
Consensus Questions for a Proposed LWVDE Position on Electoral Systems

LWVDE Alternative Voting Methodologies Study Team, March 2021

Background

In July of 2019, the League of Women Voters of Delaware began a study of alternative voting methodologies, including traditional runoff elections, range or “score” voting, and ranked-choice voting (RCV).

When we began our study, the League of Women Voters had no national-level position on voting methods. After we began, the LWVUS membership in June 2020 at the National Convention approved a new [Concurrence Position on Electoral Systems](#). The national position, which used bits and pieces from several state or local positions as a basis for concurrence, sets forth broad principles or goals that an election system should meet, but stops short of endorsing any specific voting method (other than stating that the League supports electoral methods that, among other criteria, “Implement alternatives to plurality voting”).

The LWVDE Alternative Voting Study Team now (in April 2021) asks the LWVDE membership, “**Should the League of Women Voters of Delaware adopt its own position on electoral systems? And should that position include support for one specific alternative voting method, ranked-choice voting?**”

Proposed New LWVDE Position

The proposed position from the study team starts with the new LWVUS position, adding some clauses of our own, as follows:

Voter Representation/ Electoral Systems Position (Proposed for LWVDE Consensus)

Position in Brief:

Support electoral systems at each level of government that encourage participation, are verifiable and auditable and enhance representation for all voters.

Position in Full:

LWVDE promotes an open governmental system that is representative, accountable and responsive. We encourage electoral methods that provide the broadest voter representation possible and are expressive of voter choices.

Whether for single or multiple winner contests, the League supports electoral methods that:

- Encourage voter participation and voter engagement
- Encourage those with minority opinions to participate, including under-represented communities
- Are easy to use, understand, and administer
- Are secure, verifiable and auditable
- Promote access to voting
- Maximize effective votes/minimize wasted votes
- Promote sincere voting over strategic voting
- Discourage negative campaigning
- Reduce the influence of money in elections
- Implement alternatives to plurality voting
- Are compatible with acceptable ballot-casting methods, including vote-by-mail

LWVDE believes in representative government. The League supports electoral systems that elect policy-making bodies—legislatures, councils, commissions, and boards—that proportionally reflect the people they represent. We support systems that inhibit political manipulation (e.g. gerrymandering).

The League supports the implementation of Ranked-Choice Voting in elections for representation at all levels of Delaware government, including school board, municipal, county, state and national, for both primary and general elections.

We support RCV with instant runoff (RCV/IRV) in single-winner elections, as well as RCV with single transferrable vote (STV) in multi-winner races such as councils or other governing bodies, at such time as STV becomes supported by Delaware state elections equipment and software.

LWVDE supports starting RCV implementation with limited trials, including but not exclusively trial(s) at the party primary level, particularly within the city of Wilmington.

We support eventual elimination of party primaries through use of RCV in a broadened general election.

LWVDE supports enabling legislation to allow local jurisdictions to explore alternative electoral methods, as well as supporting state election laws allowing for more options at both the state and local levels. With the adoption of any electoral system, the League believes that education of the voting public is important and funding for startup and voter education should be available. We encourage a concerted voter education process.

(Elements in green highlighted text are recommended Delaware additions to the LWVUS position. Paragraphs in yellow text are additions that the study team has a split opinion on. Elements in gray are potential additions that the study team does not recommend.)

Delaware Consensus Questions

1. Should LWVDE have its own position on Electoral Systems?

Arguments in favor:

- A local position highlights Electoral Systems as a topic of importance the local League.
- We can add clauses of our own that do not appear in the national position, to expand or clarify for Delaware.

Arguments against:

- Local Leagues can take action to support or oppose legislation under the broad LWVUS position; a local position is not required for that.

The study team recommends: Yes, create a local LWVDE position on Electoral Systems.

2. Should LWVDE's position on Electoral Systems incorporate the LWVUS position in full?

Arguments in favor:

- The information, even if repetitive, is easier to find when local.
- If the LWVUS changes its position, ours retains its original meaning until we decide to change it.

Arguments against:

- Repetition of information.
- If the LWVUS changes (improves) its position, ours could become out of sync.

The study team recommends: Yes, incorporate the full LWVUS position in ours.

