

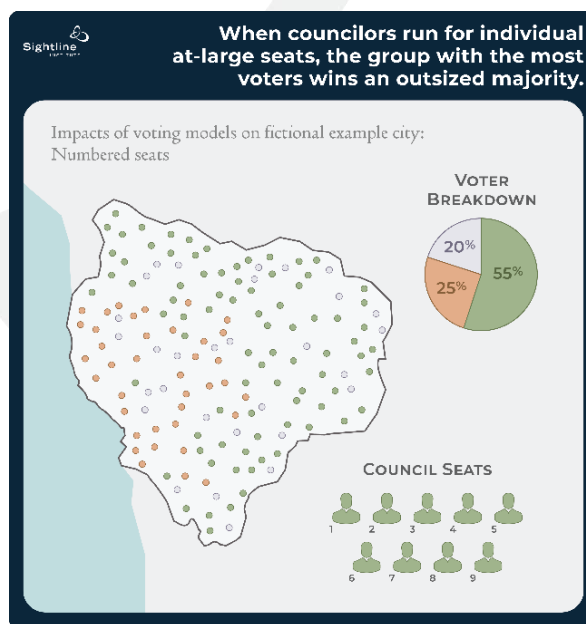
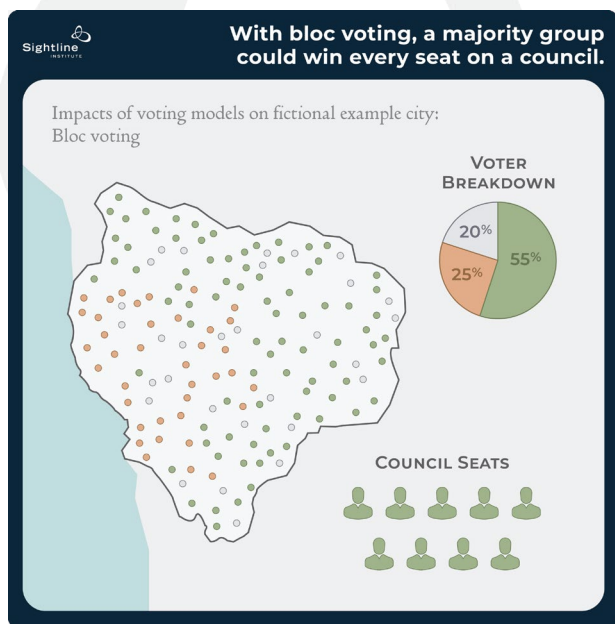
Upgraded Electoral Methods for Oregon Cities and Counties

November 2025

Oregon state law gives cities and counties flexibility to change election methods at will. Most local governments use at-large models such as bloc voting or numbered positions; some use single-member districts (also known as wards). Yet each of these methods can result in unrepresentative governments. Proportional representation, through proportional ranked choice voting, is an increasingly sought-after alternative that improves on most current methods.

Bloc voting or numbered positions can leave large groups of voters without representation

With both bloc voting and numbered positions, voters elect candidates at-large, across the entire jurisdiction, with simple plurality winners: the candidate or candidates with the most votes earn a seat. These methods overrepresent any group of voters with a majority. Although voters of all stripes cast ballots, the winner of each individual post will only reflect the group that turns out the most voters, whether that's a party, a neighborhood, or a community with a common interest.

