MAKING

DEMOCRACY WORK®

LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF COLORADO

Better Single-Winner Voting Methods

Vote for ONE!

☹

Vote on ALL!

☺

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Plurality Voting

The most prevalent voting method in the US

Also known as

- Winner-take-all
- First-past-the-post (FPTP)
- Choose-one voting

Vote for one option.

- ☐ Joe Smith
- ☒ John Citizen
- ☐ Jane Doe
- ☐ Fred Rubble
- ☐ Mary Hill

Attribution: Rspeer at the English language Wikipedia

What is a Voting Method?

A **voting method** defines
1) the form of the ballot,
2) what constitutes a valid vote,
3) how to count or tabulate votes, and
4) an algorithm for determining the outcome of the election.

A voting method is not to be confused with an **election system**, which is concerned with whether or not to have early voting, all-mail elections, electronic or paper ballots, etc.

Plurality – "Clone" Example

2018 Indiana – GOP Primary for US Senator

Mike Braun 41.2% Wins!
Todd Rokita 30.0%
Luke Messer 28.8%

Cropped image from Braun campaign ad --
Image appeared on various media websites

Vote Splitting / Spoiler Effect

Chocolate
Cake
19%

Brownie
36%

Lemon
Cake
38%

Truffle
5%

2010 Maine Governor's Race

Libby Mitchell
Democratic

Eliot Cutler
Independent

Paul LePage
Republican
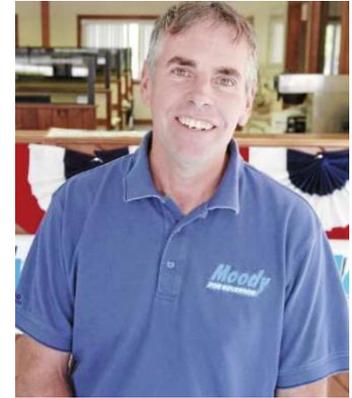
Shawn Moody
Independent

19%

36%

38%

5%

NPR's "The Math Guy" on Voting

Keith Devlin, a Stanford University mathematician:

"Voting is not like physics or engineering where we have to do what the math tells us. Rather, it is one of those cases where we can make the math work for us—to use it to achieve our own ends as a society. The voters will make the selection, but the math we choose can shape the kind of government we get."

3 Main Ways to Vote … & Examples

Option: add a later runoff, possibly with a different voting method

Plurality

Rank Order

Rating

Plurality

Instant Runoff

Approval and Score
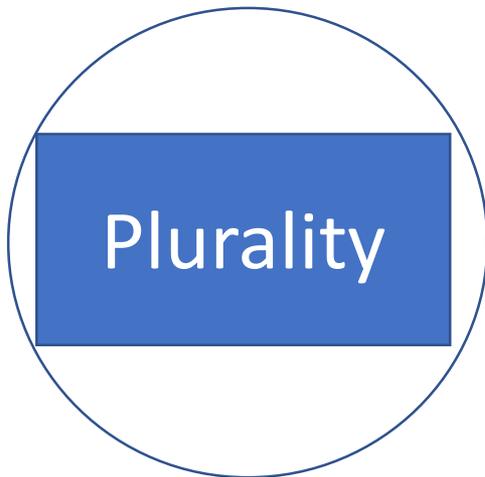
Candidates

Brownie

Chocolate Chip Cookie

Lemon Bar

Plurality Ballot

Vote for ONE.

☐   brownie

☐   chocolate chip cookie

☐   lemon bar

Approval Voting Ballot

Vote for ONE OR MORE.

- ☐ brownie
- ☐ chocolate chip cookie
- ☐ lemon bar

Score (or Range) Voting Ballot

Rate EACH candidate.

No support = 0.   Maximum support = 3.

brownie	0	1	2	3
chocolate chip cookie	0	1	2	3
lemon bar	0	1	2	3

Instant-Runoff (or Single-Winner RCV) Ballot

Rank EACH candidate.

	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice
brownie	☐	☐	☐
chocolate chip cookie	☐	☐	☐
lemon bar	☐	☐	☐

Questions?

