Improving Boulder City Governance through Better Elections: Four Perspectives

The League of Women Voters

We are a non-partisan political organization, which means we never support candidates or political parties. We <u>do</u> take positions on issues, based on study and consensus by the membership. We are working to **make democracy work for ALL**. We envision a democracy where **every person** has the desire, the right, the knowledge **and** the confidence to participate. And, *the League is NOT for women only!!*

We encourage you to join the League, follow us on Facebook, and to check our website for upcoming events.

Four Perspectives:

1) **Electing Council Members by District:** Rich Lopez, former Boulder council member
2) **Our Mayor – Our Choice**: Jan Burton, former Boulder council member
3) **Multi-Winner Voting Methods**: Celeste Landry, LWVBC Voting Methods co-leader
4) **Single-Winner Voting Methods:** Marcus Ogren, CO Approval Voting Chapter

Some Clarifications:

In today's session, Boulder refers to the *City* of Boulder, Colorado (Note: LWVBC refers to LWV of Boulder County).

The term "Ranked choice voting (RCV)" can have multiple meanings.

Boulder City Council Elections

9 members – Multi-winner at-large elections

A voter may vote for as many candidates as seats to fill

5 city council members elected every 2 years (odd years)

Top 4 vote-getters win 4-yr term, 5th vote-getter a 2-yr term

Boulder City Mayor

Mayor chosen by council from among its members

Boulder has a "weak mayor – strong city manager" system.

City council hires the city manager

Agenda

- Introduction to the current structure of Boulder City Council.

- Each panelist will have a 10 minutes to present their perspective on "What you see as Boulder's governance problems and what are possible electoral system solutions?"

- Questions and comments from the panelists

- Q&A with the audience — please type your question in the chat

League of Women Voters Panel Discussion

Electoral Governance in Boulder, Colorado

Jan Burton

7/19/2020

Boulder's Governance Issues

- Council elections
  - At-large, using "first past the post" election system
  - Encourages block (slate) voting; spoiler effect

- Mayor is not directly elected by the people

  - Top three city officials are not elected by the people

- Council pay is not representative of workload

- Low level of participation, especially among younger voters

Potential Solutions

- Ranked choice voting system for Council elections

- Direct election of the mayor

- Increase Council member pay

- Examine wards or districts for council elections
- More powerful form of mayor

Current ballot initiative gathering signatures

Directly Electing our Mayor

- Boulder voters would vote for our Mayor

  ❖ Using ranked choice voting (first time for majority voting)

  ❖ Even-year election gains 20,000 more voters

  ❖ Mayor would get a 4-year term
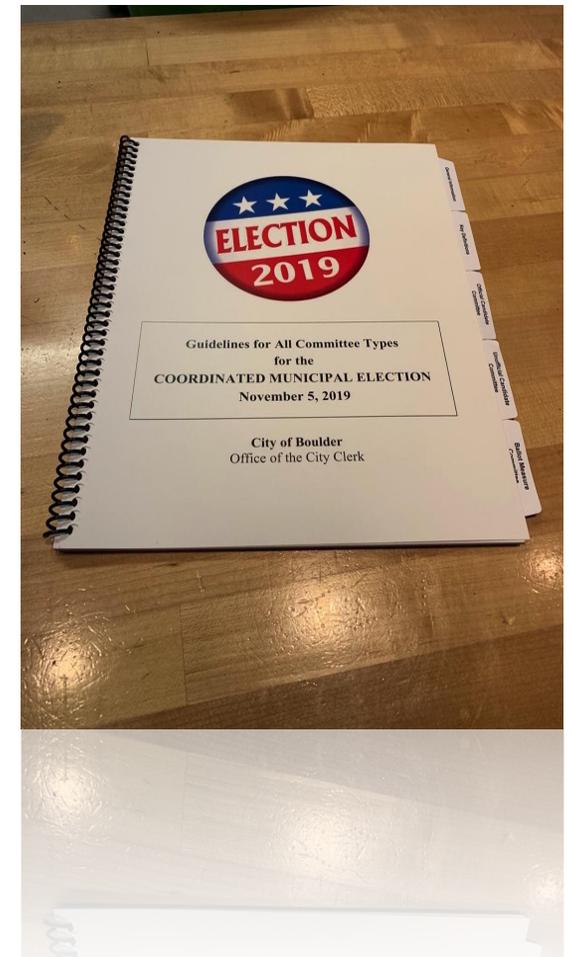
Ranked Choice Voting

Simply rank as many or as few candidates as you wish.

Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) empowers you the voter to securely voice your values.

Voters find this easy and compelling.
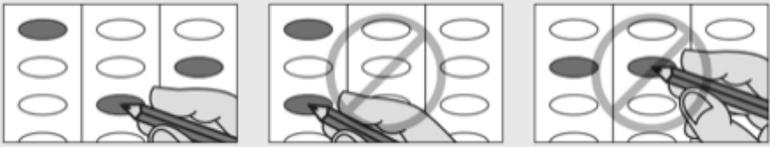
Fill in the oval completely.	No more than 1 oval in a column.	No more than 1 oval for a candidate.

Coolest Colorado Animal

Rank up to 3 candidates. Mark no more than 1 oval in each column.	First choice 1st	Second choice 2nd	Third choice 3rd
Bear	○	○	○
Bighorn Sheep	○	○	○
Mountain Lion	○	○	○

Details: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1bPNM8rMThLRthungWHIBahrY8nVvKVkybItkHiUnzgk/edit?usp=sharing

Ranked Choice Voting

Tally finds a majority winner.

50%

1	First choice votes are counted.	A 35% B 25% C 40%	No candidate has a majority.
2	Candidate B has the fewest 1st choices. B is eliminated.	A 35% C 40%	Those ballots are counted for the voters' 2nd choice.
3	Candidate A has a majority of the votes.	A 55% C 45%	The winner is Candidate A.

Details: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1bPNM8rMThLRthungWHIBahrY8nVvKVkybItkHiUnzgk/edit?usp=sharing

Ranked Choice Voting

- RCV is an improvement from plurality
  - ❖ **More Fair**: winner must earn a majority of the support.

  - ❖ **More Voice**: voters freely rank the candidates, secure from worries of "vote-splitting."

  - ❖ **Diversity Equity Inclusion**: More people of color and women run and win.

RCV Upgrade: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1sJ6a-0Fo3Nb5d8T2U5il6_F07id6BuRxX6Ay4F7ZR3k/edit?usp=sharing

Ranked Choice Voting used nationwide

Legend:
- **Statewide Races**
- **Presidential Caucus / Primaries**
- **Military & Overseas**
- **Municipal Pending**
- **Municipal Races**

Ranked Choice Voting

- Proven effective over 100 years

  ❖ Recommended by leading scholars

  ❖ Meets national League of Women Voters position criteria

  ❖ Successfully used in Colorado

Recommended: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1r6pJLeYazJzLPyAsE4JMVRUu5Z7B7GS0hsXk6xnWrMY/edit?usp=sharing
LWV: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MPkemVckUzk8PIutq7XOAWajs5RBELxBamljWWkTMqg/edit?usp=sharing
Colorado Overview: https://docs.google.com/document/d/10kRQMEZfkrWLufRJJLauBm2QXirVwpi5ERMT2BfYnZU/edit?usp=sharing

Timeline to better governance

Council wards or
districts (if
desired, after RCV)

