

## ALTERNATIVE VOTING METHODS

There is a wide range of possible voting systems today. The system we currently use is called the single-member district **plurality** voting method. A voter can vote for only one candidate in a race. It is also known as 'first past the post' or 'winner-take-all' voting. It is generally agreed that this is the worst possible voting system. Many methods have been proposed and used. None is perfect, so the pros and cons of each system must be considered when choosing which type to use. Since 2021 alternative methods have been legal for Colorado cities to use. The state constitution precludes using an alternative method of voting for statewide candidates. We will review the following voting methods: **plurality; approval voting; score voting; and star voting; and ranked choice voting with instant runoff**. The criteria in the League position can be used to evaluate each system.

### LWVUS POSITION

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

The LWVUS believes in representative government. The LWVUS supports enabling legislation to allow local jurisdictions to explore alternative electoral methods, as well as supporting state election laws allowing for more options at both the state and local levels. With the adoption of any electoral system, the League believes that education of the voting public is important and funding for startup and voter education should be available. We encourage a concerted voter education process. *Impact on Issues 2020-2022 pp 47.*

### **Adopted by LWVCO in 2017 by Concurrence with LWV Boulder County position.**

Support authorizing and implementing alternatives to plurality voting that allow people to express their preferences more effectively. The League supports gaining on-the-ground experience with alternative voting methods to ascertain whether a voting method results in outcomes that match voters' preferences as recorded on their ballots. The League supports voting methods that improve the election experience, that encourage honest rather than tactical voting, and that consider ease of implementation.

### **Secretary of State's Role**

The Colorado Secretary of State is responsible for setting the rules for the county elections. Colorado Revised Statutes 1-7-1003 addresses the conduct of elections using ranked voting methods: **instant runoff voting, choice voting or proportional voting**. HB 21-1071 authorized municipal elections to use instant runoff voting (IRV), and included instructions and funding for the Secretary of State. It allows a statutory city or town or home rule municipality located in a single county to use instant runoff voting as part of a coordinated election in 2023. It also instructed the Secretary of State to set up procedures to accommodate it and to purchase licenses from all the Colorado-certified voting machine vendors so it can be used state wide by counties in holding the odd-year coordinated elections. A county may be assessed a licensing cost for the additional capability.

Jefferson County does not have any municipalities that will be using IRV in 2023. Municipal elections, such as those that will use IRV, are conducted by the County in odd-numbered years, "coordinated" elections. The county election officials are watching how the process works out in other counties and are aware they may be required to administer such an election in the future.

### **Types of Voting Systems**

#### **Plurality System**

All candidates appear on the ballot and voters indicate their choice for one of them. All the votes are then counted and the winner is the one with the most votes. Winners need not collect a majority of the votes, only more than their opponents - a plurality of votes. Plurality voting reinforces the two-party system tending to produce stable single-party majorities in legislatures. It does this by making it difficult for third parties to elect their candidate. It can have a "spoiler" effect on elections when two candidates have similar platforms, splitting the vote allowing a candidate without the majority to win.

#### **Approval Voting**

Approval voting allows a voter to vote for as many candidates per office as he chooses. The winner is the candidate who receives the most votes, or for elections in which multiple candidates fill open seats, the winners are those candidates equal to the number of seats being filled receiving the greatest number of votes.

#### **Score Voting**

Score voting is a single-winner voting system in which voters give each candidate a score (0 being the lowest). The scores are then added and the candidate with the highest total is elected.

#### **Ranked Choice Voting/Instant Runoff**

All candidates are listed on the ballot. Voters rank candidates in the order of their preference, "1" for their most preferred candidate, "2" for their second preference, and so on. In tabulating, first all the number one preferences of the voters are counted. If a candidate receives over 50% of the first choice votes, he or she is declared elected. If



## **Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)/Ranked Choice Voting (RCV)**

**IRV does a better job of electing voters' true favorite candidates** than our current method and encourages more competition. But, it can be costly for cities with older voting machines to implement and **can lead to unexpected results in tight races.**

## **Approval Voting**

Approval Voting has been shown to easily elect a “good” candidate and encourage competition. However, this simplicity comes at a cost that frustrates some, as **voters can't differentiate between how much they like or dislike candidates.**

Each alternative voting method has its strengths and weaknesses, and none is perfect. However, all are better than our current voting method, which is why organizations around the country are working hard to see alternative methods adopted.

## **Alternative Voting In Use**

**San Francisco**, along with many other cities in the Bay Area, has been using ranked-choice voting for years. Maine and Alaska have recently implemented ranked-choice voting in some statewide and federal elections, and Fargo, ND and St. Louis, MO have implemented approval voting. Ten states already use multi-member districts in at least one of their legislative chambers.

In **Utah** 23 cities used alternative voting methods in 2021.

**Maine.** As of 2020, RCV is being used in Maine primary and general elections for President, US House, and US Senate as well as primary elections for Maine's governor and state legislators.

Primary Elections in 2018 showed high turnout and high use of the ranked-choice voting. Two Maine progressive Democrats running for governor ran a campaign ad in which they spoke positively about each other, encouraging voters to rank one of them first and the other second depending on their preferences, which was a significant shift from the previously adversarial nature of campaigns. Based on polling data from the first elections, only a small percentage of voters were confused about how to vote.

**Alaska.** In the 2020 General Election, voters approved an initiative to establish a **Nonpartisan Pick One Primary Election** system and a **Ranked Choice Voting General Election** system.

Former Gov. Sarah Palin, a Republican, and former State Rep. Mary Peltola, a Democrat, were the top two vote-getters in the 2022 August 16 primary to replace former Rep. Don Young, who died in March.

But because neither topped 50% of the first-place votes, the second-place choice of those who backed a third candidate in the race – Republican businessman Nick Begich III – determined the outcome. The result was a win for Peltola. Not all were

happy with the result and blame the RCV method. They are circulating a petition to go back to the traditional election system, the plurality method.

Telluride and Basalt currently use ranked choice voting in some municipal elections. Boulder and Fort Collins will use ranked choice voting in the cities' mayoral races in 2023 and the City of Broomfield will switch to ranked choice voting in 2023.

### **Proportional Representation**

Proportional Representation is **not** a voting method. It is an electoral system that seeks to create a representative body that reflects the overall distribution of public support for each political party. Proportional representation ensures minority groups a measure of representation proportionate to their electoral support. Systems of proportional representation have been adopted in many countries, including Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Russia, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland.

### **Conclusion:**

AVMs raise several questions. Is the fact that someone may be elected with less than 50% of the vote important enough to change to a different election system? How important is it for an election system to encourage others to vote for their true favorite rather than for someone who has a better chance of winning? Who benefits from changing to an AVM, and who is disadvantaged. What are your questions? The answers to these questions will be based on our values judgement and determine which of these voting methods are beneficial and appropriate for use in Colorado/Jefferson County elections.

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### **SOURCES**

#### **Problems with plurality voting.**

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**LWVBC Report on Voting Methods in Colorado and Beyond (PDF).**

**STAR voting - Wikipedia.**

**Democracy Policy Network, Alternative Voting Methods.**

**PR Library: Types of Voting Systems - FairVote**

<http://fairvote.org> > archives > types\_of\_voting\_systems.

**\*The Colorado Sun, "Like more than one candidate, Fort Collins could be the latest Colorado city to adopt ranked choice voting,"** Thy Vo, Feb. 11, 2022.

**\*Britannica, electoral system,** January 20, 2023.