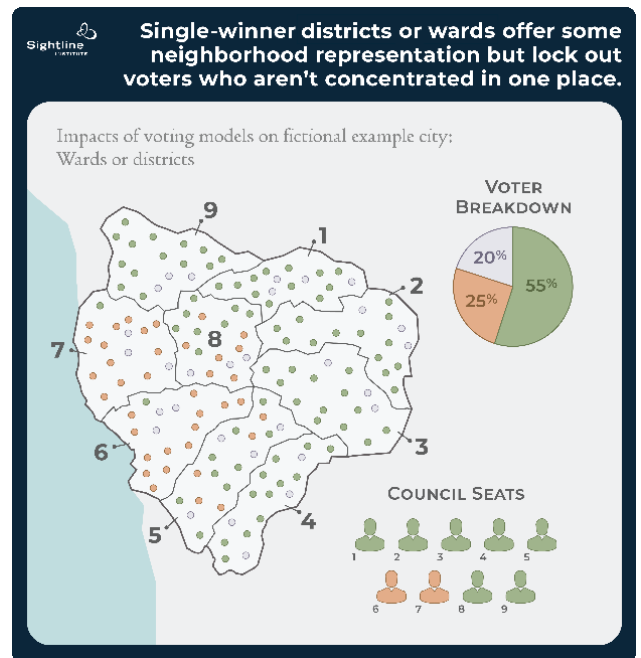


Bloc voting can be easily gamed because the numbers and types of candidates running can dramatically affect the outcome. If a popular faction runs too many candidates, all the candidates might split votes and end up with zero seats. Similarly, numbered positions set up jockeying between candidates to compete against opponents perceived as weaker or to avoid challenging incumbents.

Single-member districts can't always achieve fair representation

Single-member districts, sometimes known as wards, can diversify representation when communities with shared interests are geographically concentrated. But that's not always the case. When similar voters are scattered throughout a jurisdiction but don't make up a majority within any of its districts, they might not win a single one and will be boxed out of governing discussions. In the graphic, districts provide orange voters with representatives on a council (unlike in the at-large models) but grey voters still aren't represented.

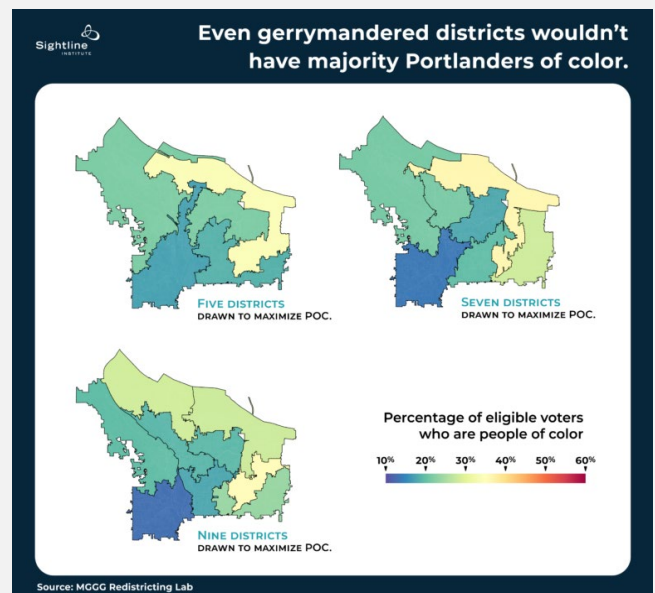
Single-member districts are also susceptible to political actors drawing lines that benefit their interests (gerrymandering). Plus, since the outcomes depend on which voters are in which district and voters have nuanced opinions, even careful mapmakers sometimes have a hard time drawing fair lines that will provide accurate representation for everyone.



Portland's story: Single-member districts couldn't give representation to people of color