Council pay

Ranked Choice
Voting for Council
members

Direct election of
mayor with Ranked
Choice Voting
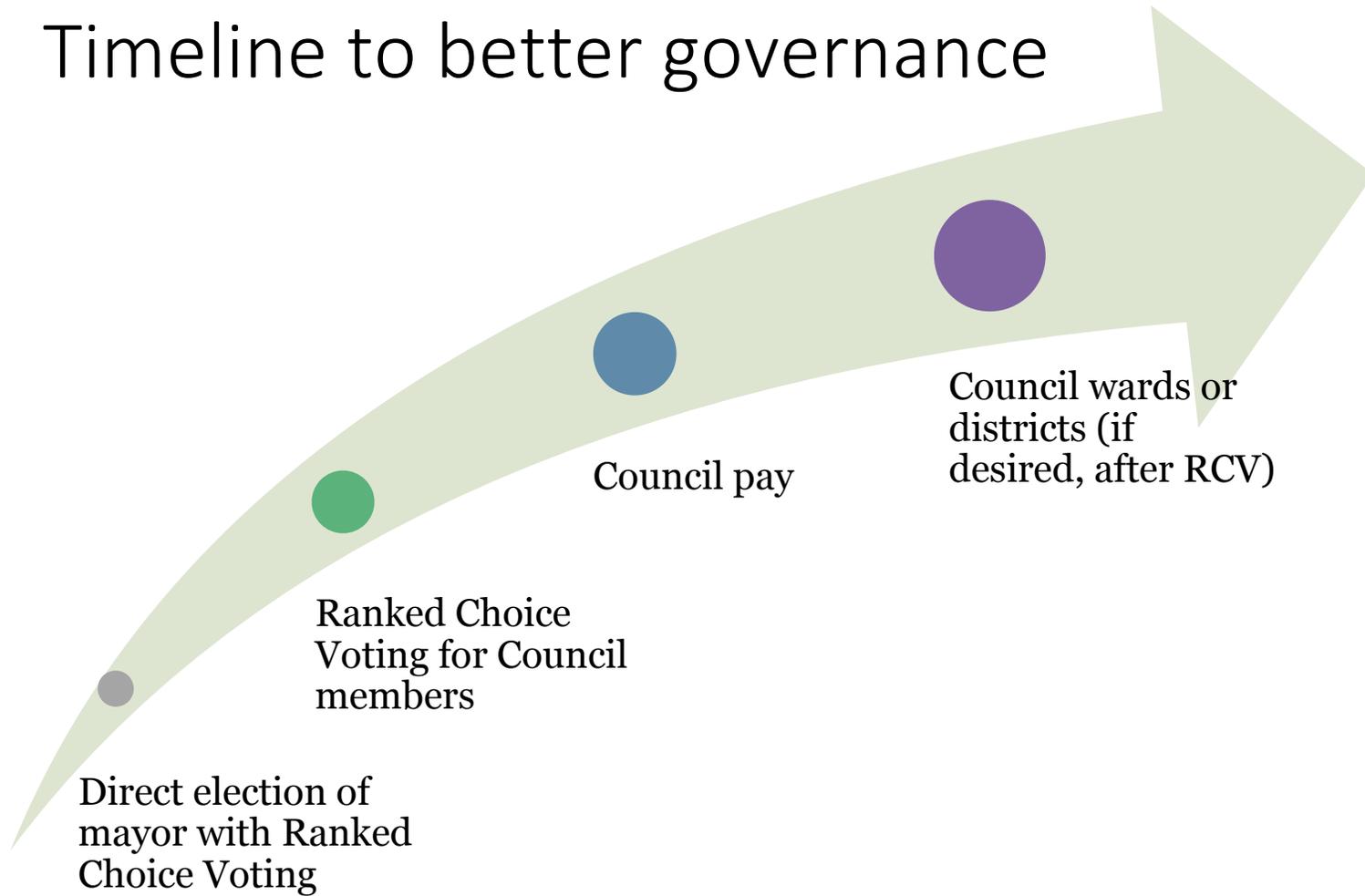
Thank you.

Backup

Ranked Choice Voting

- Boulder is ready.
  - **Optimizes Mail-ballots**: If a candidate drops out, the voter is protected.

  - **RCV Tally**: Included in the most recent county software update.

