Election Reform Committee Study Materials for Concurrence with LWV of NYC Position on Ranked Choice Voting

> **Concurrence with LWV of the City of New York Position on Ranked Choice Voting Announcement of Concurrence** — **April 26th, from 7-8:30 PM** —we'll have a short education session to answer questions about these study materials and then hold a consensus session to determine whether LWVPWM concurs with the LWVNYC position.

In May of 2021, LWVPWM concurred with the LWVUS position on standards for alternatives to plurality voting. At the New York Convention in June of 2021, LWVPWM co-presented with LWVNYC caucus on Ranked Choice Voting.

After the Convention and presentation, LWVNYS advised that local Leagues interested in moving forward with supporting alternatives to plurality voting concur with the LWNYC position. Should enough local Leagues around New York State concur with the LWVNYC's position, the NYS could consider adopting the NYC position at its 2023 Convention

> **Our immediate goal** is to determine LWVPWM concurrence with the LWVNYC position. Should we choose to concur, we would then be in a position to continue our work educating local Leagues around New York State, encouraging their concurrence with the LWVNYC position to achieve a two-year goal of having NYS concur with the NYC position.

As you read through these materials, consider 1) "Which voting method – plurality voting or Ranked Choice Voting - is better aligned with our League's and the LWVUS's position on Electoral Systems? 2) Which voting method offers more benefit to voters, communities, candidates, when more than two candidates are vying for a single seat:
1. Giving their ballot the most influence over who will represent them?
2. Encouraging campaigns to focus on issues rather than personality/mudslinging?
3. Ensuring that representative bodies better reflect their communities, including opening the way for proportional representation?
4. Encourage sincere voting over strategic voting?

Position to be concurred with:

- **We support ranked-choice voting (sometimes called "instant runoff voting") in all local elections, including primaries, specials, and general elections.**
- Voters should have the option to rank at least three and at most six candidates for a given office.
- The counting should cease to reallocate votes once a candidate receives over 50% of the current round's vote.
- RCV/IRV should happen in lieu of any head-to-head runoffs that might otherwise have occurred.
- Adequate funding should be provided for training, equipment, staff, and voter education.

Introduction: How shall we choose our representatives?

From ancient civilizations to the far, far future, this basic question of how to combine each individual's nuanced preferences and opinions into a single aggregate choice is a procedural concern affecting every aspect of our lives. Our current winner-take-all, plurality system, while easy to understand and administer, faces growing challenges from voters and public policy experts, particularly when compared to other systems, such as those used in this country and other countries to elect officials who are more representative of their constituencies.

In June of 2020, the US League of Women Voters adopted by concurrence a position on Electoral Systems at the national convention. This is the League's first national position on the systems we use to we elect our representatives.

This LWVUS position, with which LWVPWM has concurred, was drafted to guide state and local leagues in their advocacy of election system reform. Among the most popular (and established) reforms, Instant Run-off Voting (IRV), most often called Ranked Choice Voting (RCV), is fully consistent with the LWVUS position. Leagues around the country, after in-depth studies and discussion, are advocating for RCV, including the leagues who drafted and advocated for the new US position in 2020. RCV is has been adopted at the state level in Maine and Alaska, and at the local level in many localities, including New York City.

The LWVNYC Position & History

Ranked Choice Voting – Adopted in 2010, updated in 2019

- **We support ranked-choice voting (in certain circumstances known as instant runoff voting) in all local NYC elections, including primaries, specials, and general elections.**
- Voters should have the option to rank at least three and at most six candidates for a given office.
- The counting should cease to reallocate votes once a candidate receives over 50% of the current round's vote.
- RCV/IRV should happen in lieu of any head-to-head runoffs that might otherwise have occurred.
- Adequate funding should be provided for training, equipment, staff, and voter education.\

LWVNYC's reasoning

- Voters in other cities and states that use RCV appear to understand and like the system, and cities like Santa Fe reported increased voter confidence in the quality of the result. Voters are also able to express their preferences more fully than they would with the existing system.
- Observers in other cities with RCV report reduced negative campaigning.
- While we strongly recommend ample funding for logistical and educational needs, RCV has been run in Maine on a shoestring budget, so it is cost effective, particularly in comparison to the 2009 and 2013 Public Advocate regular runoffs, which cost $13 million with single-digit voter turnout.
- There is no clear effect on voter turnout, suggesting the lack of a negative consequence on that front.
- There is modest evidence for RCV leading to an increase in elected officials that are female or people of color.
- RCV has been implemented successfully in many situations, including major U.S. cities, one U.S. state, and also countries like Australia. Cambridge, MA, has been using this system since 1941.

What are the benefits of Ranked Choice Voting (per LWVNYC)?

- **Eliminates the need for runoff elections**
- **RCV gives you more say in who gets elected.** Even if your top-choice candidate does not win, you can still help choose who does. Your preferences are reflected in the outcome.
- **RCV arguably promotes more civility and less negative campaigning.** Candidates who are not your top choice still need your support as your 2nd, 3rd, 4th, or 5th choice, giving them an incentive to appeal to a wider audience.
- **RCV may lead to more diverse and representative elected officials.** There is some evidence of this in cities using RCV.
- **RCV may reduce polarization of the electorate by removing the current advantages some campaigns derive from tacking to the extreme.** {?????]

Materials used by LWVNYC as studies

Santa Fe, NM
Ranked Choice Voting
November 11, 2018

Background

Santa Fe voters approved Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) through a Charter Revision amendment in 2008. A series of legal maneuvers were taken by the city and others to stop its implementation. A final decision by the NM Supreme Court on January 9, 2018 allowed implementation to move forward with only 8 weeks to the election for a new mayor and city-council members.

I (LWVNYC) contacted <u>Maria Perez, Director FairVote New Mexico</u>, <u>mperez@fairvote.org</u>, to obtain information about the RCV system used by Santa Fe on October 26, 2018. Our discussion followed the suggested research questions established by the Voting Reform Committee. Those topics are summarized below.

Maria said she had been contacted some time ago by Kwame Akosah a policy researcher from New York City regarding attending a NYC Charter Revision Committee meeting in the spring of 2018 (not the September 27 meeting). She was unable to attend, but Rob Richie, President and CEO of FairVote did attend that meeting.

Maria commented that although Santa Fe has only 54,000 registered voters, she does think that Ranked Choice Voting is scalable. Generally Santa Fe voters liked it. Election administrators were hesitant about implementing it; the City Clerk was very uneasy about it.

As Lessons learned, Maria suggested forming a strong partnership with election officials to avoid setting up an environment leading them to feel they were being criticized.

During the Santa Fe March election, volunteers staffed 10 voting centers to collect data from voters as they left the polls about their voting experience. The data was collected, analyzed, and summarized by FairVote to generate a survey results report. This report can be found on the web at <u>https://www.fairvote.org/2018_election</u> and is attached in hard copy. The City Clerk of Santa Fe and the Public Information Officer also prepared an After Action Review for the Mayor and other city officials. This Review can be found on the web at <u>https://www.santafenm.gov/election_-_march_6_2018_regular_municipal_election</u> and is attached in hard copy.

Discussion

The following information is taken from my discussion with Maria, from the RCV survey generated by FairVote, and from the After Action Review prepared by the city.

1. What is the effect on turnout?
    1. Voter turnout increased by 10% compared to last year.
    2. 2006 voter turnout was 30.48%
    3. 2010 voter turnout was 27.4%
    4. 2014 voter turnout was 29.4%
    5. 2018 voter turnout was 38.01%

2. What is the effect on how candidates campaign and the level of negativity?

1. The 2014 election had 3 mayoral candidates.
    1. Pre-election activities were very ugly.
    2. Two of the losers dropped out of politics completely.
    3. There was lots of PAC money and negative advertisements instead of a focus on the issues.
b. The 2018 election with RCV had 5 candidates: 1 conservative Democrat and 4 more liberal Democrats.
    1. Candidates focused on their policy stands on issues. There were no negative ads on opponents.
    2. Four of the five candidates had similar platforms.
    3. Over 20 candidate forums were held which were packed with people.
    4. Those attending the forums said they had to know the issues to pick their 3rd and 4th candidates.
c. FairVote held training workshops for campaign managers on RCV and on how to distinguish their candidates without disparaging other candidates, which they had difficulty with. Voters also self-educated themselves on their new options.
d. RCV rewards candidates who reach out positively to voters rather than smearing opponents.
How might instant-runoff favor (or disfavor) candidates who are well-connected with local officials?
    . It always helps if candidates have money, are well-connected, and are incumbents.
a. RCV does promote success with very little money and mitigates the politics of the process.
What is the level of public confidence in vote results?
    . The November 2016 presidential election exit survey found that 55% of voters were "very confident" their vote was counted as intended.
a. The March 2018 election with RCV showed that more than 70% of voters were "very confident" their vote was counted as they intended.
Do candidates become more granular in their policy positions and how they differentiate themselves from others? Are candidates able to afford the outreach necessary to convey granular policy positions?
    . Candidates did get into policy positions because several candidates had similar positions.
    a. FairVote Minnesota may have more information about policy granularity.
    b. Every region does door knocking.
    c. FairVote Director Maria Perez held candidate and campaign training workshops immediately after the court order allowing RCV to go forward.
    d. Candidates and volunteers also educated their constituencies.
What was the cost, monetary and logistical of the transition? Were the ballots comprehensible and easy to design and understand?
    . A MOU between a coalition of community groups and the city was developed to establish an education and implementation program.
    a. The number of poll workers was doubled which increased the cost of staffing and training of staff.
    b. Three points of contacts with voters were established at the poling centers:
        1. At entry, welcome the voter and provide information.
        2. Before voting, ask if they are clear about the process.
        3. After voting, ask voter if they had any problems.
    c. There were no lines at the polls.
    d. The delay in announcing the winners of the election until 11:45 pm had nothing to do with RCV, although the City Clerk at first took that position. It was instead due to the time it took some voting centers to complete the closing process.

