LWVC 2019
Concurrence on Voter Representation
Basis and Terminology

The **League of Women Voters United States** does not have a position on how we elect our representatives.

Yet, how we elect our leaders has a direct effect on representation of voters and "Making Democracy Work".

- Our Mission, our Principles ["We believe in Representative Government"] and our trademark "Making Democracy Work" all speak to empowering voters through representation.

- When voters are denied representation because of where they live, the way district lines are drawn, or because they are an ethnic or political minority, apathy shouldn't be a surprise.

- The electoral systems we use can enhance or deny representation of voters just as how and who draws district lines can do the same.

- The purpose of having this position is to provide a clear, but flexible base of **principles,** (from 15 State League positions) for evaluating electoral systems that empower voters.

- This position is based on criterion, (not ballot systems) to consider when evaluating electoral options that meet the needs of a community and the voters.

- This position does not *require* League action. Like many of our positions, it is there when we need it. Many CA communities are looking at options to plurality voting as a result of California Voting Right Act violations. For them, this concurrence is very timely.

Since electoral systems are tied to representation of voters, we are providing some basic information on terminology.

The goal is not to debate systems, but to adopt a position which includes criterion for evaluating the best electoral systems for enhancing Voter Representation.

At-Large

A type of electoral jurisdiction where representatives are elected from the whole political region. Voters are not divided into districts. Common in cities and counties. Plurality/Winner-Take-All at-large systems allow 51 percent of voters to control 100 percent of seats.

Auditable

Transparent procedures to verify (either by hand count or technology) the accuracy of an election outcome.

Delayed Runoff
– see Two-round Runoff

Effective vote
Opposite of "wasted votes" (see elsewhere). Effective votes are those that were useful in successfully electing (or in determining) a winner.

Electoral System
Rules and procedures governing the election of public officials by specifying ballot structure, district magnitude and the way that votes are translated into seats.

First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) Same as Plurality Voting
In a horse race, the first horse to pass the finish line (the post) wins. The same is true for a FPTP electoral, a system that came with the British, which we still use and call Plurality voting.
In an election, candidate with the most votes wins. However, the candidate may not have received a majority if more than 2 candidates in the race, due to vote-splitting.
Vote splitting can result in electing the candidate least preferred by voters.

Gerrymandering
Different from "apportionment" which is the allotment of representatives based on an area's population. Gerrymandering is a political manipulation.
Specifically, "gerrymandering" is the manipulation of boundary lines in a district with the intent to advantage or disadvantage a candidate or political party in order to gain more seats than its proportion of the vote. Gerrymandering can be used to disenfranchise a group of voters by racial gerrymandering or disenfranchise members of the opposite party by partisan gerrymandering. [Redistricting is the term used for fair 'line drawing,' the goal of an Independent Redistricting Commission.]

Multi-Member District
An area (electoral jurisdiction) from which more than one candidate is elected.

Plurality
The most common electoral system in the US, in which the candidate with the most votes wins, without necessarily receiving a majority of votes. At times, it is coupled with a second, runoff election if a jurisdiction has required that the final winner receives a majority vote. (See above "First Past the Post"). In a multi -winner election i.e. City Council (not divided into districts) the plurality winners are the candidates that receive the most votes. (See "winner-take-all" below.)

Proportional Result
40% of the vote gets 40% of the seats (representation) in a legislative body…not Zero.
60% of the vote gets 60% of the seats (representation) in a legislative body…not 100%
(i.e. Cambridge, MA. City Council and School Board proportionally reflect the voters in the community). (Compare this to Winner-Take-All below.)

[While this proposed concurrence does not oppose or support any one system, this system is being explained for its more common use.]

Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) aka Instant Runoff and Preference Voting
Voters are able to rank candidates by preference indicating a "back-up" candidate if their first choice does not have enough support to get elected. They don't have to go back for a second election to accomplish the same.
RCV can be used to achieve a majority single winner without a second election (known as "Instant Runoff" and used in San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, San Lorenzo in CA).
RCV can also be used to elect multi-winners to achieve a proportional result (i.e.40% of the voters gets 40% of the seats) in a legislative body. (Cambridge, MA City Council and School Board).