  - **Staff Experience**: Election professionals at Boulder Elections have run RCV elections before.
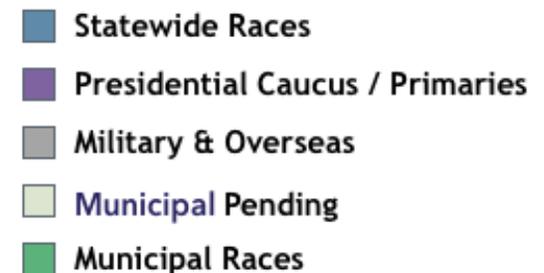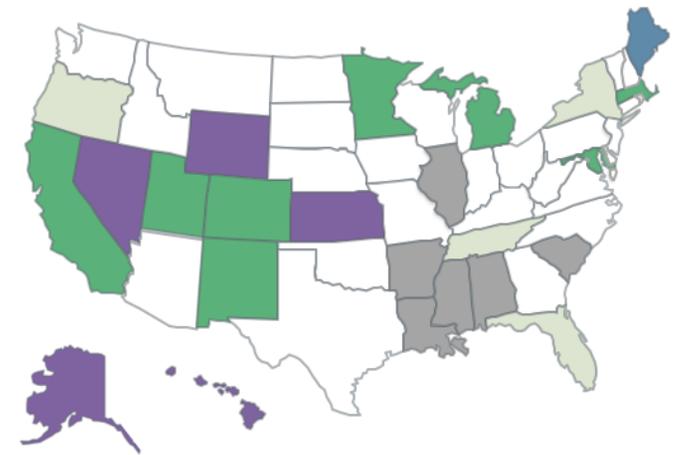
- Statewide Races
- Presidential Caucus / Primaries
- Military & Overseas
- Municipal Pending
- Municipal Races

RCV Readiness: https://docs.google.com/document/d/10kRQMEZfkrWLufRJJLauBm2QXirVwpi5ERMT2BfYnZU/edit?usp=sharing

Council (Multi-Member) Elections:
2 Distinct Types

Single-Winner **Ward** Contests

VS

Multi-Winner **At-Large** Contests
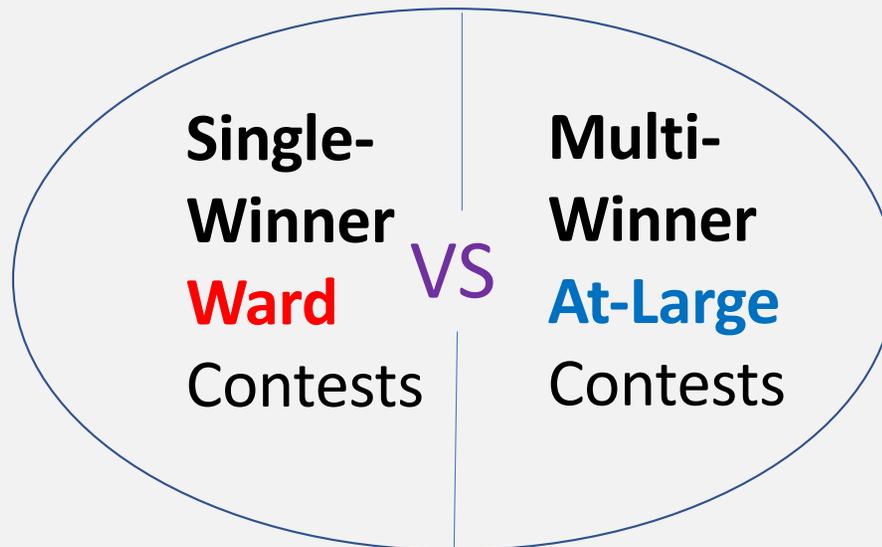
A city council may have some of each type.

Advantages of
Multi-Winner Contests

- **Eliminate gerrymandering**

- **Increase competitiveness**

I Voted
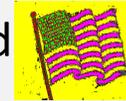
Competitiveness Problems in Single-Winner Districts

Problem #1 - Many district elections are **uncontested** giving voters no choice. A candidate can win due to geography, rather than ability.

Problem #2 - **Two good candidates** vie for one district seat. Only one of the good candidates can win.

