



Alternate Voting Processes Study

Background Information

PREPARED FOR LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF FLORIDA BY THE
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Alternative Voting Systems: Facts and Issues: Part I

Here begins information about various voting systems for the LWVF study adopted in May 2005. Parts 1 through 6 are from the LWV of Minnesota study of 2004 when they adopted a position on the subject. Subsequent parts will deal with Florida's voting systems. We thank LWVMN Education Fund for permission to reprint this report.

Introduction

The 2000 Presidential election challenged Americans' complacency about the accuracy and fairness of our voting system as never before. With the outcome still in doubt three weeks after Election Day, the combination of a close race, multiple candidates, antiquated voting equipment, and confusing recount procedures created a perfect storm that left voters across the country frustrated and angry.

While some saw the disputes in Florida as an entertaining diversion, others began to wonder about their own state's equipment and procedures, and, for the first time in many years, some started to question seriously the fundamental structure of a winner-take-all plurality election system. When only two major party candidates are on the ballot in an election using the plurality system, majority rule is not a concern. However, when three or more candidates are running, the winner might not have received a majority of the votes.

In fact, eleven of twelve statewide elections in Minnesota conducted from 1998 through 2002 were decided by less than a majority,¹ sparking interest in alternative voting systems that would address this and other issues. Evidence of this interest includes bills permitting Instant Runoff Voting in local and state elections that were introduced in the 2002 and 2003 Minnesota Legislatures² and a more narrowly focused bill that would give the city of Roseville, Minnesota, the option to use alternative voting systems that was introduced in 2004.³

The proposed election law for Roseville passed in the Senate but was "resoundingly defeated" in the House on March 15, 2004. Comments after the vote suggest that many people are unaware that alternative voting systems exist and are unfamiliar with the steps necessary to adopt one of them.⁴

H.F. 1719: Proposed Election Law for Roseville

"Notwithstanding any contrary provision in Minnesota Statutes, the city of Roseville may adopt by ordinance cumulative voting, ranked-order voting, or another method of voting for municipal elections in 2004 that uses a form of ballot different from that required by Minnesota Statutes, section 2048.36, subdivision 2." This bill passed in the Senate but failed in the House on March 15, 2004.⁵

These facts suggest that League members, legislators, and the public would find information about alternative voting systems to be a useful resource. The purpose of this study is to provide background information about the most frequently discussed alternative voting systems for reference, discussion, and

debate. The study does not offer solutions or proposals for change, nor does it assume that changing the current system is necessarily desirable.

This study will use the term *voting system* to mean

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a collection of rules and procedures that establishes how an election will be conducted. These rules include how the ballots are marked, how the votes are tabulated, how many votes are necessary to win, and other election administration procedures.

The scope of the study is limited to single-seat Minnesota state and local elections, such as those for mayors, state legislators, or governor. It describes our current election system and four alternative systems — Plurality, Approval Voting (AV), Instant Runoff Voting (IRV), Borda Count, and Condorcet — in terms of how the ballots are marked and how the votes are counted. In addition, the study presents different issues raised by advocates for each system.

In the Plurality and Approval Voting systems, voters do not rank their choices; they simply indicate which candidate or candidates they prefer. In the Instant Runoff Voting, Borda Count, and Condorcet systems, however, they do rank their choices. This means that they identify their first choice, their second choice, and so on, depending on how many candidates are running and the voter's interest in ranking more than one candidate. Ranking all of the candidates is not a theoretical requirement of any system. This process is called *preference voting*.

Each of these systems has advocates who are actively working for its acceptance, if not in Minnesota, then in other states or at the national level. This is not

a comprehensive list of all voting systems but rather a discussion of those with vocal supporters and/or those that occur most frequently in academic publications. The League of Women Voters has incorporated the opinions of supporters and opponents of each alternative voting system as well as views from members of various academic disciplines and leaders of Minnesota's four political parties.

The report does not address presidential elections, the Electoral College, multi-seat elections, proportional representation, cumulative voting (see Glossary) or other election reform issues such as redistricting, paperless ballots, or campaign finance. ◊

Notes:

- 1998: Governor, Secretary of State, State Auditor, State Treasurer, Attorney General; 2000: President, U.S. Senator; 2002: U.S. Senator, Governor, Secretary of State, State Auditor. <http://www.sos.state.mn.us/election/result.html>
- "Election Reform Legislation," National Conference of State Legislatures. http://www.ncsl.org/programs/legman/elect/elections_search.cfm
- Katie Derdoski, "Alternative Voting Methods Considered in Roseville for Special Election," Roseville Review, Jan. 20, 2004:1.
- Lenora Chu, "Minnesota Legislature: House Rejects Instant Runoff," St. Paul Pioneer Press, Mar. 16, 2004, www.twincities.com/mld/pioneerpress/news/politics/
- Minnesota House of Representatives website: <http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/> Search bill: hf1719.

Alternative Voting Systems

League of Women Voters of Minnesota

Part I Facts and Issues: Introduction

Part II Facts and Issues: Voting Systems

Part III Issues: Determining the Will of the People

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League of Women Voters of Florida

Issues Related to Alternative Voting Systems for the State of Florida