatest strength. Two others are in a position to play a spoiler role, however, in districts 12A and 12B. The Green Party is running seven candidates in its second election as a major party.

Swing voter influence

This is the year of the swing voter, and we have replaced our list of top ten districts affected by a third party candidate with top ten lists of districts influenced by swing voters, both for state House and Presidential elections. In both contests, the place to find voters willing to vote for either party is predominantly in the central part of the state, namely the Brainerd-Little Falls-Saint Cloud corridor and extending east and west of Saint Cloud, with some strong pockets in the south suburban and exurban areas.

One tries to hang on, four others attempt a comeback

Arlon Lindner, renowned for his social conservative views, lost his endorsement contest in the Republican Party and filed to run as an independent candidate, trying to hang on to his seat. The Republican candidate is considered “Untouchable” in that district.

At the same time, four former DFL legislators are attempting a comeback in the House. They are former senators Don Samuelson (12A) and Len Price (56B), and former representatives Ruth Johnson (23A) and Geri Evans (50B). All have tough contests. But Samuelson has the better chance of the two former senators, running for an open seat in a swing district. Price faces incumbent Karen Klinzing in a “Comfortable” Republican district. Johnson’s district tilts slightly to the DFL and has a good shot at taking that seat back from Howard Swenson. Geri Evans has been in and out of the legislature every other election cycle for over a decade. This should be her year to get back in. That is unlikely, however, in a district rated as “Probable GOP.”

Recommendations

Ending gridlock in state government begins by breaking up the monopolies each party has over certain regions of the state. Both the Democratic and Republican parties must take an active interest in representing all areas of the state. That can only happen if both parties are able to elect candidates from all areas of the state.

Drawing competitive districts is a good start. However, it is physically impossible to make every district competitive due to simple geographic realities of how like-minded voters are concentrated. Even if this could be accomplished, it would bring other problems.

The problem of how to elect candidates from both parties from all parts of the state goes deeper than whether districts are competitive or not. The issue lies in the nature of single-winner districts and plurality – or ‘First-Past-The-Post’ – elections. Other methods of voting that are designed to represent more than one party in a geographical area have been used for a century by many of the world’s major democracies. Awareness and acceptance of these alternatives is beginning to gain a toehold in the United States.

A voting method designed to achieve proportional representation could result in Republicans being elected out of the central cities and Democrats winning elections in the southeast. Both parties would have a stake in representing the interests of all areas of the state. This would be a major step toward breaking the gridlock. There are several sensible immediate steps to assist these systems in being adopted statewide:

1. One or more home rule cities should consider amending their charter to conduct their elections with an alternative voting method, thus serving as a laboratory of democracy within the state's borders. Many of the world's major democracies use alternative voting methods. But it would be helpful to witness local usage of such a system and assess its strengths and weaknesses at close hand.
2. All new voting equipment purchased or certified for purchase in the state should be required to be compatible for use with a ranked-ballot used with some alternative methods of voting. Hand-counted paper ballots can be formatted for this purpose. However, electronic optical scanners must be outfitted with firmware that will create a data file, an electronic copy of each ballot, not merely tally the total number of votes cast for each candidate. The expense would be minimized if the firmware were included at the time of original purchase. With the federal government providing some \$40 million largely for new voting equipment, it is critical that this issue be addressed at this time.
3. A blue-ribbon commission with broad, high-level participation should be appointed to examine various voting methods and evaluate them against performance criteria such as their effectiveness at winning representation for the greatest number of voters, for promoting competitiveness and accountability, for promoting discussion of issues important to a broad range of voters, and for promoting voter turnout. This commission should issue a report with recommendations on which voting systems would be most appropriate and provide the greatest benefits for Minnesota.