Broomfield City Council Single-Winner Elections

Number of Broomfield Municipal Candidates by Contest and Year									
Contest	2019	2017	2015	2013	2011	2009	2007	2005	2003
Mayor	3	2	1	2	2	2	3	3	2
Ward 1	2	2	2	2	1	2	3	3	3
Ward 2	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	2	2
Ward 3	3	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	1
Ward 4	2	4	2	2	1	2	2	3	2
Ward 5	2	3	1	1	1	3	2	2	2

Source: Sept 18, 2018 Broomfield City Council Study Session and Broomfield Election website

Diversity in Multi-Winner Contests

Top two vote-getters in the 2019 Boulder City Council election:
    1)   A Republican man   2) A Black woman
Republicans and Blacks are minorities in the city of Boulder, but they have
representation on the city council.

Strategies that voters may employ in vote-for-5 elections to increase diversity:
- Vote only for 1 – a minority candidate – to improve that candidate's chances
        Not a viable strategy for an uncontested or 2-candidate race
- Vote for your favorite(s) and a "minority" candidate
        Not possible for vote-for-one single-winner contests

Advantages of
Multi-Winner Contests

- **Eliminate gerrymandering**

- **Increase competitiveness**
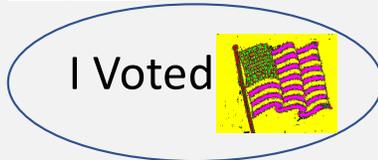
- **Use a voting method that promotes proportional representation**
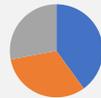
Proportional Representation:
Boulder City Council 1917-1947

"For elections of officials, the Hare system of preferential voting is prescribed. This system insures a **real representation of like-thinking groups of voters**, instead of the present fictitious representation based on wards or other arbitrary geographical districts. It minimizes also the well known evils of parties and of excessive campaign funds."

-- from Prefatory Synopsis, Charter of the City of Boulder, CO

Non-Partisan
Proportional Representation (PR)

Non-partisan PR elections allow the VOTERS to choose

**the *characteristics which matter most*
to them and/or which are the
important issues of the campaign:**

renters, religion, age, gender, racial/ethnic, positions on issues
(fracking, guns), or, yes, political ideology (endorsements) or geography

Achieving Proportional Representation

Voter-Expressed Preferences

22 | 40
38

A Block Voting Result

1 | 1
1 | 1
1

A 5-Winner PR Result

1 | 2
2
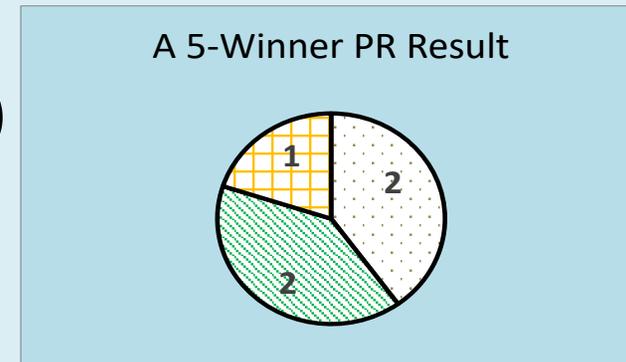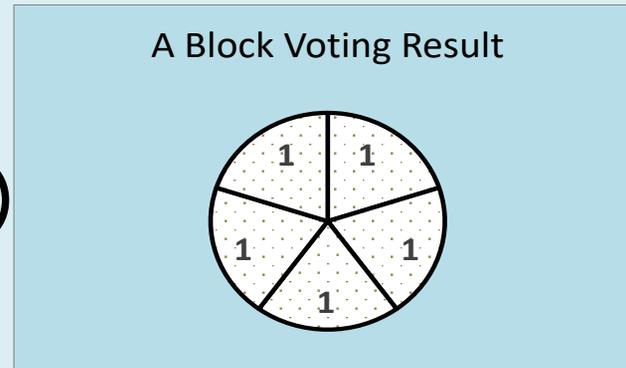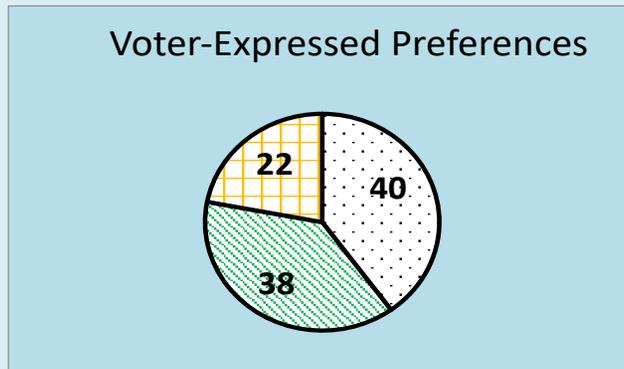
Multi-Winner Council Elections