e.   The City Clerk and Public Information Officer wrote a positive After Action Review.
f.   No information on ballot design.
g.   Three vendors of election systems dominate the field. Santa Fe uses Dominion Election Systems as does New York City.
1. They were responsive to Santa Fe's needs.
2. They understand the election process.
3. They are investing in research of the election process as related to their business.
h.   Santa Fe has state of the art equipment and can crank up to 10 candidates.
i.   67% of survey respondents said the ballot was "not at all confusing" as opposed to 6% who found it "very confusing".

Did voters understand the new system?
.   No specific data was found related to whether voters "understand the new system". But some survey results may relate to this question: satisfaction with the experience and confidence with the system.
a.   94% of respondents were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with their voting experience.
b.   Over 70% of respondents said they were "very confident" their vote was counted as they intended.
c.   70.65% of respondents said they thought RCV should be used in future city elections for mayor and city council.
d.   More than 55% of respondents said they liked using the Ranked Choice Voting ballot.
e.   Because ranking second and later choices can never hurt a voter's first choice, campaigns gain nothing by telling voters to rank only them. The survey results demonstrate that the campaigns understood these facts and campaigned well under the new system.

Ranked Choice Voting In Santa Fe: A Guide by Tripp Stelnicki, *The New Mexican*, Nov 29, 2017

http://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/local_news/ranked-choice-voting-in-santa-fe-a-guide/article_efc81ad8-ce7e-558f-b0f5-630387963dde.html

ROAD TO RANKED CHOICE VOTING

March 4, 2008: Santa Fe RCV was approved by voters as a charter amendment.

2010 to early 2017: No RCV systems ready to be submitted to the Secretary of State's Office for certification.

June and July 2017: City Council twice votes to delay implementation of RCV until after March 2018 election because software has not been certified.

Aug 30, 2017: Five city residents file an emergency petition to the state Supreme Court asking justices to order the city to implement RCV for March.

Sept 1, 2017: The 2018 election cycle officially begins.

Sep 21, 2017: A panel of 3 Supreme Court justices denies petition.

Sep 27, 2017: The Secretary of State certifies an upgraded software system for use in all elections statewide in 2018. Software includes a RCV module.

Sep 29, 2017: The same group of 5 city residents petition the state District Court in Santa Fe to order the city to implement RCV,

Nov 29, 2017: The District Court Judge orders the city to use RCV in the March election saying the necessary software is available.

Dec 4, 2017: The City Council will meet "to set a course forward" on election policy

Dec 20, 2017: The City Council adopted an ordinance establishing procedures for RCV.

Jan 9, 2018: The NM Supreme Court rejected the city's appeal of Thomson's order, allowing implementation of RCV.

March 6, 2018: Election Day

Santa Fe's First Ranked Choice Voting Election Produced Clear Outcomes, Higher Turnout and Effective Use of New Ballot, March 7, 2018, Contact: Rich Robinson, posted by Myeisha Boyd, FairVote

https://www.fairvote.org/santa_fe_s_first_ranked_choice_voting_election_produced_clear_outcomes_higher_turnout_and_effective_use_of_new_ballot

- According to FairVote headquarters in Takoma Park, MD voter turnout soared.

- The 2018 mayoral election had more than 20,600 voters and may top 40% of registered voters. This is comparable to the higher than expected mayoral turnouts last November in St. Paul and Minneapolis using RCV.

- The 2018 mayoral election exceeded votes cast in the 2014 mayoral election of 17,022 (28% of registered voters) and also in the controversial "Soda Tax" special election of 2017.

- Women's representation soared as well. Women now hold four of the eight council seats up from two seats in the current council.

- Of the votes for mayor, there were only 40 "undervotes" meaning 99.8% of voters did not skip the 5-choice mayoral ballot.

- There were only 26 "overvotes", when more than one candidate is chosen at the same ranking, meaning that 99.9% of all ballots that included a vote for mayor were valid.

- From the first round to the last round of the five-candidate mayoral race, voter drop-off was just 4%.That means eight of nine voters who backed one of the three candidates who lost before the final round also effectively chose to rank one of the final two candidates as a back-up. This is a far higher ratio than the typical decline of turnout in traditional runoffs that averages more than 35 percent in federal primary election runoffs.

- Elections were run basically without a hitch. Final results were delayed in part to higher turnout.

- FairVote website shows video of voters supporting RCV with these comments:
  - Did not have to vote for the lessor of two evils to make sure that somebody did not get into office.
  - Could support multiple candidates in a meaningful way.
  - Very easy.

- o 30 seconds to vote.
- o Nice to be able to rank preferred candidates.

FairVote Survey Results

https://www.fairvote.org/2018_election

- Survey methodology
  - o The surveys were collected from voters leaving the polls on Election Day, March 6, 2018. Twenty-seven volunteers covered eight voting centers for the entire polling day and two for a half-day each. Respondents participated at random. Surveys were then collected and provided to Dr. Yury Bosin, who was responsible for data entry and returning data to FairVote New Mexico. FairVote New Mexico then worked with FairVote staff in generating the survey results.

- Ballot
  - o 55% liked using the RCV ballot
  - o 24% did not like using the RCV ballot
  - o 67% found the RCV ballot not at all confusing
  - o 17.2% found the ballot not too confusing
  - o 9.4% found the ballot somewhat confusing
  - o 6.3% found the ballot very confusing
- Turnout of registered voters
  - o 2006 30.48%
  - o 2010 27.4%
  - o 2014 29.4%
  - o 2018 38.01%
- Candidates ranked
  - o Ranked 1 11.15%
  - o Ranked 2 8.08%
  - o Ranked 3 11.15%
  - o Ranked 4 8.00%
  - o Ranked 5 61.63%
- Satisfaction with voting experience
  - o Very Satisfied 81%
  - o Somewhat satisfied 13%
  - o Somewhat unsatisfied 3%
  - o Very unsatisfied 1%
- Vote counted as intended
  - o 2018 election70% very confident
  - o 2016 election 55% very confident
- How ballots counted
  - o Did not register a valid preference .3%
  - o Preferences inactive by final round 4.0%
  - o Counted in the final round 96.0%
- Support for RCV
  - o March 2008 voter approval of RCV 65%
  - o March 2018 70.65% thought RCV should be used in future city elections for mayor and city council

- o More than 76% of voters had a candidate or campaign ask to be a second or third choice
- o More than 95% of voters reported that no campaign asked them to only vote for one
- o More than 69% of voters reported that the candidates spent "very little time" or "none of the time" criticizing their opponents.
- Tone of campaigns
  - o Much more positive 34.24%
  - o Somewhat more positive 33.19%
  - o About the same 29.55%
  - o Somewhat more negative 1.77%
  - o Much more negative 1.25%

For more information on RCV

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From Fairvote:

https://www.fairvote.org/spotlight_cambridge#history_rcv_cambridge

Cambridge, Massachusetts has used the at-large form of ranked choice voting, an American form of proportional representation (PR), to elect its City Council and School Committee since 1941. Cambridge adopted ranked choice voting at a time when more than two-dozen cities across the United States, including New York, Cincinnati, and Cleveland, used RCV to elect city councils and other positions in local government. Many of the cities that adopted RCV in that era did away with it due to changes in voting technology and the increased ability of racial minorities to get elected under RCV, but the system remains in Cambridge.
Ranked choice voting allows groups of like-minded voters to elect representatives in proportion to their share of the population and has ensured fair representation of the city's political and ethnic minority groups for over 70 years. In February 2014, FairVote published a report on the effects this system had on the city's elections in 2013, and an op-ed in the Cambridge Chronicle discussing the use of this form of fair representation voting in the city.