Plurality   Rank Order   Rating

Plurality

Instant Runoff

Approval and Score
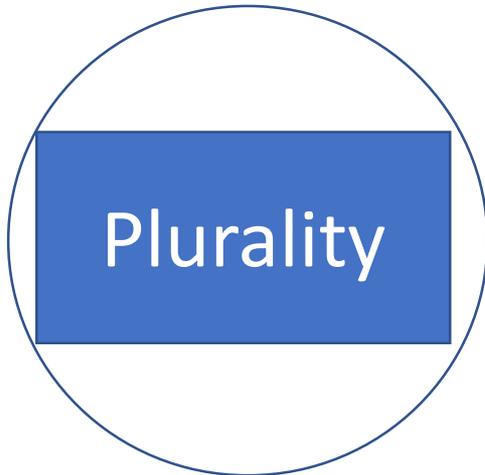
Advantages for the Electorate

Feel freer to vote sincerely rather than tactically

- Avoid "throwing away" one's vote

- Avoid splitting the vote between clone candidates

Vote on ALL!

Express opinions better than choose-one plurality

- Government that reflects the voters' preferences

Voter, Candidate and Ballot Considerations

?

- More pressure on voter to research all the candidates

- May reduce the influence of dark money in campaigns

$$

- Possible pressure on candidates to forego negative campaigning and/or form alliances

- "Complex" ballots may lead to more spoilage

Change is Hard!

- Process for auditing election results (ballots) may change

BALLOT BOX

Which voting method is best for your elections?

What is your goal?

- Rating – preference data on all candidates, but no majority?
- Ranking – get a "majority," but lower rankings not considered?

Ease of implementation

- Ballot redesign may require more text and new audit process
- Precinct countable? Extra time to tabulate ballots?

Cost savings – example: eliminate later run-off elections

Education efforts to ensure successful elections. Define "success."

Should LWVUS Adopt
a Voting Methods Position?

- Many states and local Leagues already have a Voting Methods position.

- Many jurisdictions (municipal, county, state and even federal) are considering changing from plurality. **The League advocates for change based on its positions.**

Additional question: If so …

Should a LWVUS position specify a *particular* voting method?

Democracy works best ...

... when everyone is participating and heard.

LWVCO Voting Methods Position

*The League supports authorizing and implementing **alternatives to plurality voting that allow people to express their preferences more effectively**. The League supports gaining on-the-ground experience with alternative voting methods in order to ascertain whether a voting method results in outcomes that match voters' preferences as recorded on their ballots. The League supports voting methods that can **improve the election experience**, that encourage honest* voting rather than tactical* voting, and that consider ease of implementation.*

*A voting method encourages "honest" voting when it allows voters to meaningfully support all their preferred candidates, rather than leading them to either not support their favorite or "tactically" indicate a higher preference for a candidate who is not their favorite.

LWVCO Voting Methods Position
(continued)

Considerations:
- ***Some voting methods are intended for single-winner elections, others for multi-winner elections.*** *It is important that the intended use of a voting method match its actual application. Multi-winner voting methods can promote proportional representation which fosters diversity of our elected officials.*

Examples

Elect One
- governor (Maine primary, 2018)
- judge (North Carolina, 2010)
- mayor (San Francisco)
- city council by ward (Santa Fe)

Elect 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 or …
- Congress (Montana,1916)
- state legislature (AZ, WV, others)
- city council at-large (Cambridge)
- city boards (Minneapolis)

LWVCO Voting Methods Position
(continued)

- ***Election officials should conduct post-election analysis*** *to evaluate the voters' usage of the voting method and the election's reflection of voters' stated preferences. There should be sufficient data transparency – for example, access to ballot records in anonymous form – for an independent analysis to be conducted by other interested groups.*
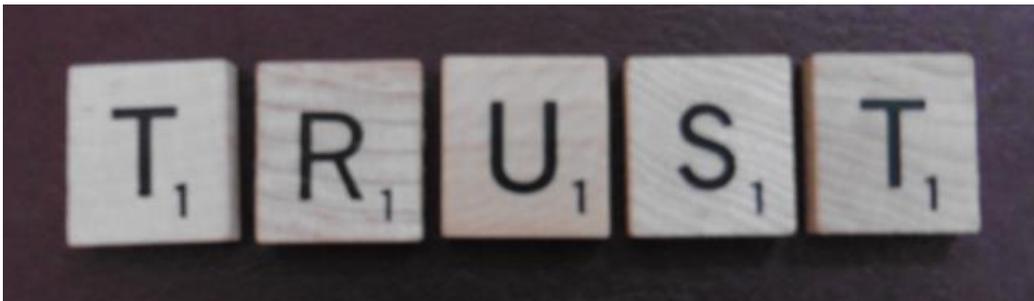
Action Kit and More Information

Website: lwvbc.org → Teams at Work → Voting Methods Team

Action Kit for "going out on the road" includes

    * poster   * tri-fold pamphlets   * ballots

Other Resources

    * study packet leading to position

    * FAQ video: Voting Methods 101

    * slides from various presentations

    * much more!