Promote PR

Rank: Hare aka STV form of RCV

Rate: Proportional forms of Approval Voting

Weight: Cumulative Voting (semi-proportional)

PLACE Voting (use in single-member districts for a multi-member body)

Do Not Promote PR
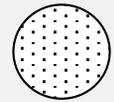
Block Plurality Voting (Boulder)

Block Approval Voting (CUSG, Fargo)
– better than plurality

Block Preferential RCV
– worse than plurality

Block Plurality Election

1,000 voters   5 seats to fill   15 candidates

Every voter votes a straight-slate of 5 candidates.

Polka Dot candidates sweep all the seats with 40 % of the vote.

Polka Dot A	**400**	**Stripe A**	**380**	**Squares A**	**220**
Polka Dot B	**400**	**Stripe B**	**380**	**Squares B**	**220**
Polka Dot C	**400**	**Stripe C**	**380**	**Squares C**	**220**
Polka Dot D	**400**	**Stripe D**	**380**	**Squares D**	**220**
Polka Dot E	**400**	**Stripe E**	**380**	**Squares E**	**220**

Simplified Flowchart of Single Transferable Vote (STV)
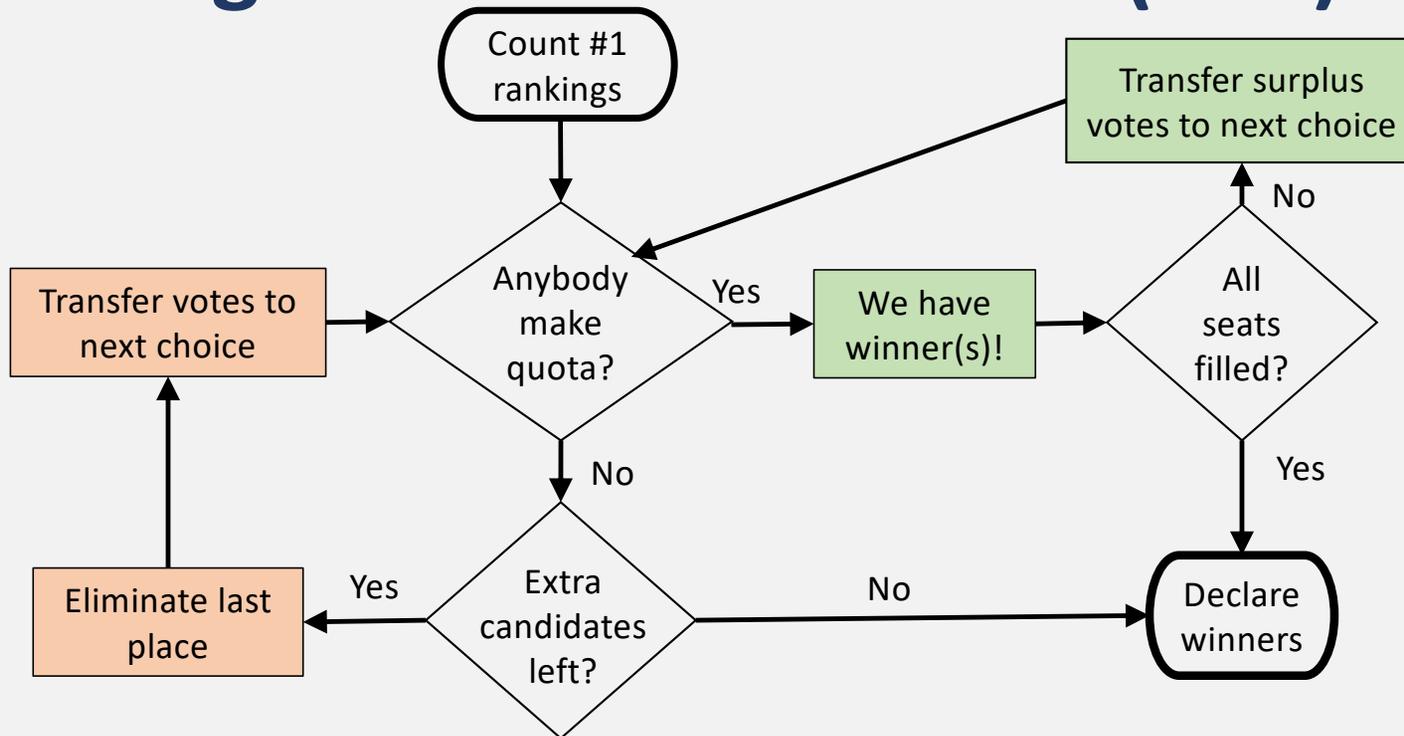
Single Transferable Vote Election