LWV MA connected LWVNYC to Adam Friedman of Voter Choice MA, who in turn connected LWVNYC to Poly: https://www.voterchoicema.org/about_us
adam@voterchoicema.org

Poly's email:

So you understand the Cambridge Proportional Representation system, it is used exclusively in our Municipal Elections. Cambridge is run by a City Manager. We elect both the City Council (9 members) and the School Committee (6 members). The office of Mayor exists, but it is largely ceremonial and the mayor is chosen by the City Council from among their members. Other than presiding at Council meetings, the Mayor heads the School Committee. We often have more than twenty candidates for Council and 10 to 15 for School Committee. Back in the hand-counting day, The Count took a week or more to complete.

http://cambridge.wickedlocal.com/article/20140225/NEWS/140227796

Questions on RCV:

Who: Polyxane Cobb from Cambridge, Deb McDonough from Maine

Notes:
Deb
      Multi-winner ranked choice voter
      Scarborough, ME
      Questions primarily involve education and outreach

Poly
      1941
      Until early 90s did count by hand

Was a community experience that took a week, it was fun

Poly's retired, but was an election commissioner for many years in Cambridge

9 councilors and 6 school committee members - have as many as 15 candidates on school committee, 25 candidates for city council

Fundamentally the same - 1 candidates vs. multiple candidates

Complexity is that it takes a long time, and you have to make sure you do it right

Choice Plus Pro software

Every community with PR has own quark

Cambridge has formula for achieving quota ex. How many votes a candidate has to achieve in order to be elected → to make it impossible for more than 9 to achieve

Total number of valid ballots / (total number of available seats + 1) + 1 // makes it impossible

Formula for candidate to candidates

In first count, a candidate achieves more votes than quota in first count

Instead of pulling out extra ballots from front to back, they want to pull them out semi-randomly

Divide total # of votes by excess votes - 10.8 in ex., count 10, pull out 1

If a ballot did not have a number 2 choice, it would stay with original candidates

Pulled ballots until person had what they needed for quota and no more

Eliminate all candidates that don't achieve more than 50 votes per each round

Deb - any conversation about switching to fractional distribution systems
- Poly - Yes. People say it's more accurate, but she doesn't care b/c state law recounts have to recount ballots. Fractional distribution can't do it by hand, have to do it with a computer
  - Candidates don't trust it
- Have had 3 recounts since computer has gone into effect; everyone verified computer count. People no longer trust computers.

How does Poly feel about Voter Choice MA?
- She's a huge proponent
- Can have a huge number of candidates, but always end up with a balance that seems to work
  - Last election - 2 young men running with same age and same experience
  - Both active within the city, and they took votes from one another b/c they were largely the same
  - Instructive b/c true that type of candidates can affect one another in a negative as well as positive way. Can end up getting the person you don't want b/c there are too many candidates you want
  - If can't make it to quota, then they're damaged candidates anyway. Real issue is if equally attractive candidates or candidates that represent same point of view → splitting of votes can occur. Poly questions it when people of similar views cancel out each other. PR allows if 3rd candidate undesirable to majority of electorate, ranked choice is going to correct it - whole purpose behind doing it.

What is Poly's role in Cambridge?
  - Prior election commissioner, PR evangelist
  - Used to work on campaigns - people will show up to vote among new people if they have children and care about the school committee,; if you explain it to them well
  - Wardens find themselves giving lectures on PR

- o Turnout determined by how many former councilors and former school committees decide not to run - people call them open seats
- o Notion same old same old will win, so people don't turn out
  - ▪ If "open seats", public gets more engaged
  - ▪ Council elects mayor becomes leader of school committee
  - ▪ Biggest turnouts in 70s when rent control came to Cambridge
- ▪ Election commission can only do so much to increase turnout
  - ▪ When she ran campaigns, knock on doors of people who always voted plus new people to the city. Hard thing to do in Cambridge - people percieve it as bigger city than it is - busy place, students
  - ▪ 70k / 100k population is registered to vote

Deb - how many incumbents do you have running
- o Generally are 8 or 9 incumbents running
- o People who don't run again
  - o People who want to retire
  - o People who use it as a stepping stone to something else
  - o People who have relied on 1 portion of electorate and doesn't expand (gets older and dies or moves out of community)
- o Incumbents are very successful, rare to lose. Incumbents get elected and generally are good politicians. They show up to local events.

What is the effect on turnout? Notice difference between newcomers to the community and long time people from Cambridge?
- o Person can be passionately believing something, there isn't a whole lot people can do about it
- o People have confusion about how it works
- o Too much outreach → could lead to confusion

What is the effect on how candidates campaign and the level of negativity?
- o Candidates are nicer to one another
- o Very little negative advertising
- o Debates - lot of calling one another my friend/honored colleague
- o Pleasant elections overall
- o "Well I agree with so and so but I would take it a step further"
- o Some candidates only generate a few votes, can't raise enough money for outreach
- o People get on the ballot at start of June, they have to have 50 people who sign their nomination papers; some people have a party
- o Pretty easy to get on the ballot, they make it as easy as possible, takes a month to get them in

Voter rank
- • Up until and including last election, they had enough spots to rank all 25 candidates plus write-in spaces
- • Some people have trouble finding names on the ballot, so they fill in the 9 write in spaces with the names of the candidates - easier for them to write them in; people sometimes used nicknames, they go by voter intent in Cambridge

Are there systemic patterns to whether people only rank their top choice, versus ranking their top 2+ choices, when presented with more than 2 choices?
- o Have always been cohort that does only #1
- o Are people who do all of them
- o Some candidates say should do all of them, doesn't mean you are going to win
- o Furthest ballot will go is 4th or 5th choice is as far as it's going to go, chance it will be distributed

- They spend day after election they go through ballots that couldn't go through scanner (over vote or duplicate vote) typically → means they aren't really thinking who to give votes to
- People do designs like smiley faces - in ME too
- Number 27 - if only vote on ballot, computer ranks it as #1
  - Deb invalidates ranking in ME law

LWVUS Position – LWVPWM Concurred May 2021

LWVUS 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 verifiable and auditable
• Promote access to voting
• Maximize effective votes/minimize wasted votes
• Promote sincere voting over strategic voting
• Implement alternatives to plurality voting
• Are compatible with acceptable ballot-casting methods, including vote-by-mail

Additional LWVNYC Study Material

Effect on turnout (summary: inconclusive given other factors)	Santa Fe: concurrent with 9% rise in 2018 (although RCV was not necessarily the main cause) Maine: higher than expected turnout in 2018 primary (same-- probably other reasons for turnout rise) Minneapolis: 2017 turnout 42%; 2013 turnout 33%; 2009 turnout 20%; 2005 (pre-RCV) turnout 30%, 2001 (pre-RCV) turnout 41% Cambridge: not clearly any consistent effect on turnout
Are voters confused?/Did voters like and use RCV? (summary: voters	Santa Fe: 67% felt ballot was very clear; 94% were satisfied with their voting experience; 70% reported liking RCV

seem to use RCV just fine)	Maine: about 80% of voters for Governor in the June 2018 primary selected at least 2 candidates; about 8% ranked all 8 candidates (first time using RCV) Minneapolis: in 2017 (third time using RCV), 87% of voters for Mayor selected at least 2 candidates and 74% selected the **maximum in Minneapolis of 3 candidates**; really cool data visualization at http://vote.minneapolismn.gov/results/2017/2017-mayor-tabulation Cambridge: lots of variation in how people vote, never goes past 4th or 5th instant runoff round; voters seem to be occasionally confused (but not necessarily more than they are with regular ballots)
Effect on voter confidence (summary: largely positive)	Santa Fe: 15% (55% to 70%) increase in confidence in vote counting system Maine: campaigns prefer hand counts to computers due to lack of trust (but no mention of lack of trust from RCV)
Level of negative campaigning (summary: less of this occurs)	Santa Fe: positive report on campaigning effects Cambridge: elections tend to be pleasant, with little negative advertising (source: former election commissioner)
Do campaigns try harder to differentiate on policy? (summary: unclear)	Santa Fe: modest evidence that yes Cambridge: former election commissioner says that when there are fewer differences in policy, it's less likely that they completely split the vote than with first-past-the-post
Logistical or monetary costs (summary: staff, ballot design, training, machines, test elections, and voter education may all constitute costs)	Santa Fe: more staff were required to man the polls Maine: new machines and ballot design was required, as well as staff training and public informational materials; tabulation took 8 days after the June primary which was longer than expected; ran off a bare-bones budget of $110K beyond usual costs (Boston Globe, 10/17/18) Minneapolis: conducted a "test" election in May 2009; "with a 70,000 voter turnout [in case of recount], it was estimated hand-counting the 22 offices would take 37 8-hour shifts with 102 election judges serving as counters and data entry staff" St Paul: "The county also provides detailed information of what RCV did cost—slightly less than $190,000 combined for the city and county. Almost half of these were one-time costs, such as developing training materials, for implementing the new system." (Pew Trusts)

	Cambridge: has done RCV forever and used to do it by hand (took about a week to count), but now uses Choice Plus Pro software
Voter outreach ideas	Minneapolis: prior to implementation, elected officials and administrators said "the task of educating voters about a fundamental change in voting method appeared difficult but not impossible...They mentioned that every election confuses a small number of voters, even though the voting system has been in place for over 200 years"; government website has a nice interactive ballot explainer http://vote.minneapolismn.gov/rcv/index.htm

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Pro and Con Considerations, Voter Representation / Electoral Systems