3. Should LWVDE's position add the bullet item "Are easy to use, understand, and administer" to the LWVUS position?

Discussion / Justification: the LWVDE Alternative Voting Study team polled LWVDE membership in the summer of 2019 to find out what they felt was important in an election system. 80% of members (28 out of 34) felt "Are easy for voters to use and understand" was an important criterion.

Arguments in favor:

- Most LWVDE members polled in 2019 liked this criterion.
- LWV of Oregon includes "Easy to use" as a bullet point in its position.

Arguments against:

- Some think that ease of use can be assumed desirable without stating it explicitly. It was omitted from LWVC / LWVUS to streamline the position.
- Many otherwise desirable voting methods are in fact more difficult to understand than plurality voting is. This clause might discourage their adoption.

The study team recommends: Yes, include this clause in our position.

4. Should LWVDE's position add the word "secure" to the LWVUS "verifiable and auditable" bullet item?

Discussion / Justification: some members of our study team felt that election security, clearly a crucial item, is a glaring omission from the LWVUS position.

Arguments in favor:

- LWVDE membership responded nearly unanimously in favor of "Support secure, verifiable and auditable elections"
- If covered elsewhere in the LWVUS positions, it is buried pretty deeply. The SARAT referred to below is in an "interpretation" paragraph, rather than in an actual position statement.

Arguments against:

- The LWVUS concurrence organizers, when queried on this, responded that security was already well covered elsewhere ("At Convention 2010, delegates added the principle of transparency to the position under "Citizen's Right to Vote" so that the League would support voting systems that are: secure, accurate, recount-able, accessible, and transparent. It is known as SARAT.").

The study team recommends: yes, add "secure" to the "verifiable and auditable" clause.

5. Should LWVDE add the bullet item "Discourage negative campaigning"?

Discussion / Justification: on a slider scale of -50 to +50, LWVDE membership gave "encourage a focus on the issues and discourage negative campaigning" an average score of +40 (strong support).

Arguments in favor:

- LWVDE members strongly supported this clause in the 2019 poll.
- LWV of Oregon includes "Discourage negative campaigning" in their position statement, and LWV of Tennessee includes both "Discourage negative campaigning" and "Encourage meaningful discussion of issues".
- Some voting methods (e.g. RCV in Maine) do appear to nudge campaigns in a more positive direction.

Arguments against:

- Some think this is criterion is obvious and can be assumed without stating it explicitly. It was omitted from LWVC / LWVUS to streamline the position.

The study team recommends: yes, include this clause in our statement.

6. Should LWVDE add the bullet item "Reduce the influence of money in elections"?

Discussion / Justification: on a slider scale of -50 to +50, LWVDE membership gave "Election systems should reduce the influence of money in elections" an average score of +45 (very strong support).

Arguments in favor:

- LWVDE members strongly supported this clause in the 2019 poll.
- One can imagine a voting method that might accomplish this. Selection of our representatives by random lottery, for example, would eliminate any need to campaign and eliminate the influence of money entirely. Perhaps a future (non-imaginary) voting method might be found that also has positive effect in this area.

Arguments against:

- This is a pretty tall order. No voting method currently in use in the U.S. has been shown to affect campaign spending.
- None of the other Leagues' voting method positions that we used for comparison contain this clause.

The study team recommends: no, do not include this clause in our electoral systems position.

7. Should LWVDE include this paragraph about RCV in its position?

"The League supports the implementation of Ranked-Choice Voting in all elections for representation at all levels of Delaware government, including school board, municipal, county, state and national, for both primary and general elections."

Discussion / Justification: the study team believes that ranked-choice voting shows great promise to improve our elections in the U.S. One team member stated it thusly...

Ranked-choice voting with instant runoff provides for a system with more voter impact and freedom than our current first-past-the-post system. Under RCV, the varied preferences of voters can be more fully expressed when compared to only being able to make a single choice from among many. In addition, by allowing for more (ranked) choices, the issue of the false choice between "the lesser of two evils" is reduced. A voter may choose all candidates that she likes, ranking them by her preference, which will allow her to vote her conscience instead of attempting to play a game of guessing the voting preferences of others and selecting a candidate that she feels is likely to align with those guessed preferences. If her first-choice candidate is eliminated, then her vote will go to her second-choice candidate, and so on. Because of this, the likelihood of her vote being counted for one of her candidates is increased. This will likely have a positive impact on the attitudes of voters, since no vote need be "thrown away" if it is not directed toward one of the two major parties in the state.

