



So, how'd we do?

Review of Minnesota legislative election predictions in *Gridlock!: No-Contest Elections™ 2004*

Categories*	Number of seats predicted	Number of accurately predicted seats	Rate of accuracy
Untouchable DFL	25	25	100%
Untouchable GOP	10	10	100%
All Untouchables	35	35	100%
Comfortable DFL	19	17	89%
Comfortable GOP	22	20	91%
All Comfortables	41	37	90%
Probable DFL	18	12	67%
Probable GOP	21	19	90%
All Probables	39	31	79%
All Categories	115	103	90%

*Categories are based on spread in parties' average strength in a district

Untouchable: 20% or greater spread
Comfortable: 10% to 20% spread
Probable: 3% to 10% spread

FairVote Minnesota produces a biennial report series, *No-Contest Elections™*, which assesses the level of competitiveness in Minnesota state legislative elections. The 2004 report, *Gridlock!*, is the fourth in the series, and highlights how non-competitive elections contribute to a breakdown in a productive legislative process. The report is available on line at <http://www.fairvotemn.org/resources/publications/gridlock.pdf>

Based on the experience of two previous reports, we believed we could predict the results of over 85 percent of the 2004 state house races with at least 85 percent accuracy. We exceeded our own expectations. Our model accurately predicted 90 percent of the seats where there was at least a 3 percent spread between the average party strength of the DFL and Republican candidates.

The punditry devoted considerable ink and electrons to postulating why the DFL made such a strong comeback. Yet, we predicted it – with two-year-old data that was blind to who the candidates would be and had nothing to do with recent public opinion polls or the relative merits of the parties' performance over the past two years.

What does this mean for partisan gridlock at the legislature? 'Safe' seats are clustered in political regions, with the DFL heavily concentrated in the urban core and the northeast, and the outer suburbs, exurban areas, and the southeast almost as heavily dominated by the Republicans. Each party wants to take care of its own territory, but has no political incentive to consider the needs

of areas where it does not and cannot elect anyone. Major issues like transportation, education, and capital improvements have been held hostage by this stand off.

The solution? In the first report of this series, FairVote Minnesota introduced “competitiveness” as a criterion in redistricting, a concept that found its way into the court panel’s district plan for this decade, with fewer ‘Untouchable’ districts and more districts where the spread between the parties is less than 10 percent. Attempting to further the application of the “competitiveness” criterion in future redistricting efforts would likely contribute to breaking down political Balkanization.

However, as the report clearly shows, in most of the state, party concentrations are so heavy that drawing districts that are more competitive is not possible. Even if it were possible, the correlation between an advantage in average party strength and that party’s election prospects has proven so strong that the effect would not be sufficient to adequately correct the problem. What is needed is a more systemic reform.

A voting method designed to elect representatives of both parties – or even an occasional third party representative – from all areas of the state is ultimately the solution to breaking up political Balkanization and partisan gridlock. A variety of methods that accomplish proportional representation are used by most of the world’s major democracies. A ranked ballot method used in Ireland and Australia has a history of use in some American cities, and may be the most suitable method for use in the United States.

This ranked ballot method has a single-winner version, known as “instant runoff voting,” that has gained traction recently, having been adopted by the voters of San Francisco and used for the first time in 2004 in that city’s municipal elections. “IRV” has been shown to improve elections in its own right, but also could be a transitional reform to a more effective proportional voting method.

Statewide reforms are unlikely until sufficient local experimentation has demonstrated the efficacy of alternative voting methods. That means “home rule cities,” those with charters granting them autonomy from many state laws regulating municipal procedures, are the most recommended and likely jurisdictions in the near term to adopt an alternative voting method such as instant runoff voting and proportional representation.

For more information on *No-Contest Elections*TM and alternative voting methods that can help combat partisan gridlock, contact FairVote Minnesota at info@fairvotemn.org or (612) 724-5540.