Pro	Con
Considering our long-standing principle, "We believe in representative government," after 100 years, we need a position on Voter Representation to support this principle. The electoral system determines WHO gets representation.	After 100 years, the LWV doesn't need a national position on Voter Representation; the principle covers it.
This proposed concurrence provides a clear but flexible base of preferred principles (from 14 state and many local positions) for evaluating electoral options to enhance voter representation.	The numerous criteria included are very broad, and, as an entire group, not easily achieved.
This position does not support one particular electoral system, but allows options for local jurisdictions seeking to empower more voters.	This position doesn't specifically name or support a best electoral system; naming the 'best' could be helpful and less confusing to members.
This concurrence was developed from positions of 14 state leagues. Those Leagues, and many other Local / State Leagues, have done deep dives into electoral reform. As LWVUS intended, a concurrence allows us all to take advantage of their work. LWVUS is supporting adopting positions by concurrence as an alternative to national studies.	Despite having used the concurrence process (instead of full nationwide studies) in the past for national positions, we should not adopt positions by this method.
This position is especially important to Leagues without their own position. Such Leagues can use this to evaluate whether to support or oppose voter-approved ballot options or legislation for their communities; or even to propose such measures. This does not supersede the option for Leagues with positions to use their own.	Some Leagues may prefer to do their own study and develop their own position.
The purpose of a concurrence (the process which is in our bylaws and demands a 2/3 vote) is to use the positions of Leagues that have done the full research and consensus of each subject and arrived at a position.	Without full national study, there may not be member understanding. Some states have studied it, but all states should study it at the same time.
It makes sense for the League of Women VOTERS to have a position on how we VOTE in our leaders.	The LWV doesn't need a position on HOW we elect our leaders. We have functioned within our current system and without a position for 100 years.
Electoral options are needed to improve voter representation. The LWV does not have a position that supports or opposes ANY electoral system	While the LWV has not studied and does not have a position on the current winner-take-all plurality system, it is accepted and familiar to voters.
This position recognizes that the electoral systems we use can enhance or deny representation just as much as who draws district lines, and how they are drawn. With this position, both issues are addressed	Redistricting reform with Independent redistricting commissions drawing the lines will solve the issue of voters not being represented.

League of Women Voters State Positions [as of 2016 at least 14 State Leagues had positions supporting RCV]

ARIZONA

The League of Women Voters of Arizona believes in the election system principle of greater vote representation. The LWVAZ maintains the hope that election system reform that provides a stronger voice for the greatest number of voters should have a positive effect on voter participation. Therefore, the LWVAZ:

- Supports changing the present election systems so that they more accurately represent the wishes of voters:

- Adopting the Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) system for single seat races;

- Adopting proportional representation for multi-seat races, specifically Ranked Choice Voting.

- Believes that education of the voting public is important to election systems.

- Supports giving Arizona voters the option of more choice among election systems.

Consensus 2005, Amended 2008

CALIFORNIA

Election Systems Position:

Support election systems for executive offices, both at the state and local levels, that require the winner to receive a majority of the votes, as long as the majority is achieved using a voting method such as Instant Runoff Voting, rather than a second, separate runoff election.

(In 2011 Expanded to all single-winner elections.) Adopted 2001; Modified 2003; Expanded to all single- winner elections, 2011.

FLORIDA

Following statewide local League consensus meetings, the League of Women Voters of Florida announced a new Election Law, Voting Process position making the method of instant runoff voting a recommended alternative to plurality voting.

MAINE

Endorsed ranked choice voting in 2011.

President Barbara McDade wrote in Bangor paper in 2011:

"A recent OpEd piece asserted that run-off elections are not needed. The League of Women Voters of Maine disagrees. "Majority rules" is the bedrock of our democracy. The majority of the people should elect our governor, providing him or her the mandate necessary to lead effectively.

"The League endorses Instant Runoff Voting (IRV). With IRV, voters rank all candidates on the ballot in order of preference. In round one, the first-choice votes are counted. If a candidate gets more than 50 percent of the votes, he or she is declared the winner. If no candidate has a majority, the counting goes to round two. The candidate with the lowest number of votes is

eliminated, and the votes cast for the eliminated candidate are then transferred to the second choice listed on each ballot. If a candidate gets a majority, the election is over. If no one receives a majority, the counting continues to round three and so forth.

"This system would elect the candidate with the broadest support of the people. The election would be accomplished in one day, avoiding many of the problems associated with traditional runoff elections, including additional expenses for municipalities, extension of the campaign season, increased cost of campaign financing, and significant reduction in voter engagement and turnout in the runoff.

"IRV legislation will be introduced in Maine's Legislature this session. Our legislators should give IRV careful consideration as a means to ensure broad support for the state's chief executive.

MASSACHUSETTS

VOTING SYSTEMS - GOAL: Voting systems should be easy to use, administer and understand, encourage high voter turnout, encourage real discussion on issues, promote minority representation, and encourage candidates to run.

When electing someone to a single executive office at the state level, such as governor or attorney general, including primary and general elections, the voting system should require the winner to obtain a majority of the votes.

The League supports instant runoff voting. Cost and complexity make two-round runoff not acceptable. Adopted 2005

MINNESOTA

Position on Alternative Voting Systems:

Alternative Voting Systems: Support of the option to use Instant Runoff Voting to elect State or Local Officials in single seat elections. LWVMN also supports the continued use of the plurality voting system in our elections. The LWVMN Board reserves the right to decide the appropriateness of legislation proposing to replace the plurality voting system with the Instant Runoff System at the state level. LWVMN strongly supports the right of local governments and municipalities to choose Instant Runoff Voting for their own elections. Voters need to understand how votes in an election are tabulated and how a candidate actually wins an election. If a change in elections occurs, LWVMN strongly supports adequate voter education. LWVMN does not support Approval, Borda Count, or Condorcet as alternative voting systems.

NORTH CAROLINA

IRV Endorsement: In accordance with the League of Women Voters 'position of promoting political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government, the LWVNC will support legislation that assures that the candidate preferred by a majority of voters wins the election.

Specifically, the LWVNC will support instant runoff voting (IRV) for all statewide and local elections. Adopted: May 31, 2008.

OKLAHOMA

Took position in favor of IRV over runoffs in 2011.

SOUTH CAROLINA

Adopting election systems that ensure better proportional representation of the varied segments of our voting population, within South Carolina, by city, county or statewide, as is appropriate. Our

present "winner-take-all" system in many instances fails to achieve a goal of fair representation of minorities and women. Most of the world's major democracies use a form of proportional representation, and we endorse this opportunity for the following reasons:

    a) To achieve better election and/or influence for minorities and women in proportion to their numbers in the population.

    b) To lessen election costs, in part by eliminating costly runoff elections.

    c) To eliminate redistricting and its frequent abuse through gerrymandering.

    d) To lessen the advantages now in place for incumbent candidates over new office- seekers.

    e) To lessen polarization among segments of the population.

    f) To increase voter turnout and decrease voter cynicism.

    g) To encourage election campaigns based on issues rather than personal attacks.

    h) To promote a greater opportunity for the voices of third-party candidates.

Continued support for the League's one-person, one-vote position, with added emphasis on the right of each community to develop its own election system, after careful examination of the demography of its community. Systems which may be considered include Instant Runoff Voting (IRV), Limited Voting, Cumulative Voting, and others. Of these, IRV has been used in various states and localities, and is being introduced into various election districts. It is likely to be the most effective and widely accepted new system.

The actions supported below speak to local elections only because it is unrealistic to consider them at a statewide level before actual local practice has taken hold so that the public may be aware of the advantages of a new system, as well as its simplicity in practice. In order to seek the method most suitable for the local population, we recommend that the local League determine whether a form of proportional voting would benefit the community in so far as providing more equitable elected representation and if the result is affirmation, proceed as follows:

    a) Determine what alternative election system would be desirable to achieve the above goals.

    b) Engage in a concerted voter-education process within the community so as to gain community understanding and support.

    c) Work with the city or county council to change their respective election methods to incorporate at-large elections, as well as a selected alternative election system, either through Council vote or by voter referendum.

    d) Work with legislators to change school board election methods. (Any agreement to change the voting method will require subsequent approval of the US Justice Department.)

    e) Provide continuing voter education to enhance public acceptance and ease of voting under a new election system and work with County Election officials to ensure successful execution at the first election under a new system.

Background/Action: A study of alternative election systems was passed at the LWVSC 2003 convention. The number 11 support position was adopted by the state board at its March 2005 meeting. In 2007, with completion of a two-year study of electronic voting in SC, Section 9.f. was amended and Section 12 was added.

VERMONT

CONSENSUS ON INSTANT RUNOFF VOTING (IRV):

In accordance with the LWV's position of promoting political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government, the LWVVT will support legislation that assures that the candidate preferred by a majority of voters wins the election.

Specifically, the LWVVT will support instant runoff voting (IRV) for all statewide Elections.
Adopted: 1999

Vermont Position on Redistricting and Voting Methods:

The emphasis on geographic representation in legislative bodies in the U.S. may be anachronistic. It is more important that voters be represented by elected officials who reflect their political views, than happen to live nearby. Single-seat winner-take-all elections, regardless of method of redistricting, elevate the representation of geography above political philosophy, and other priority voter self- identities.

