



The



James M. Jeffords Center's
Vermont Legislative Research Service



The Pros and Cons of ~~Cd00r~~ states and state representatives in
eleven states

¹ and numerous local officials. MMDs are often used to maintain congruence between legislative districts and other political boundaries (such as towns, wards, etc.) while at the same time adhering to the principle of one person one vote rule mandated by the U.S. Supreme

Incumbency, Competition, and Contestation

Incumbents do *not* appear to gain any advantage from MMDs. Indeed, one study found that the incumbency reelection advantage was smaller in MMDs.⁴ A separate 50 state analysis of state legislative elections found no difference between SMDs and MMDs with regard to the rate at which incumbents ran for reelection and won.⁵ Political Scientists Malcolm Jewell and David Breaux argue that the potential for incumbents to be *more* vulnerable in MMDs, writing “a plausible argument could be made that incumbents are most difficult to defeat if they are entrenched in relatively small single member districts.”⁶ The findings of their analysis supported this argument.⁷

In a study of who runs for the state legislature, Moncrief, Jewell and Squire found that “[i]ncumbents in multimember districts are likely to take a strong role in recruiting candidates to run with them as part of the party “team” in the district.”⁸ As a result of such activity the level of contestation and competition in MMDs would likely increase.

Since MMDs allow map makers to draw districts congruent with other political subdivisions, there is some reason to believe MMDs may enhance political competition. In an in depth study of the process of redistricting Jonathan Winburn concluded that the most effective way to ensure greater electoral competition is to make criteria for redistricting part of the states’

of interests that should

Vermont's Experience with MMDs in State House Contests 2002 2006

The above research speaks to the experience in general with MMDs in the U.S. To see whether these findings applied to Vermont, we conducted an analysis of Vermont House races in the 2002, 2004 and 2006 elections comparing SMDs and MMDs for differences with regard to incumbency, contestation and competition. Figure 1 compares MMDs and SMDs in Vermont House contests with regard to the percentage of open seats (an open seat is one for which no incumbent is running; MMDs were considered to have an open seat if there were fewer than two incumbents running for reelection, SMDs were open if there were no incumbents running). As seen in the chart, MMDs were more likely to have a seat that was not held by an incumbent legislator in the contest.

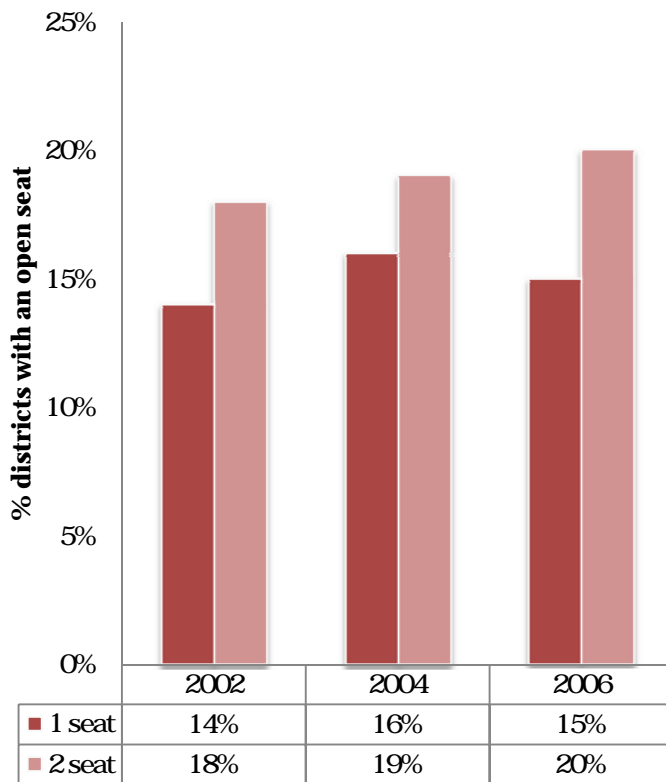


Figure 1: The percent of Vermont House districts with an open seat (no incumbent running for the seat), 2002, 2004 and 2006.

