

RANKED-CHOICE VOTING
and
Other Alternative Electoral Systems

LWV New Castle County

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Basic Components of Any Electoral System

- Objective—how many winners to be chosen?
- Balloting method—how do voters express their preferences?
- Decision rule—how are votes combined to determine winner(s)?

How Many Winners?

- Not in a particular election (trip to the polls), which may involve a long ballot, but as a result of a particular vote
- Multiple winners
 - Common for legislatures or councils
 - At-large or even nationwide
 - Or multi-member districts (M)
- Single winners
 - Executive elections
 - Single-member district legislatures (SMDs)

Balloting Methods

- Categorical (binary)
 - Candidate receives or does not receive your vote
 - All votes count equally
 - Conventionally, vote for M, but there are other categorical balloting methods as well (approval voting, limited voting)
- Ranked Choice (preferential)
 - Rank the candidates in order of your preference: 1, 2, 3,.....
 - How many to rank may be discretionary or a complete ranking may be mandatory (many Australian elections)
- Score (range) voting
 - Assign each candidate a score from a specified range (e.g., 0 to 10, or 1 to 5)

Decision Rules

- Plurality: whoever gets the most votes wins; if more than one to be chosen, the top M vote-getters win
- Majority: to win, a candidate must get at least 50% of the votes plus 1
- Proportional (for multi-winner elections): number of seats for a particular group (usually a party) proportional to number of votes
 - Quota formulas
 - Divisor formulas

The Conventional U.S. System

- Single-winner elections, even for legislatures (SMDs)
- Choose-one voting
- Plurality rule
- Various names:
 - First-past-the-post
 - Plurality voting (a misnomer)
 - For legislatures, SMD plurality

Alternatives for Multi-winner Elections

- Party-list PR
- Mixed-member proportional (MMP)
- Single transferable vote (STV)

Party list PR

- Many European and Latin American countries, plus others
- Vote for a list of candidates determined by the party you choose
- Lists may be nationwide (Israel, Netherlands) or from regional districts
- Closed or open lists
- Seats proportional to votes, often with a threshold requirement

Mixed-member Proportional (MMP)

- Germany, New Zealand, Scotland, Wales, London; much interest in Canada
- Typically, two votes—one for a constituency representative chosen by conventional plurality; the other for a party list
- List seats allocated by a compensatory formula, so that overall representation is proportional to party votes
- The best of both worlds?

Single Transferable Vote (STV)

- Ranked choice voting in multi-member districts—the MMD version of IRV—a source of confusion
- Ireland, Australian Senate, Cambridge MA, Fair Representation Act (proposed reform of US House)
- Typically 3 to 5 member districts
- Winners determined by quota, with a complicated system of vote transfers if necessary
- Vote for individuals, not parties

Reforms for single-winner elections

- If it ain't broke, why fix it?
- Choose-one plurality works fine if there are only 2 candidates
- But if more than 2 candidates, or potentially more than 2, lots of problems

Problems of conventional plurality with multiple candidates

- Winner may have plurality less than a majority
- Worse, most voters may heartily dislike the winner (majority split between 2 or more losers)
- Spoiler effects—entry of third candidate changes who wins
- Leads to worry about wasted votes, pressure (moral or legal) to discourage candidates
- Winner-take-all system promotes highly adversarial, zero-sum politics

Single-winner reforms

- Runoff (two-round system)
 - Majority required to win in first round
 - If none, top 2 (usually) advance to runoff
 - France (et al.), some southern U.S. states
- Approval voting
 - Approval ballot, usually with plurality rule
 - Some non-governmental associations; recent adoption in Fargo ND; effort in St. Louis
 - Promoted by Center for Election Science
- Ranked Choice Voting (RCV or IRV)
 - Australian House of Representatives, Irish presidency
 - Many US cities in recent years: San Francisco, Oakland, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Portland ME, etc.
 - Promoted by FairVote

RCV-IRV

- Ranked-choice ballot
- Majority required to win
- If no majority among first preferences, eliminate candidate with fewest first preference
- Transfer those ballots to voters' second choices
- Repeat if necessary until a candidate has majority of votes

Maine's Adoption of RCV-IRV

- Spear-headed by Maine LWV
- Approved by a referendum in 2016
- A challenge to Maine Supreme Court blocked implementation for state offices in general elections
- But was used in 2018 for primaries and for general election to US Senate and House
- Current effort to extend to presidential primaries

Democratic Gubernatorial Primary Results

Candidate	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4
Janet Mills	33.3% 41,735 votes	35.5% 44,042 votes	40.8% 49,945 votes	54.1% 63,384 votes
Adam Cote	28.3% 35,478 votes	30.3% 37,543 votes	34.8% 42,623 votes	45.9% 53,866 votes
Betsy Sweet	16.6% 20,767 votes	18.5% 22,987 votes	24.4% 29,944 votes	Defeated
Mark Eves	14.3% 17,887 votes	15.7% 19,521 votes	Defeated	
Mark Dion	4.1% 5,200 votes	Defeated		
Diane Russell	2.2% 2,728 votes	Defeated		
Donna Dion	1.3% 1,596 votes	Defeated		

**Maine, CD-2
Official Results**

Candidate	Round 1	Round 2
Jared Golden Democrat	45.6% 132,013 votes	50.6% 142,440 votes
Bruce Poliquin Republican	46.3% 134,184 votes	49.4% 138,931 votes
Tiffany Bond Independent	5.7% 16,552 votes	Defeated
Will Hoar Independent	2.4% 6,875 votes	Defeated

For discussion:

*What are the pros and cons of
RCV-IRV?*