1,000 voters   5 seats to fill

Quota to win is 167 votes > 1000/(5+1)

Round 1 (Tabulation of #1 Rankings):

Polka Dot A and Stripe A win!

Polka Dot A	**200**	**Stripe A**	**210**	**Squares A**	**132**
Polka Dot B	**134**	**Stripe B**	**100**	**Squares B**	**30**
Polka Dot C	**46**	**Stripe C**	**40**	**Squares C**	**23**
Polka Dot D	**15**	**Stripe D**	**20**	**Squares D**	**20**
Polka Dot E	**5**	**Stripe E**	**10**	**Squares E**	**15**

Single Transferable Vote Election

1,000 voters   5 seats to fill

Quota to win is 167 votes > 1000/(5+1)

Round 2 (Transfer surplus votes):

Polka Dot B wins!

PolkDot A	~~200~~ **167**	**Str A**	~~210~~ **167**	**Squ A**	132
PolkDot B	~~134~~ **167**	**Str B**	~~100~~ 143	**Squ B**	30
PolkDot C	46	**Str C**	40	**Squ C**	23
PolkDot D	15	**Str D**	20	**Squ D**	20
PolkDot E	5	**Str E**	10	**Squ E**	15

Single Transferable Vote Election

1,000 voters   5 seats to fill

Quota to win is 167 votes > 1000/(5+1)

Rounds 3 and 4 (Eliminate lowest candidates sequentially):

PolkDot A	**167**	**Str A**	**167**	**Squ A**	**132**
PolkDot B	**167**	**Str B**	~~**143**~~ **153**	**Squ B**	**30**
PolkDot C	~~**46**~~ **51**	**Str C**	**40**	**Squ C**	**23**
PolkDot D	**15**	**Str D**	**20**	**Squ D**	**20**
PolkDot E	~~**5**~~ **elim**	**Str E**	~~**10**~~ **elim**	**Squ E**	**15**

Single Transferable Vote Election

1,000 voters   5 seats to fill

Quota to win is 167 votes > 1000/(5+1)

Rounds 5, 6, 7 and 8 (Eliminate lowest candidates sequentially):

Square A and Stripe B win!   All 5 seats filled.