Figure 2 shows the percent of incumbents whose reelection was contested in SMDs and MMDs.¹¹ The figure shows that a higher proportion of incumbents faced challengers in MMDs than in SMDs in 2002 and 2006 (there was only a 1 percentage point difference in 2004).

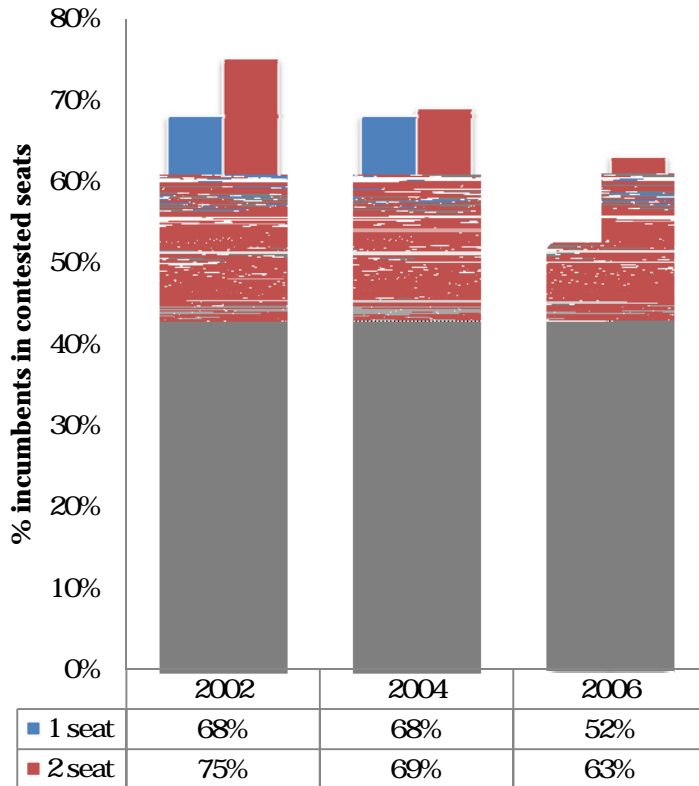


Figure 2: Percent of incumbents in contested districts.

Figure 3 compares MMDs and SMDs with regard to the reelection success rate of incumbents. It appears that incumbents in MMDs are slightly more successful at winning reelection than incumbents in SMDs. Thus, the evidence from Vermont House contests regarding MMDs and incumbency is mixed: while there were more open seats (that is proportionately fewer incumbents per contest) in MMDs, and a higher frequency with which incumbents face a challenger in MMDs in 2002 and 2006, incumbents that do run for reelection tend to be slightly more successful in MMDs.

¹¹ Comparing MMDs and SMDs with regard to contestation and competitiveness is, as political scientists who have tried to do so argue, very difficult (see Richard G. Niemi, Simon Jackman, Laura R. Winsky in "Candidacies and Competitiveness in Multimember Districts," *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Feb., 1991), pp. 91-109). We code candidates as being in contested races if there are at least one more candidates than the number of seats. As argued in the literature, since Vermont's 2 seat districts are Bloc with Partial Abstention types (a.k.a. free for all contests) contests all candidates face off against each other. So, if there are three candidates for 2 seats, all candidates are fighting for the 2 seats and are thus all facing competition.

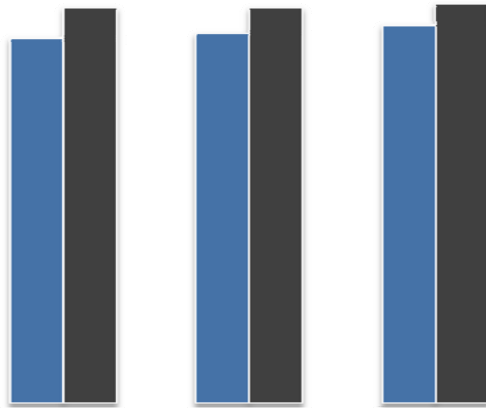


Figure 3: Incumbency success rate by district type (the percent of incumbents who won reelection).