It is impossible to redistrict single-seat districts in such a way as to promote BOTH competitive elections AND a highly representative delegation (as these two priorities are in inherent conflict in single-seat districts). Therefore,

The League of Women Voters of Vermont supports the principle of legislative districts using alternative voting methods, such as proportional representation in multi-seat districts, as a way of achieving both competitive elections and fair representation of both majorities and minorities within a district.

Adopted: 2008

WASHINGTON

POSITION IN BRIEF:

Action to facilitate changes in the state constitution to achieve a representative and effective state legislature. Action to promote an informed electorate. Action to limit methods of financing political campaigns in order to ensure the public's right to know, combat undue influence, enable candidates to compete more equitably for public office and promote citizen participation in the election process. Action to support access for citizens to initiate or modify legislation through the initiative and referendum process. Action to protect the interests of all affected parties in considering the formation of new counties. Action to clarify in legislation the processes in county formation and to require that the entire county have the ability to vote on separation. Action to allow more options for alternative election systems that promote "representative-ness" such as proportional representation, citizen participation and accountability and a primary that is "open" and encourages minor party participation. ...

The LWVWA adopted a two-year study, "An Evaluation of Major Election Methods and Selected State Election Laws," at the 1999 state convention in Spokane, WA. This study, completed in 2000, described a number of election systems in use throughout the world which could serve as alternatives to the system commonly used in the United States. Election methods dealing with both multimember and single-member races were described. The study provided a list of criteria by which election methods could be evaluated, and these criteria were ranked by League members, with representative-ness, citizen participation and accountability receiving top ranking. The term "representative-ness" was coined to signify the degree to which a legislative body reflects the demographic makeup of the state (mirrors the political preferences of the voters, including ethnic, racial, philosophic, or minorities) and also to signify protection of the right to representation for ethnic, racial, philosophic and other minorities. After reading and discussing the study, League members concluded that the State should enable jurisdictions in Washington to experiment with a variety of election methods. ...

Recognizing the complexities of the topic of election methods, delegates at the 2001 LWVWA convention adopted a one-year continuation of the Election Methods study focusing on the three alternative election methods currently receiving considerable public attention:

- Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) for single winner offices (produces a majority vote winner.)
- Choice Voting (Single Transferable Voting) for representative bodies used to achieve proportional representation.

- Cumulative Voting (achieve semi-proportional representation)

- An explanatory program was developed which utilized visual aids and mock voting using current voting methods as well as the three major alternative systems. This program was a great help in better understanding the relationship between the election method used and election results. Members are enthusiastic about sharing this program with the public and in seeing alternative election methods adopted at the state and local level...

- The League of Women Voters of Washington:

  o Supports state election laws allowing for more options for alternative election systems in governmental jurisdictions at both the state and local levels.

  o Believes that consideration should be given, when evaluating election systems, to how well they promote "representative-ness", citizen participation and accountability. ***

  o Supports adoption of election methods that produce proportional representation when electing representative government bodies such as councils, legislatures and Congress.

  o Supports the concept of a majority vote requirement for winners of single offices such as mayor or governor, as long as it is achieved using a voting method such as the Instant Runoff Vote, rather than a second, separate runoff election.

LOCAL LEAGUE: POSITION EXAMPLES

BERKLEY (CA)
"Instant runoff voting" should be used in all elections involving more than two candidates for a single position. *Adopted: 2000*

OAKLAND (CA)
"Instant runoff voting" should be used in all elections involving more than two candidates for a single position. *Adopted: 2003*

MONTGOMERY (MD)
"We support the option to use Instant Runoff Voting for single seat or executive office elections, both at the county and local level. This would require the winner to receive a majority of the votes cast.

a) To fill vacancies in any county offices, when special elections are held, we support a single election requiring a candidate to receive a majority of votes (using Instant Runoff Voting) instead of conducting both special political party primaries and a special general election.

b) In addition, we support using a single election, instead of both a primary and general, which requires a candidate to receive a majority of votes (using Instant Runoff Voting) in order to be elected to the nonpartisan Board of Education. The election should be concurrent with the general election.

Election Equipment We believe all newly acquired voting equipment (hardware and software) for use in Montgomery County should allow alternative ways of casting and counting ballots and be usable for all county and municipal elections. (NOTE: In 2008, this includes support of Instant Runoff Voting and Single Transferable Vote.) *Adopted 2008*

Criteria for Evaluating Election Methods

The LWVUS lists 8 criteria for evaluating electoral systems, 4 of which were well covered by LWV Washington's 2000 study.[1] This section offers background and detail on each of the LWVUS criteria, sequencing those defined by Washington second, followed by the additional criteria listed by Washington that were not included in the LWVUS position.

- ***Are verifiable and auditable*** - Must have stringent integrity properties. For example, most states require a paper trail. Further, hand recounts must be possible for auditing. (RCV is fully compatible with these requirements)

- ***Maximize effective votes/minimize wasted votes*** - Plurality voting *maximizes* wasted votes. In single-member races, voting for a third party or a write-in is usually a wasted vote. In multi-member races, an overwhelming favorite reduces the value of votes for that candidate in excess of the threshold needed to win one of the available seats

- ***Are compatible with acceptable ballot-casting methods, including vote-by-mail*** - Specifically, how ballots are marked, accommodating disabled voters, voting-by-mail, optical-scan machines. (RCV ballots are consistent with all current ballot-casting methods)

- ***Implement alternatives to plurality voting*** - Implicit in this statement is that plurality voting, when compared to alternatives, is the least effective in terms of meeting LWVUS goals for election methods. (See below for how election methods are evaluated.)

- ***Encourage voter participation and voter engagement*** - One test of a healthy democracy is voter turnout. Democracy is founded on the principle of "consent of the governed." This principle is weakened when fewer than half of all eligible voters are electing the officials who make decisions that affect everyone.

  Election methods and procedures can dramatically affect turnout. In addition to procedures that overtly reduce turnout by making voting harder (barriers to registration, distant polling places, ballots in only one language, etc.), election methods and procedures may affect turnout in subtler ways. One example is the "safe district" dominated by one party. Citizens opposed to that party are easily discouraged from voting because, they feel, their vote has no chance of affecting the outcome – that their vote is actually not as powerful as the votes of citizens who support the dominant party. Also, in districts with uncontested races, voters of the dominant party may not take the trouble to vote, viewing that vote as pointless. Some voters as a matter of principle will not vote in any uncontested race. However, when a variety of closely contested races and issues are also on the ballot, turnout may be improved.

  Political scientists often measure the percentage of voters who supported a winning candidate. Election methods differ greatly on this. Some methods routinely use the votes of more than 80% and even 90% of the electorate to choose the officeholders. Other methods tend to produce much lower percentages. Not surprisingly, turnout correlates remarkably well with these measures of winning votes. Simply put, citizens seem most likely to vote when they feel that their vote is most likely to count (make a difference in the results).

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[1] LWV of Washington, "An Evaluation of Major Election Methods And Selected State Election Laws Fall 2000," pages 22-34, available *https://www.lwvwa.org/resources/Pictures/emstudy.pdf*

- ***Encourage those with minority opinions to participate, including under-represented communities -*** On the meaning of this attribute, John Adams, the second president of the United States, wrote:

  "The principal difficulty lies, and the greatest care should be employed in constituting this representative assembly. It should be in miniature an exact portrait of the people at large. It should think, feel, reason and act like them. That it may be the interest of the assembly to do strict justice at all times, it should be an equal representation, or, in other words, equal interests among the people should have equal interests in it. Great care should be taken to effect this, and to prevent unfair, partial and corrupt elections." (Adams)

  An essential aspect of Representative-ness is the protection of the right to representation for ethnic, racial and philosophic minorities. Despite the nearly universal use of plurality or majoritarian ('winner-take-all') election laws throughout the United States, the League's history in regard to the national Voting Rights Act implies support for "effective representation of minority citizens."

- ***Promote access to voting*** - Two additional criteria, suggested by the IIDEA, should be considered. Note that the IIDEA uses "parliament" as the generic term for all legislative bodies.

  Excerpts from the IIDEA Handbook of Electoral System Design explain these terms.

  Ease of voting—ensuring access to polling places, removal of barriers to registration and voting, accuracy and currency of the electoral rolls, confidence in ballot secrecy.

  Wasted (or Losing) votes—"[T]he broader issue of ensuring whether an individual's vote makes a difference to the final results. If you know that your preferred candidate has no chance of winning a seat in your particular district, what is the incentive to vote? In some electoral systems the number of "wasted votes" (i.e., those that do not go towards the election of any candidate, as distinct from spoiled or invalid votes, which are ballots excluded from the count) can amount to a substantial portion of the total national vote."

  Proportionality of results—Referring to the corrosive effect resulting from a widespread perception that the system is "rigged" and produces unfair (very disproportionate) results.

  As IIDEA writes in the Handbook:

  > "... even within democratic parliamentary systems, the choice of the electoral system can influence the legitimacy of institutions. For example, the Australian Senate between 1919 and 1946 was elected by a highly disproportional electoral system (the Alternative Vote in multi-member districts) that produced lop-sided and unrepresentative results. This tended to undermine the actual legitimacy of the Senate itself in the eyes of both electors and politicians.... After the system was altered to a fairer proportional system (the Single Transferable Vote) in 1948, the Senate began to be perceived as more credible and representative...."