Ranked-choice voting has the potential to change the outcome only when there are more than two candidates in a race. In Delaware, because we do not have a strong third party presence, ranked-choice voting could have the most immediate impact in party primaries, and for the nonpartisan city/town councils and school board elections. It also would benefit independents who want to express support for third party candidates in the Presidential election, while still having their second-choice vote count.

Please refer to the "related documents" at the end for more information.

Arguments in favor of RCV:

- Ranked-choice voting (RCV) eliminates the spoiler effect that happens under plurality when two similar candidates “split the vote”, allowing more candidates to run and thus giving the voter more choices.
- It ensures that the winning candidate gets majority support (50% or more of the vote).
- It allows voters to vote for their true favorite in a multi-candidate race, without fear of “wasting their vote” or helping their least favorite candidate to win.
- When compared against the ten bullet-list criteria in the proposed position, RCV satisfies 5 of them better than our current plurality system (encourage minority opinions, maximize effective votes, promote sincere voting, discourage negative campaigning, implement alternatives to plurality voting), and only 1 of them less well (it is less easy to use, understand, and administer). It would not likely affect the other 4.
- Of the methods our team studied, RCV has the best potential for implementation in the United States, as it is already in use in some localities here.
- No voting method is perfect. And election scientists disagree on which method(s) are best. But RCV is an achievable method that is far better than our current plurality.

Arguments against RCV:

- Ranked-choice voting is a brand-new idea for many people, and may spark distrust. Considerable voter education would be needed.
- RCV is a fairly young idea in the U.S. Although some cities have used RCV for quite a while (e.g. Minneapolis, Minnesota since 2009), the first statewide implementation was in Maine starting in 2018, and now Alaska starting in 2022).
- RCV is nontraditional. “It’s not the way we do it.”
- It isn’t perfect. The outcome of an RCV election can change depending on the order in which the losing candidates are eliminated.

Arguments in favor of adding specific method(s) to the LWVDE position:

- Eliminates ambiguity or guesswork.
- Our Advocacy Corps might consider that the LWVUS position is too general or vague to allow them to support ranked-choice voting (and has already taken that stance at least once, when approached for a potential endorsement by a local RCV organization).

Arguments against adding specific method(s) to the position:

- Some feel that we should keep our position general. If we put a specific method like RCV in our position, we may find that we prefer a different method later on as election science evolves.
- Adding a specific methodology like RCV to our position might be later interpreted to mean that we can’t support other alternatives to plurality voting that may be proposed.

The study team recommends: yes, include the statement in favor of RCV in our LWVDE electoral systems position.

8. Should LWVDE include these details about types of RCV (IRV and STV) in its position?

“We support RCV with instant runoff (RCV/IRV) in single-winner elections, as well as RCV with single transferrable vote (STV) in multi-winner races such as councils or other governing bodies, at such time as STV becomes supported by Delaware state elections equipment and software.”

Discussion / Justification: most U.S. localities that use ranked-choice voting use it for single-winner races, with instant-runoff vote tallying. RCV used in multi-winner races is less common, and has a more complex vote tallying algorithm. Currently it is used in only four U.S. cities, including our own tiny Village of Arden, Delaware. However, ranked-choice voting in multi-winner races has the potential to not only improve representation, but greatly reduce the problem of gerrymandered districts. This is the premise of the [“Fair Representation Act”](#) introduced into Federal congress in each of the last several sessions by Rep. Don Beyer of Virginia. Many see ranked-choice voting in multi-winner races as a desirable “end game” after the country gains experience and trust with the simpler single-winner IRV variant.

Delaware Elections Commissioner Albence has stated that our both our ES&S voting machines and our ballot scanners (for mail-in or absentee ballots) can be programmed to handle ranked-choice voting, but ES&S currently does not have a vote-tallying module available to handle RCV in multi-winner races (STV), only single-winner ones (IRV).