Comparing MMDs and SMDs with regard to competitiveness is tricky because of the difficulty in comparing the electoral distances between candidates in contests with different numbers of candidates (Is a 5 percentage margin of victory in a 4 way race for 2 seats the same as a 5 percentage margin of victory in a 2 way race for 1 seat? Are 5 percentage points the same when partial abstentions or bullet voting makes some votes worth more than a single vote?). Electoral practices may also confound comparing districts on competitiveness. The practice of placing a second candidate on the ballot in a 2 member district who doesn't actually run for the spot but serves as a "soaker" to absorb voters' second votes so they don't go to the other party's candidates, for example, might result in lower levels of competition (and the higher levels of contestation found above). The research on this matter recognizes that any such comparisons between SMDs and MMDs will not be perfect.¹² With these caveats in mind, we compared MMDs and SMDs based on how many contests were decided by 10 percent of the vote or less. The results are in Figure 5. While fewer SMDs saw contests in two of the years studied, according to the calculations we used, there were a higher proportion of competitive seats in SMDs in every year.

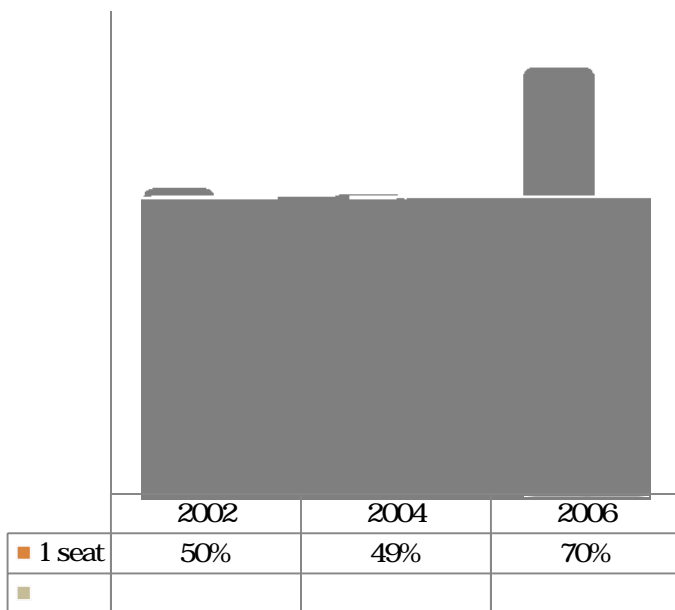


Figure 5: The percent of competitive seats (with a margin of victory 10 percentage points).¹³

¹² See Richard G. Niemi, Simon Jack

Vermont's experience with MMDs versus SMDs in State House campaigns parallels the findings of the extant research on the effect of MMDs with rega

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female legislative candidates. The authors suggest “some of these hypotheses may have been more accurate in the 1980s, but recent experience argues against them.”¹⁹

Vermont’s Experience with MMDs in State House Contests 2002 2006

Table 1 shows the number of female candidates in each type of district for the elections of 2002, 2004 and 2006. Figure 6 shows the percent of women legislative candidates who won by district. The data shows that women candidates were more successful in SMDs than in MMDs in Vermont, lending support to the more recent findings of Richardson and Cooper.