- ***Promote sincere voting over strategic voting*** - Sincere voting has two aspects. First is the problem, related to the issue of minority representation, of ensuring that the majority's wishes are respected. The second aspect is ensuring that voters feel they do not have to play games or vote strategically to ensure that their vote doesn't end up backfiring on them.

  Strategic voting then is the opposite of sincere voting, and the need for strategic voting is a defining characteristic of various election methods.

  Most American voters understand strategic voting whether or not they use the term. They know that, in some cases, a vote for a favorite third-party candidate can actually help the least-preferred candidate win, by splitting the vote between the two major contenders, or by

drawing votes away from one contender in a close race. In a strong two-party system, great pressure is apt to be exerted on the third-party supporter, urging her not to vote for her favorite candidate and thereby spoil the race for her second choice candidate. In slang terms, she will be asked to vote for the lesser of evils rather than help the worst evil get elected. The electoral system in use in our country makes strategic voting possible and, some say, vital.

New Mexico experienced the minority winner phenomenon in 1997, when a Green Party and a Democratic Party candidate shared a majority of votes for a seat in Congress–while losing to a Republican candidate who achieved a plurality but not a majority of votes. The same year, the reverse took place in the Alaskan gubernatorial race where Republicans split their votes between two factions and the Democrat won. These are but two examples of a long-understood facet of single- member plurality elections: "vote splitting" – where a majority of voters, voting their sincere choice, wind up electing the candidate they least prefer.

The choice of election methods and procedures has much to do with whether or not voters feel that they can vote their sincere choice, or whether they must vote strategically (be willing to vote for other than their true preferences). Many people feel that the necessity to vote strategically when more than two parties are on the ballot has a great deal to do with the low rates of citizen satisfaction with and participation in elections. Others believe that strategic voting is part of the reality of political life whenever more than two parties are fielding candidates for office, and that minor party candidates and their supporters, in wishing for a "sincere" vote, simply do not have sufficient pragmatic grasp of this reality. However, an election method, which provides the ability for a failed "sincere" vote to be transferred to a second-choice candidate, could allow a voter the luxury of having her cake (sincere vote) and eating it, too (strategic vote as well).

Additional Criteria (from WA, not US)

- Promote accountability (2)
- Reduce election costs (6)
- Ensure majority support for single winner offices (7)
- Encourage efficient decision-making effective legislative performance (8)
- Discourage negative campaigning (10)

WA Criterion 7: Ensure Majority Support for Single-Winner Offices

Majority's wishes can be frustrated when a plurality winner (receiving less than a majority of the votes) is elected. In other words, a plurality election makes it possible for a candidate preferred by a majority of voters to be defeated by a candidate strongly opposed by a majority of the voters. The more candidates there are for a position the more likely this is to happen. For example in a 1999 Seattle Port Commissioner race, the top two candidates each received only 18% of the primary vote. It is not usual for eventual winners to have received less than 35% of the vote in the primary election. Plurality winners violate a basic democratic ideal—"majority rule." Without a mandate supported by the majority, public confidence in government may be eroded and it can be difficult for an elected official to assume a leadership position. Since not all single-winner election methods allow plurality winners, this is a criterion that can be used to judge election methods.

WA Criterion 2: Promote Accountability

Democratic theory says that elections foster accountability – the means by which electorates may hold officials accountable for their performance. The ability to "turn the rascals out" is, in large part, what distinguishes democracies from other forms of government.

While it is true that the structure of government has a large influence on its accountability (or lack thereof), different election methods may also contribute to, or detract from, governmental accountability through two related factors: the strength and number of political parties, and the strength of incumbency. Critics of our existing election method believe that these two factors are strongly influenced by the society's election methods.

Political Parties

Strength:

While government accountability shouldn't be confused with party accountability, strong parties favor governmental accountability for several reasons, first among them being the influence of party cohesion and the resulting government policies. In a country with distinct and vital parties, candidates are less likely to "freelance" and more likely to "toe the party line." For voters, this represents increased accountability, because it both clarifies each party's (and hence candidate's) positions and reduces the odds that candidates will stray from the party platform.

Numbers:

With respect to the number of parties, governmental accountability would seem to be reduced at either extreme (too few or too many viable parties). States with a single ruling party offer voters little or no true accountability. At the other extreme, it is possible for so many parties to win representation in the government that it cannot ever act decisively, no matter how critical the issue. It is important to note that this "gridlock" may have nothing to do with the number of parties (it may just reflect the division in society). It means, however, that each voter cannot blame – or hold accountable – his or her representatives for government inaction.

Critics of the "two-party system," such as that in the United States, believe it leads to reduced accountability. A two-party system reduces party cohesion and strength, as party candidates must seek to be all things to all people. In countries with two-party systems, candidates and office-holders tend to choose their party more by pragmatic local considerations (and often even change party as local circumstances change) than by ideological ones. Voters in two-party systems often complain that there is no difference between the two parties, especially when critics are not themselves affiliated with either of the two major parties. Again this is not surprising, since both parties must seek to please the same centrist voters in order to gain a majority. The natural result is the use of similar appeals made in similar ways. It is hard to throw the rascals out, critics contend, because most voters feel they do not have alternatives.

Other observers, however, believe that voters look for a variety of qualities in a candidate in addition to party affiliation, and that they will not hesitate to hold their elected officials accountable at the ballot box regardless of the number of viable parties. It has also been observed that the two major parties, even in recent history, are often far apart philosophically, which is more apt to create polarization and legislative gridlock than political consensus or voter confusion.

Incumbency

Incumbency also affects accountability. Incumbents have always enjoyed many natural advantages in reelection contests, and there are usually a few officeholders here and there

who are all but unbeatable because they are so personally popular. Neither of those are what is meant by incumbency here.

Incumbency that reduces political accountability is the incumbency that permits even average officeholders (i.e., not the unusually-popular exceptions) to not only win out against challengers, but to reliably win by landslides or, even better, to face only token challengers, if any. This manifestation of the power of incumbency says less about the incumbents than it does about the weakness or absence of opponents.

This strong incumbent power can arise in a number of ways. Lopsided party dominance reduces accountability. For example, some states in the U.S. are essentially one-party states in which one of the two major parties has, for all practical purposes, quit contesting most races. In state legislatures, Idaho is now overwhelmingly Republican despite the fact that Democrats get 35%-40% of the vote, while in Massachusetts and Arkansas, Republicans don't even run enough candidates to have a theoretical chance to win a majority. In Congress, Massachusetts's entire delegation is Democrat (ten House, two Senators) and Oklahoma's entire delegation is Republican (six House, two Senate). Critics of the current system contend that this denies voters accountability. However, also to be considered is the question of how often incumbents in single party districts or states receive serious challenges from members of their own party. In addition, historic changes in party affiliation have occurred in various nearly or solely single-party areas, such as in the South after the Civil War and again in the 1980's when the Democratic south turned Republican in large numbers.

Even in cases where both parties function, a strong incumbency sometimes can occur. A strong factor in creating an incumbent-friendly environment can be the ability to gerrymander: to draw election districts in such a way as to provide electoral advantage to particular political parties.

Gerrymandering can increase incumbency for both major parties, because the electorate is divided into safe seats for both. When possible, the stronger party attempts to see that districts are drawn so the weaker party cannot win any representation. If this extreme level of gerrymandering cannot be accomplished, then districts are drawn so the largest blocks of the weaker party's voters are "crammed" into the fewest possible districts. While this costs the stronger party those few seats, it gives this party a greater number of safe seats elsewhere. Thus, both sides will represent incumbent- friendly districts that may be held as long as they like, safe from both primary and general election challenges - provided that no significant voter demographic or philosophic changes occur.

In the 1998 U.S. House of Representatives races, 95 out of 435 (22 percent) had only one major party candidate; the other major party didn't bother fielding a candidate. Voters in those districts have few options for holding their member of Congress accountable, except perhaps by encouraging another member of the same party to run against the incumbent.

WA Criterion 3: Promote Openness

An open government system is one that offers the citizenry opportunities to observe, comment and evaluate the performance of elected bodies. This transparency is essential to democratic governance.

While many variables must be taken into account in analyzing this topic, such as the effects of campaign finance disclosure and open meeting laws, critics of America's predominant two-party electoral system believe that different election methods lead to different degrees of governmental openness, and that, all else being equal, government openness increases as the number of political parties increase.

In a two-party system, critics argue, there may be little incentive to develop a broad consensus

if one party has sufficient votes to carry out its policies (assuming that the Executive is of the same party and hence declines to wield her veto powers). In such a system policy debates may be more frequently closed and internal policy differences hidden. Such differences, if made public, are considered a breakdown of party discipline and a sign of weakness.

With multi-parties represented, coalitions of minority parties likely would be required to span a broader spectrum of views, which could lead to more open discussion of differences. The more diverse interests which have a chance of winning, the more policy issues should emerge during campaigns and after winners are seated.