Arguments in favor:

- Eliminates ambiguity in future discussions of potential legislation. The Advocacy Corps does not have to wonder which type(s) of RCV we support.

Arguments against:

- These are implementation details that do not belong in the position.
- We should only support IRV at this time, not STV.

The study team recommends: the team’s opinion is split on this addition.

9. Should LWVDE include this paragraph about an RCV implementation strategy in its position?

“LWVDE supports starting RCV implementation with limited trials, including but not exclusively trial(s) at the party primary level, particularly within the city of Wilmington.”

Discussion / Justification: The study team found that party primaries in the City of Wilmington are a specific area where ranked-choice voting often could impact the outcome. The 2016 Wilmington Democratic primary is a prime example, when eight candidates split the vote and Mayor Purzycki won with only 24% of the ballots. In 2020, out of the eight races where RCV could have changed the outcome, three of them were City of Wilmington primary races.

Through our interviews with election stakeholders, we also found that there is support for RCV within the Wilmington Democratic Party leadership. Wilmington Party Chair Cassandra Marshall stated that she’d love for Wilmington to be a trial case.

Arguments in favor:

- Starting with a limited trial would allow people to get used to the new idea slowly.

- This implementation strategy was a major finding of our study; it seems to be the most promising path forward here in Delaware.
- There is support within the Democratic party leadership in Wilmington, and a resolution from the Wilmington City Council requesting the RCV pilot could alleviate fears of a “mandate from above.”

Arguments against:

- These are implementation details that do not belong in the position.
- If we include one specific implementation path, this could be interpreted to mean that we oppose any other implementation path.
- When interviewed, some Delaware legislators expressed concern with either a limited trial in general (mixed messaging to the voters, harder to target the correct subset) or for Wilmington in particular (in light of the history of state control of this city’s elections, there was a wish to avoid a perception of a special-case “mandate from above”).

The study team recommends: the team’s opinion is split on this addition.

10. Should LWVDE include this paragraph about eliminating party primaries in its position?

“We support eventual elimination of party primaries through use of RCV in a broadened general election.”

Discussion / Justification: in some localities where ranked-choice voting has been implemented, the local government has used RCV to eliminate party primaries entirely. The purpose of primary elections is to narrow the field of candidates to one per major party, so that votes of the party faithful are not split between multiple party candidates in the general election. Under RCV, the vote-splitting penalty between two candidates goes away; the voters’ second choice kicks in if their first choice cannot win.

Arguments in favor:

- Cost savings for the government.
- Cost savings for the candidates (one campaign instead of two).
- Greater choices for voters.
- Prevents the common Delaware situation where independent voters have no say because the election is effectively decided in the primary.
- Weakens party control (if you think the two-party system is a bad thing).

Arguments against:

- Our study team is not uniformly convinced that elimination of party primaries is a good idea.
- Weakens party control (if you think the two-party system is a good thing).
- This is too extreme, not likely achievable in Delaware.

The study team recommends: no, do not include this statement in the position.

Tally sheet / notes:

1. Should LWVDE have its own position on Electoral Systems? Y N

2. Should LWVDE's position on Electoral Systems incorporate the LWVUS position in full? Y N

3. Should LWVDE's position add the bullet item "*Are easy to use, understand, and administer*" to the LWVUS position? Y N