Sincere Voting
A term used when a voter chooses to cast her ballot for her most preferred candidate despite the candidate's chances to win. [This is the opposite of "strategic" voting described elsewhere.] In electoral systems that encourage sincere voting, the voter can vote for a preferred candidate and not worry about "wasting" their vote.

Single Member District
An area (electoral jurisdiction) from which only one candidate is elected.

Spoiler Effect or "Spoiler Candidate"
Generally derogatory terms used to describe the phenomenon in which candidates split the vote. The terms can also apply to same-party candidates in relationship to weaker and stronger support. The most well-known examples of a candidate being labeled a 'spoiler' was during the 1992 election when Ross Perot split the vote with George Bush Sr. and helped elect Bill Clinton with 43% of the vote, and in 2000 when Ralph Nader split the vote with Al Gore helping to elect George W. Bush. Those votes for Ross Perot and Ralph Nader are considered "wasted votes" (see wasted votes).

Strategic Voting (aka Tactical Voting)
A voter chooses to vote for a candidate other than her 'sincere' choice. This is done in hopes of preventing a less-than-desirable outcome. This is most common when, despite the fact that the voter may prefer an independent, 3rd party or weaker candidate, she believes she would be 'throwing her vote away' and instead votes for a candidate presumed to have a greater chance of victory. Because the spoiler effect (see elsewhere), still sways decisions under California's Top Two in the Primary round, there is encouragement for voters to vote tactically (instead of sincerely). They need to choose the candidate they believe is most likely to advance to, or win, the general election, as opposed to voting for their most preferred candidate. They may also decide to vote for the opposite party candidate they would most like to see run against their preferred candidate.

Two Round Runoff
This is an election type used in a winner-take-all (WTA) system, in which a 'delayed' or second election is held if no candidate achieves a majority of votes in the first election (or first round). Common in CA, this is sometimes referred to simply as "runoff elections". Runoff elections ask voters to go back to the polls to ensure a majority (if required) in the second election. A second election costs candidates and taxpayers more money, encourages negative campaigning, and in many cases, fewer voters participate.

Vote Splitting

When more than 2 candidates are on the ballot, voters can split their votes among like-minded candidates and it can help elect a least favored candidate. This can also cause good, like-minded candidates NOT to run for office for fear of splitting the vote. This reduces voter's choices, especially when parties encourage people not to run.   Some alternatives to plurality voting address this problem. (See "Strategic Voting "and "Spoiler Effect".)

Verifiable

A system (such as a paper ballot) that provides a secondary confirmation that equipment has correctly counted a voter's ballot.

Wasted Vote

A political science term that refers to votes that were NOT useful in the election of the winner. More often this means all ballots cast for a losing candidate (or candidates), but can also mean any extra (not needed) votes cast in support of a much-liked winner. If a voter does not vote for a 'viable' candidate in most plurality elections, then their vote is "wasted". It doesn't count toward electing a winner. Some alternative electoral systems address this problem.

WTA (Winner-Take All)

"Winner-take-all" is a term used to describe "single member district" and "at large" electoral systems (listed above) that award seats to the highest vote getters without ensuring fair representation for minority groups. Under winner-take-all rules, a slim majority of voters can control 100% of seats, leaving everyone else effectively without representation. Result is under-representation of women, communities of color, third parties, young people, and voters stuck in areas where their voice/representation is diminished when they have no seat at the table.

Since many areas are dominated by a single political viewpoint, in partisan elections, winner-take-all voting systems will often result in no-choice elections in which one party has a permanent monopoly on power, and the winner is effectively predetermined. Nearly every emerging democracy has rejected WTA use. Winner-take-all systems introduced to America by the British during the colonial era, are virtually unknown in other developed countries.