Table 1: Number of Female Candidates Running in Vermont State House Seats

Number of Female Candidates			
	2002	2004	2006
1 seat	32	41	40
2 seats	41	42	44

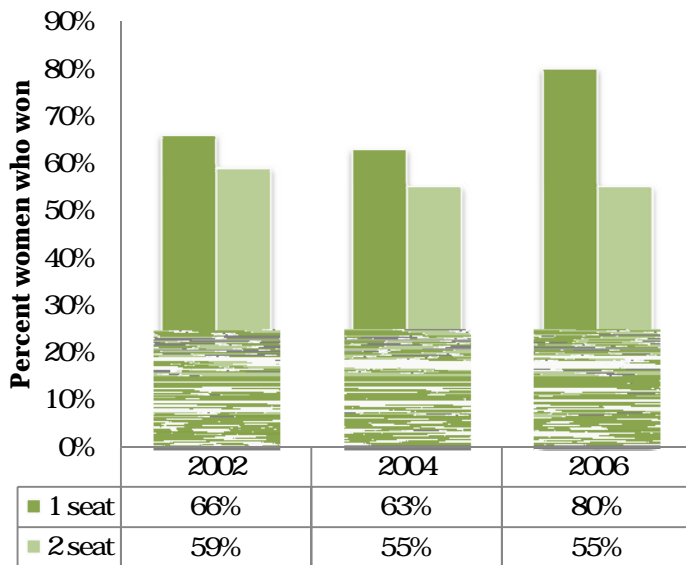


Figure 6: Percent of women candidates who won by district type.

Policy Representation

Are MMDs and SMDs different with regard to the nature of policy representation? If an election is fought on the basis of policy positions or ideology (a big “if” for elections in the U.S.²⁰), the best representation is as a battle for the median voter on the

ideological scale of the district. The winning candidate in primaries will be the candidate who wins the votes of those from her side of the ideological spectrum and enough voters in the center of the ideological spectrum to constitute a majority of the total. MMD change this calculation. "Instead of concentrating around the median voter, candidates in MMD elections are more likely to move to the extremes to stake out a particular constituency."

In a study that compared Arizona state representatives with Arizona state senators, researchers found that the ideological distance between the winning candidate and the runner-up in Arizona state representative elections is 0.0017, while in Arizona state senator elections it is 0.225. (researchers) (researchers) 2_1 1

Research on the representation of political parties in MMDs versus SMDs has found that MMDs do NOT harm minority party representation.²⁵

Campaign Finance and MMDs

Another consideration is whether there are differences between SMDs and MMDs with regard to the financing of campaigns and the importance of money in winning those campaigns.

Fund Raising

According to a study by the Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress (2002), the study found that MMDs do not harm minority party representation.

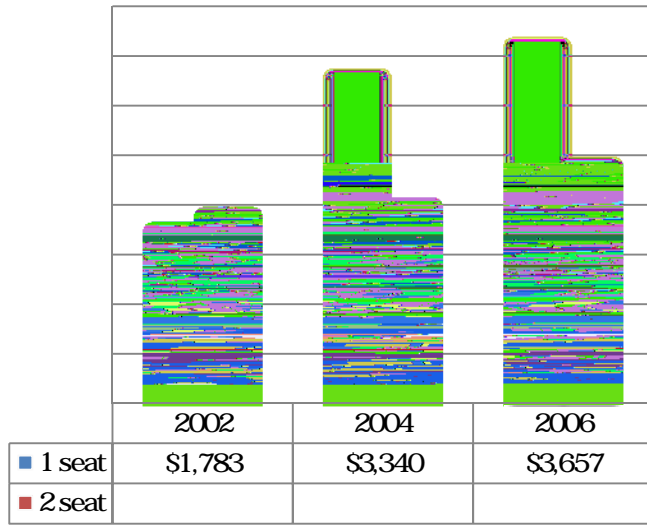


Figure 7: Median campaign revenues for Vermont House candidates in MMDs and SMDs.

money has on the electoral fortunes of candidates. Because candidates in MMDs often run as a team, sharing expenses, it may be that candidate spending is not as important as it is in SMDs. Is there any difference in the importance of money for winning votes in MMDs versus SMDs?

Total # in MMDs 8003

Total # in SMDs 4325

Conclusion

The comparison between MMDs and SMDs (note caveats discuss above) finds that compared to SMDs,

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