4. Should LWVDE's position add the word "*secure*" to the LWVUS "verifiable and auditable" bullet item? Y N

5. Should LWVDE add the bullet item "*Discourage negative campaigning*"? Y N

6. Should LWVDE add the bullet item "*Reduce the influence of money in elections*"? Y N

7. Should LWVDE include the paragraph about RCV in its position? Y N

8. Should LWVDE include details about types of RCV (IRV and STV) in its position? Y N

9. Should LWVDE include the paragraph about an RCV implementation strategy in its position?
Y N

10. Should LWVDE include the paragraph about eliminating party primaries in its position? Y N

Resources for More Information

LWVUS Electoral Systems Position

- **Concurrence Position Overview:** [lwv.org/league-management/recommended-concurrence-lwvus-board-2020-22-program-planning](https://www.lwv.org/league-management/recommended-concurrence-lwvus-board-2020-22-program-planning)
 - **Final concurrence language:** [lwv.org/league-management/proposed-concurrence-electoral-systems](https://www.lwv.org/league-management/proposed-concurrence-electoral-systems)
 - **Terminology** for concurrence: [lwv.org/league-management/background-material-proposed-concurrence-electoral-systems](https://www.lwv.org/league-management/background-material-proposed-concurrence-electoral-systems)
 - **Pros & Cons** analysis: [lwv.org/league-management/pro-and-con-considerations-voter-representation-electoral-systems](https://www.lwv.org/league-management/pro-and-con-considerations-voter-representation-electoral-systems)
 - **Informational quick summary:** [lwv.org/league-management/council-convention/concurrence-informational-quick-summary](https://www.lwv.org/league-management/council-convention/concurrence-informational-quick-summary)

Ranked-Choice Voting

In support

- FairVote: <https://www.fairvote.org>
- Rank the Vote Delaware: <https://rankthevotede.org>
- DelawareOnline Op-Ed, January 2021 by Eric Morrison and Kristin Brownlee: delawareonline.com/story/opinion/2021/01/09/its-time-rank-vote-delaware-and-across-america/6597855002

In opposition

- electionscience.org (favors approval voting over RCV): <https://electionscience.org/approval-voting-faqs>
- rangevoting.org (favors score voting over RCV): <https://rangevoting.org/rangeVirv.html>
- Fred Van Bennekom, Great Brook (thinks “fringe” strategy will come into play): <https://greatbrook.com/ranked-choice-voting-the-strategy-guide-to-winning-rcv-elections>

Neutral

- Wikipedia “electoral systems” pages: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electoral_system
- National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL):
 - “Alternative Voting Systems” page: <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/alternative-voting-systems.aspx>
 - Ranked-choice voting pros & cons: <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/ranked-choice-voting636934215.aspx>
- Delaware Legislative Brief, October 2020 by legislative fellow Jeffrey Chubb: legis.delaware.gov/docs/default-source/publications/issuebriefs/rankedchoicevoting.pdf
- Vermont LWV “pros & cons” website article: <https://my.lwv.org/vermont/article/pros-and-cons-instant-runoff-ranked-choice-voting>
- New York Times article 11/06/2019: <https://time.com/5718941/ranked-choice-voting>

Explanatory Videos

- Introduction to RCV, from academy4sc dot org, 2020: <https://youtu.be/HXPgMx17mR4>
- Minneapolis instructional video for IRV voters, 2017: <https://youtu.be/53z9feUiqdg>
- Scottish instructional video for STV voters, 2017: <https://youtu.be/P38Y4VG1lbo>
- Maine explanatory video for 2016 referendum: <https://youtu.be/5sVpLxGKd3Q>
- “Sticky Notes” (by MPR news):
 - Single-winner (IRV): <https://youtu.be/oHRPMJmzBBw>
 - Multi-winner (STV, with fractional tally): <https://youtu.be/INxwMdl8OWw>
- CGP Grey “Queen Lion” videos
 - STV 1 (Single Transferable Vote – simple cases): <https://youtu.be/l8XOZJkozfl>
 - STV 2 (Single Transferable Vote – more complex): <https://youtu.be/Ac9070OIMUg>
 - MMP (Mixed-Member Proportional): <https://youtu.be/QTOI-sdoSXU>

LWVDE Study References

- [LWVDE Team presentation to League Members](#) Jan/Feb 2020,
 - and the [LWVDE presentation handout](#) summary sheet:
- **League of Women Voters Education Fund Clearinghouse**, for LWV State Studies (CA, DC, MN, OR, PA, UT, WA):
<https://sites.google.com/a/leagueofwomenvoters.org/clearinghouse/rep/election-systems2>
- **International IDEA Handbook** (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance):
<https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/electoral-system-design-new-international-idea-handbook>
- **Ranked Choice Voting in Maine** (report for Hewlett Foundation): <https://hewlett.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/RCV-in-Maine-final-for-web-posting.pdf>
- **“Our Common Purpose,”** American Academy of Arts & Sciences, June 2020:
<https://www.amacad.org/ourcommonpurpose/report>