PolkDot A	**167**	Str A	**167**	Squ A	~~132~~ ~~147~~ **167**
PolkDot B	**167**	Str B	~~153~~ **167**	Squ B	30
PolkDot C	~~51~~ 66	Str C	~~40~~ 46	Squ C	23
PolkDot D	~~15~~ elim	Str D	~~20~~ elim	Squ D	~~20~~ elim
PolkDot E	-- elim	Str E	-- elim	Squ E	~~15~~ elim

UK Parliament Debate
2017 Oct 30

Single-Winner Voting Methods

Burlington, VT 2009 Mayoral Election

Candidate	Bob Kiss (Progressive)	Andy Montroll (Democrat)	Kurt Wright (Republican)
Votes	2981 (**33.8%**)	2554 (**28.9%**)	3294 (**37.3%**)

Burlington, VT 2009 Mayoral Election

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Votes (round 2)	4313 (**51.5%**)	0 (eliminated)	4061 (**48.5%**)
Kiss Wins			

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Votes (round 2)	4313 (**51.5%**)	0 (eliminated)	4061 (**48.5%**)
Kiss Wins			

Montroll vs. Kiss	
Montroll: 4064 (**53.9%**)	Kiss: 3476 (**46.1%**)
Montroll Wins	

Montroll vs. Wright	
Montroll: 4597 (**55.6%**)	Wright: 3664 (**44.4%**)
Montroll Wins	

Approval Voting

Simple; vote for as many as you like

Strategic and well-informed voters elect beat-all winners:

- If the beat-all winner would lose, there is a majority who would be better off voting for the beat-all winner (and their preferred candidates)
- Therefore, that majority will elect the beat-all winner if they're strategic

Not as good when voters lack polling data

Score Voting

Score as many candidates as you like. Highest total score wins.										
Batman	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	●
Catwoman	●	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Lex Luthor	●	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Spiderman	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Superman	0	1	2	3	4	5	●	7	8	9

How does STAR Voting work?

Voters score candidates, and ballots are counted in a two step process: Score, Then Automatic Runoff [STAR]

Ballot

Score candidates from 0 to 5.

5 is **full support**
0 is **no support**

Those that you leave blank receive a 0.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Andrew	0	1	2	3	●	5
Bianca	0	1	2	3	4	●
Chris	0	1	2	3	4	5
Desi	0	1	2	3	●	5
Edith	0	●	2	3	4	5
Frank	0	1	2	3	4	5

ROUND 1: Score

The two highest scoring candidates are finalists.

Rank	Total Score
1: Andrew	21,192
2: Edith	20,394
3: Chris	19,102
4: Desi	10,390
5: Bianca	1,542
6: Frank	346

Way to go, Andrew & Edith!

ROUND 2: Then Automatic Runoff

The ballot already indicates the voter's preferred finalist.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Andrew	0	1	2	3	●	5
Bianca	0	1	2	3	4	●
Chris	0	1	2	3	4	5
Desi	0	1	2	3	●	5
Edith	0	●	2	3	4	5
Frank	0	1	2	3	4	5

Andrew gets this vote.

RESULTS: The finalist preferred by the majority wins!
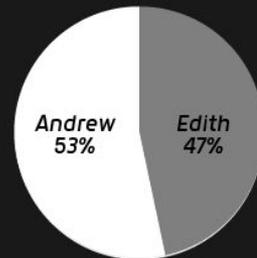
Andrew 53%
Edith 47%

Andrew*	42,533	53%
Edith	37,134	47%

*CONGRATULATIONS, ANDREW!

www.starvoting.us

Method	Plurality	IRV (Instant runoff)	Approval	Score	STAR (score+runoff)
Complexity	Very low	Medium	Very low	Low	Low-medium
Expressiveness	Terrible	Good	Okay	Great	Great
Performance with honest voters	Massive vote splitting	Center squeeze	Possible vote splitting	Great	Great
Performance with strategic voters	Two-party system	Two-party system	Elects beat-all winners	Identical to Approval	Slightly less great
Performance with mix of honest and strategic voters	Two-party system with spoilers	Two-party system (probably)	Elects beat-all winners (probably)	Greater influence for strategic voters	Slightly greater influence for strategic voters
Voter Satisfaction Efficiency	72-86%	80-91%	84-96%	84-97%	91-98%