WA Criterion 4: Promote Responsiveness

Some election methods tend to reflect societal changes in an almost linear way, albeit lagging usually somewhat behind the electorate. In such systems, if popular support for a party platform doubles or triples, it would be unusual if the number of party candidates elected did not increase, possibly doubling or tripling. These are fairly responsive systems.

Other election methods tend to act in a more binary (on/off) fashion, and fluctuate between extremes. For example, in majoritarian systems, a policy position with only 15% support in the electorate is likely to have no elected advocates in government. Likewise, a doubling of support is still not likely to produce many Representatives in office. Even tripling support for this idea does not guarantee that any elected officials will advance this policy. However, the next increment of increased support is likely to cause enormous change. Once a majority shares this same view, the system may leap to the new position in a single bound. All the advocates of the old view may be swept out, and only advocates of the new position may be in office and in leadership in the government – even if their majority is very slim.

Another analogy might be the comparison between an on/off light switch and a dimmer switch. The light switch is moved and nothing happens, until all at once the light is on. Proportional voting systems are more like dimmer switches, move them a little bit and the light gets a bit brighter or dimmer.

A slow-then-hyper-responsiveness is typified by the U.S. House of Representatives. Dominated since mid-century by the Democratic Party, the entire leadership (determined by the party winning the most seats) changed on Election Day in 1994. Political scientists analyzing the returns noted that a change of fewer than 20,000 votes would have kept the Democrats in control. Thus, for years, millions of voters chose Republican candidates again and again, but the majority, the leadership, and thus the power in the House remained with the Democrats. And then a tiny shift – equal to about 4% of residents in a single district – resulted in an enormous power shift. Thus the election method used has a great deal to do with the extent and rate at which the resulting governments tend to respond to citizen desires.

WA Criterion 6: Reduce Election Costs

Although campaign financing is not the focus of this study, it is important to note that the election methods and procedures that a society uses have a great deal to do with how much money campaigns require.

Election rules – not just campaign finance rules – have a great deal to do with how much candidates feel they must raise and spend. In particular, the winning threshold – the minimum percentage of votes needed to win — has a great effect on campaign spending. Lower thresholds allow lower spending, while higher ones (up to the maximum of 50% +1) correlate with the highest spending.

Another aspect of costs refers to the administrative costs incurred in holding the election. The IIDEA Handbook notes, in observations pertinent to both national and local elections:

"Elections do not take place on the pages of academic books but in the real world, and for this reason the choice of any electoral system is, to some degree dependent on the cost and administrative capacities of the country involved...it is important to remember that, while cost and administrative issues should always be borne in mind, simplicity in the short term may not always make for cost-effectiveness in the longer run. An electoral system may be cheap and easy to administer but it may not answer the pressing needs of a nation, and when an electoral system is at odds with a country's needs the results can be disastrous. Alternatively, the "best" electoral system in any given case may at the outset appear a little more expensive to administer and more complex to understand, but in the long run it might help to ensure the stability of the state and the positive direction of democratic consolidation."

WA Criterion 8: Promote Efficient Decision-Making and Effective Legislative Performance

Both efficient decision-making and effective legislative performance are greatly influenced by the divided structure of American Federalism. With its separate executive and legislative functions, the system is widely accepted as biased against efficiency and rapid decision-making. In sharp contrast to a Parliamentary system, the Framers' sought "checks and balances" to prevent an overactive government.

Still, election methods play a role here. Election methods that favor establishment of clear majorities in a legislature promote decisiveness. Legislatures thus elected will likely face less difficulty in passing a program and overriding any executive vetoes that may occur. Systems favoring establishment of clear majorities, however, could be seen to be less representative than more proportional systems, even as they may enhance decisiveness and, perhaps, effective performance. Since election methods differ greatly in the extent to which they promote clear majorities or cohesive coalitions, election methods can influence decisiveness and effectiveness.

WA Criterion 10: Provide Incentives for Inclusion and Discourage Negative Campaigning

Also included from the IIDEA handbook:

"Incentives for inclusiveness—Electoral systems can be seen not only as ways to constitute governing bodies, but also as a tool of conflict management within a society. Some systems in some circumstances will encourage parties to make inclusive appeals for electoral support outside their own core vote base; for instance, even though a party draws its support primarily from black voters, a particular electoral system may give it the incentive to appeal to white, or other, voters. Thus the party's platform would become less divisive and exclusionary, and more unifying and inclusive. Similar electoral system incentives might make parties less ethnically, regionally, linguistically, or ideologically exclusive."

Voters frequently complain about the quality of campaigns. Campaigns that focus on personal attacks may drive voters away from the polls and increase voter cynicism about elections in general. Some experts suggest that the kind of election system used affects campaign strategy. For example, systems that require people to cast a vote for a party seem to encourage less of a focus on individuals and more of an emphasis on issues and party platforms. Proponents of election systems that use multiple votes or rank candidates argue that their systems discourage mudslinging campaigns since a candidate is less likely to conduct a negative campaign against another candidate if they believe they might receive a second or third choice vote from the other candidates' supporters. These systems also discourage negative campaigning because they tend to result in larger numbers of candidates in any particular race. Hence candidates are motivated to stick to a discussion of issues rather than campaigning negatively when there are many likely opponents to criticize.
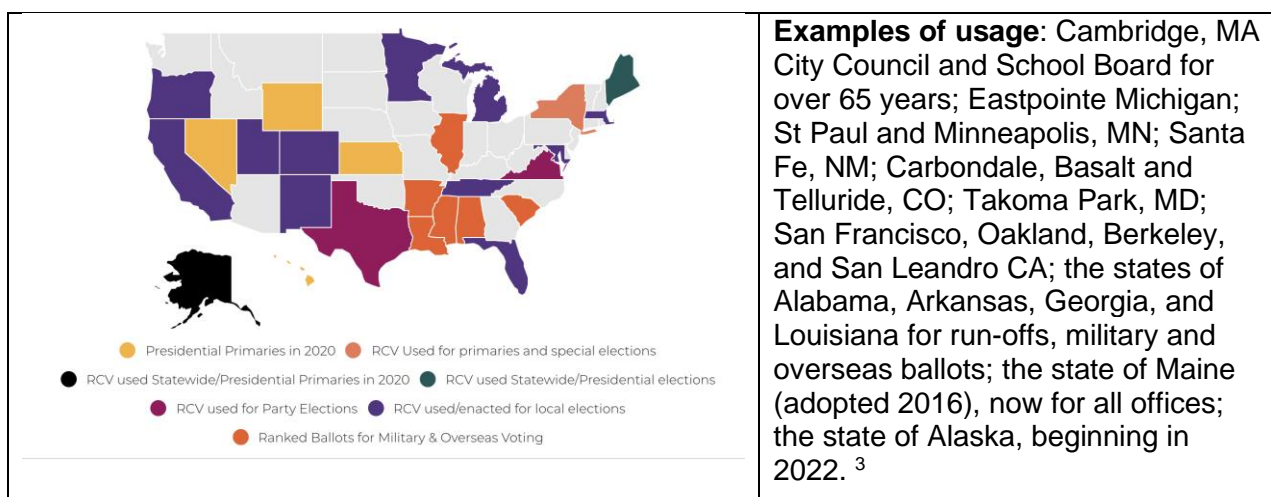
Ranked Choice Voting Considerations

Whilst our concurrence with LWVUS does not support specific electoral reform beyond systems meeting the 8 criteria, Ranked Choice Voting deserves some attention due to its increasing use in the United States and globally — with state and local Leagues around the country advocating for it. Jurisdictions currently employing RCV also call it Instant Run-off Voting and Preferential Voting to contrast it with Plurality or First-Past-the-Post voting.[2]

This section has 3 parts:

- A brief description of RCV

- The LWV of Vermont Pro-Con Considerations on RCV

- The LWV of Vermont Position on RCV (1999 & 2016)

Ranked-choice voting (RCV), also known as instant runoff voting (IRV), is currently used in 20+ jurisdiction in the U.S. (see below), as well as in many national, state and local elections around the world. It has been used in Australia since 1918, and Ireland since 1921.

	Examples of usage: Cambridge, MA City Council and School Board for over 65 years; Eastpointe Michigan; St Paul and Minneapolis, MN; Santa Fe, NM; Carbondale, Basalt and Telluride, CO; Takoma Park, MD; San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, and San Leandro CA; the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, and Louisiana for run-offs, military and overseas ballots; the state of Maine (adopted 2016), now for all offices; the state of Alaska, beginning in 2022. [3]

As special consideration for New York is fusion voting (see below "Outstanding Issues…" section of LWV NYC 2019 position). Fusion voting allows for the same candidate to appear multiple times on different lines representing different political parties. While this does present a unique challenge for RCV, it is not insurmountable. A sample ballot that could work with both fusion voting and RCV is included after the glossary.

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[2] Definitions and comparisons of additional electoral systems have been extensively studied by many LWV, most particularly, LWVWA and LWVOR, cited above; and LWV Rogue Valley: http://lwvroguevalley.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Election-Methods-Study-Update-2016-10-17-1.pdf
[3] Map available: https://www.fairvote.org/rcv - where_is_ranked_choice_voting_used

The LWV Vermont Position & History w/Pros and Cons

Ranked Choice Voting (adopted 1999, 2017)[4]

Position In Brief:

> The League of Women Voters of Vermont (LWVVT) will support ranked choice voting for all statewide elections.