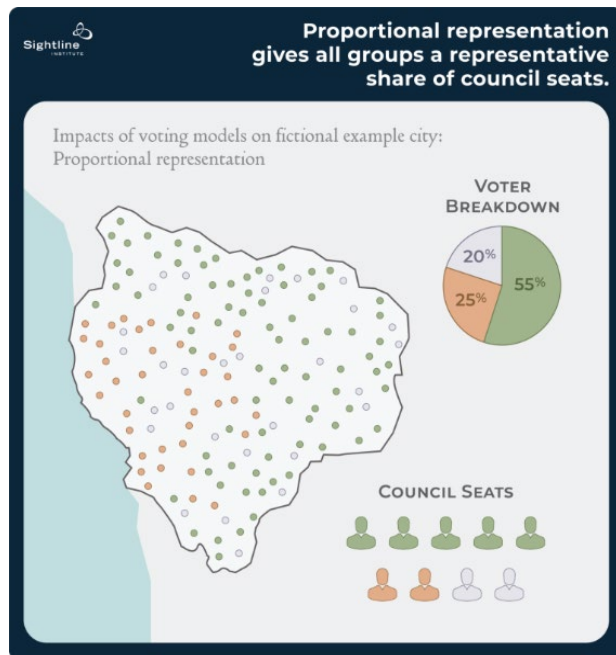
Portland, Oregon, recently started using proportional ranked choice voting to elect its city council, and the city now has one of the most [representative councils in city history](#). The old model of at-large numbered positions consistently locked out certain groups. People of color, for example, make up [more than 30 percent of Portland voters](#), but under the previous model, from 2001 to 2023, they were elected to only [12 percent of council seats](#). Now with proportional representation, 42 percent of city councilor members are people of color, and research shows that [people of color across the city were able to elect a candidate they preferred](#).

The charter commission that explored possible reforms considered single-member districts but discovered that people of color are spread out across the city. The commission found that even drawing districts to maximize representation for people of color [would not offer accurate representation](#) because people of color are not geographically concentrated enough to make single-member districts effective. The same is true for many other groups or viewpoints.



Proportional representation delivers winners who better match real voter makeup

Proportional representation simply means an elected body that represents the viewpoints of its constituents in proportion to their share of the vote. Multi-winner ranked choice voting is the only form of proportional representation that works with nonpartisan elections, making it the best proportional method for Oregon’s local governments.



With proportional ranked choice voting, communities of interest can win representation based on their vote share. (The exact threshold required to win a seat depends on the size of the governing body.) They don’t have to be geographically concentrated and can earn a seat even if a group doesn’t make up the majority of voters. More voters support election winners in proportional elections, improving confidence in governing and trust in elections.

Scholars have documented many benefits of proportional representation, including

- higher [voter participation](#),
- reduced [risk of political violence](#),
- better [health outcomes](#), and
- more [environmental protections](#)

With better representation comes a more stable policy that better reflects the nuances of voter opinion. More diverse views on a council also means more incentives

for councilors to work toward consensus solutions in order to pass reasonable policy adjustments.

Proportional representation is explicitly included as an option in Oregon’s constitution; any Oregon government can shift to proportional ranked choice voting with a simple change in local law.

Proportional representation is already delivering results for jurisdictions near and far

Proportional ranked choice voting (also called multi-winner ranked choice voting or single transferable vote) has been used in national elections in Ireland and Australia for more than a century and is currently used in multiple local governments in the United States, including Albany, California; Arden, Delaware; Cambridge, Massachusetts; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Arlington County and Charlottesville, Virginia; and most recently in Portland, Oregon. Other US cities have also [previously used proportional ranked choice voting](#).

In these elections, voters rank candidates in order of preference, just as with single-winner ranked choice voting. Votes are also counted in a similar way, except that candidates need to reach a lower threshold to win a seat on a multimember body. (On a three-seat body, for example, candidates need to earn 25 percent of votes to win; on a five-seat body, the threshold is just under 17 percent.) Any excess votes for a candidate who exceeds the threshold get redistributed to a voter’s next choice, so voters don’t have to worry about wasting their vote on an already-popular candidate, nor do they have to fear wasting a vote on a “spoiler” candidate or someone who has no chance of winning. (See this video for [more on how votes are counted](#).) This mechanism means that voters don’t have to overthink their strategy; the best way to get their viewpoints represented is to simply rank their preferences.

Elections using proportional ranked choice voting tend to result in a diverse set of winners: progressive and moderate-left; old-school conservative and MAGA; renters and homeowners; a mix of genders and incomes and races. This method truly reflects the community as a whole.