Position History:

Approved 1999

"Instant Runoff Voting" is more often and more descriptively called "Ranked Choice Voting" in 2017. This position was reworded and reaffirmed at our state convention in 2017.

In accordance with the LWV's position of promoting political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government, the LWVVT will support legislation that assures that the candidate preferred by a majority of voters wins the election.

Specifically, the LWVVT will support ranked choice voting (RCV) for all statewide elections.

(Ranked Choice Voting has previously been termed "Instant Runoff Voting.")

Commentary

> *"Let us never forget that government is ourselves and not an alien power over us. The ultimate rulers of our democracy are not a President and senators and congressmen and government officials, but the voters of this country." ~ Franklin D. Roosevelt*

Each election method has pros and cons, but in 1999 the LWVVT studied the choices and decided IRV was the best method to achieve the best voter participation and the outcome most reflective of the voters' wishes. The NEK Unit reviewed the issue again this past spring, and confirmed that no election method has been identified as better than IRV for our goals.

With the League's advocacy, the Vermont legislature approved IRV in 2000, but Gov. Douglas vetoed it. Burlington gave it a try for city elections, but with insufficient voter education and strong opposition from active members of the major parties, it was rescinded after only one election.

Thus at our 2017 state convention in Randolph, we voted to advocate for and educate about IRV as part of our biennium program.

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[4] "LWV of Vermont, Position on Ranked Choice Voting, available: https://my.lwv.org/vermont/position/ranked-choice-voting-1999-2017

LWV Vermont Pro/Con Considerations[5]

The LWVVT has a position in support of Instant Run-off Voting [the most common form of Ranked Choice Voting] but we here present a review of the arguments for and against it.

PROs of IRV/RCV

Promotes majority support - The voting continues until one candidate has the majority of votes, so the final winner has support of the majority of voters.

Discourages negative campaigning - Candidates who use negative campaigning may lose the second choice vote of those whose first choice was treated poorly.

Provides more choice for voters - Voters can vote for the candidate they truly feel is best, without concern about the spoiler effect.

Minimizes strategic voting - Instead of feeling compelled to vote for 'the lesser of two evils," as in plurality voting, voters can honestly vote for who they believe is the best candidate.\

Saves money compared to running primary elections (to narrow the field before the general election) or run-off elections (to chose a final winner, if no candidate has a majority and the law requires a majority for that office). With IRV, the result can be obtained with one ballot.

Provides outcomes more reflective of the majority of voters than either primaries (candidates "play to their base") or run-off elections (typically lower turnout).

CONs of IRV/RCV

It is new - A certain percentage of people don't like change. This can make them unhappy, or might make them decide to not participate.

It will require education about how it works - We don't want spoilt ballots! We don't want uninformed people coming to exercise their right and responsibility to have a bad experience, or to leave without voting properly.

The ballots and the counting of the ballots will be more expensive - It either requires a computer system, or is labor intensive to count by hand, with risk of errors. But security and integrity of our elections will require having a "paper trail" so that we can do recounts, and know the results are valid.

The "vetting" is less clear - In the U.S., we have very few requirements for what a person must do to run for office and be on a ballot. With primaries, the idea is that there is so much publicity that voters in later primaries, and then in the general election, will have learned the candidates' weaknesses and be better informed before voting. If there are no primaries, we may need to figure out how to "vet" candidates better, or pass more requirements for candidates to qualify to run.

You could still fail to get a candidate with a majority. If enough voters did not give any votes to their lower choices, then you could fail to get a candidate who ends up with a majority, after all. Australia requires that voters do rank every candidate, even if they really don't want some of the candidates. (I have not seen that proposed in the U.S.) This might be interpreted as reducing your choice, or forcing you to vote against your conscience.

I have not seen this discussed yet, but if there are too many choices, without clear front-runners, I am not sure whether the result reflects the voters' desires as well as it would if there were only, say, five choices. So it may be complicated to determine who will be allowed on the ballot.

If you look over the list of pros above you can see why towns that use IRV tend to have better voter turnout than before they started the IRV. People are less turned off by the campaign process and happier with the election results.

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[5] LWV Vermont, available at https://my.lwv.org/vermont/article/pros-and-cons-instant-runoff-ranked-choice-voting.

Terminology/Glossary

(in alpha order) Below is some basic information on electoral terminology.

Approval voting allows a voter to vote for as many candidates as she supports regardless of the number of seats to be filled. Fargo, ND, used approval voting in November of 2020, with the candidate in a single-winner contest or candidates in a multi-winner contest who get the most votes winning. Approval Voting has (less common) multi-winner versions; most – but not all – promote proportional 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 % 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. Many, but not all, multi- member districts (MMD) hold multi-winner elections, however, some MMD stagger elections over time so that members are essentially elected in single-winner

contests.

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 election (a runoff) if a jurisdiction requires 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 who receive the most votes. (See "winner-take-all" below.)

Proportional Result 40% of the vote gets 40% of the seats in a legislature...not Zero. 60% of the vote gets 60% of the seats in a legislature...not 100%

Majority Rule with representation for the Minority (in this example 40%)
(i.e. Cambridge, MA. City Council and School Board proportionally reflect the voters in the community). (Compare this to Winner-Take-All last page)

LWV founder, Carrie Chapman Catt, served on the Advisory Council of the Proportional Representation League from 1919 until the time of her death at age 88. Believing P.R. to be a natural extension of the suffrage movement, she thought it "was important not only to get the vote but to make the vote effective in securing representation."

Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) – Single-Winner and Multi Winner Versions
With Ranked Choice Voting, voters are able to rank candidates by preference, indicating "back-up" candidate- choices when appropriate. RCV is a ranking, not weighting, method.

The two traditional forms of RCV are:

1) Single-winner – also known as **Instant Runoff Voting** (IRV), **Preference Voting, Alternative voting**

2) Multi-winner – aka **Single Transferable Vote** (STV)

Single-winner types of electoral systems (including RCV) are always Winner-Take-All. When voting in a single- winner IRV election, if the voter's first choice does not have enough support to get elected, their 'back up 'candidate(s) will be counted. The voter's highest favorite remains their vote if still in the race. Voters don't have to go back for a second (delayed) election. RCV can be used to achieve a majority single winner in the final round (of remaining votes) without a second election.

Multiple winners, STV, or RCV for multiple seats, is a proportional representation system, a key principle of voter representation. Nontraditional forms of RCV may be adopted, but the details of those systems would define their levels of representation. The multi-winner form of RCV (Single Transferable Vote) is used when electing multiple winners to achieve a proportional result (i.e.40% of the voters gets 40% of the seats) in a legislative body.

Multi-Winner Contest A single race on a ballot in which multiple candidates vie to

fill two or more seats.

Sincere Voting A term used when a voter chooses to cast her ballot for her most preferred candidate regardless of 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 with weaker and stronger support. Two well-known examples of candidates being labeled "spoiler" were in 1992 when Ross Perot split the vote with George Bush, Sr., and helped elect Bill Clinton win with 43% of the vote, and in 2000 when Ralph Nader split the vote with Al Gore and helped to elect George W. Bush. Those votes for Ross Perot and Ralph Nader can be termed "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, third-party or weaker candidate, she instead votes for a candidate presumed to have a greater chance of victory, rather than 'throwing her vote away."

In primaries, or Top-Two systems (as in Washington and California), strategic voters choose the candidate they believe is most likely to advance to, or win, the general election, as opposed to sincerely voting for their most preferred candidate. Where allowed (as in Top-Two), they may also decide to tactically vote for the opposite-party candidate they would most like to see run against their preferred candidate.

STV Single Transferable Vote (See Ranked Choice Voting.)

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 many areas (states, cities, counties), 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.

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

Vote Splitting When more than 2 candidates are on the ballot, voters may split their votes among like-minded candidates which 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 voters 'choices, especially when parties encourage people not to run. Some alternatives to plurality voting address this problem.

(See "Strategic Voting "and "Spoiler Effect" above)

Wasted Vote   A term used in political science term that refers to votes that were NOT needed to elect the winner. 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" because it does not count toward electing the winner. Some alternative electoral systems address this problem.

WTA (Winner-Take-All) "Winner-take-all" is a term used to describe "single-member districts" and "at large" electoral systems (listed above) that award seats to the highest vote getters without ensuring fair representation for minority groups.

WTA is the opposite of "Proportional Result" which provides for majority rule with minority representation when 2 or more seats are to be filled. See "proportional result" above.

Under winner-take-all rules, a slim majority or sometimes a plurality 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 and they may 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. (This is often seen in over 90% of Congressional districts in the House of Representatives).

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.

Sample Fusion Ballot (from Australia)

Sample RCV Fusion Ballot (Australia)

Supplemental Videos:

Intro:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Z2fRPRkWvY

Muliti-winner/Proportional Representation:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8XOZJkozfI

Open Primaries (Alaska):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wvaJbC4lSPk