

# 2023 LWVCO Annual Meeting – Voting Methods Q&A Caucus

Presented by LWV of Boulder County Voting Methods Team (Celeste Landry)

**“Voting Methods Central” website** – [lwwbc.org > Teams at Work > Voting Methods or https://lwwbc.org/content.aspx?page\\_id=22&club\\_id=629866&module\\_id=301984](https://lwwbc.org/content.aspx?page_id=22&club_id=629866&module_id=301984)

From the VM Central website, you may link to the **VM Library** or go directly to [https://lwwbc.org/content.aspx?page\\_id=22&club\\_id=629866&module\\_id=497180](https://lwwbc.org/content.aspx?page_id=22&club_id=629866&module_id=497180)

**LWVCO Alternative Voting Methods Task Force website** (to be updated with summaries of meetings and links to meeting recordings and docs) – [lwwcolorado.org > Advocacy > Alternative VotingMethods or https://lwwcolorado.org/content.aspx?page\\_id=22&club\\_id=314195&module\\_id=540498](https://lwwcolorado.org/content.aspx?page_id=22&club_id=314195&module_id=540498)

## Sample Ballots

A great place to start is the sample ballots for different voting methods on [VM Central](#). See how better ballots can help you vote in a more expressive way!

- Plurality (traditional method) – vote for up to as many candidates as there are seats to fill
- Approval – vote for all the candidates you support, regardless of the number of seats to fill
- Score (STAR) – give your favorite candidate(s) a 5, your least favorite(s) a 0 and score the others according to your level of support. Unsourced candidates receive a 0.
- Ranked (RCV) – rank your favorite candidate #1 and others, if desired, in order of preference

## Voting Methods Reforms in Colorado

- Voters in Boulder, Broomfield, and Fort Collins have all recently adopted Instant-Runoff Voting to be used as early as this year. You can learn more about these efforts at the [VM Library](#). Go to “Adopting and Implementing Better Voting Methods – Municipalities in Colorado.”
- House Bill 21-1071 requires the Secretary of State to set up procedures to enable county clerks to run Instant-Runoff Voting elections for municipalities. Voters in home-rule cities may change their charter to use any voting method, but county clerks are only required to conduct a municipality’s Plurality and Instant-Runoff Voting elections.
- Other cities, such as Denver and CO Springs, are also discussing voting methods reform. LWV Denver recently wrote a letter to the *Denver Post* supporting a better voting method for Denver.

**Colorado statute (HB08-1378) allows cities to use two ranked voting methods**, both of which are forms of Ranked-Choice Voting (RCV):

- 1) Single-winner **Instant-Runoff Voting or IRV**
- 2) Multi-winner proportional **Single Transferable Vote or STV (proportional RCV)**

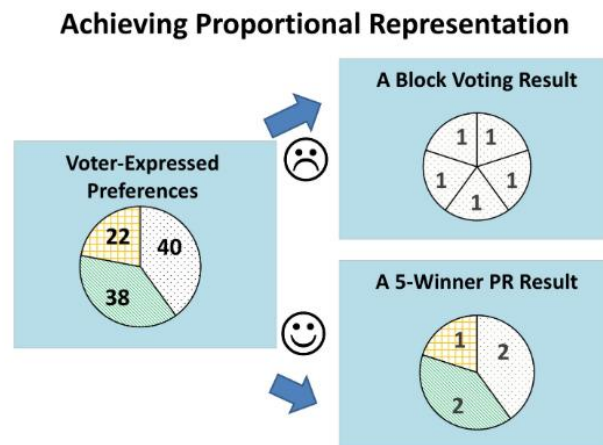
We watched short videos of these two forms of RCV which we accessed via the [“What Is RCV Anyway?”](#) article that is available on the [VM Library](#) under “Websites of Advocates for Better Voting Methods – Ranked-Choice Voting”

**Proportional representation (PR) in elected bodies** - Using a proportional voting method enables sizable communities-of-interest to elect candidates who better represent their view, in proportion to their size – even if the community-of-interest is not a majority or plurality of the electorate. The pie-chart graphic below is on [VM Central](#).

- Caucus attendees also heard about **Cambridge** “PR” elections (using proportional RCV), about the successful switch in campaign tactics to adopt PR in Cambridge two years after the exact

same ballot measure was rejected, and that **Boulder** used a PR system for 30 years. The Cambridge slides are available at the [VM Library](#) under “Multi-Winner Voting Methods – Specific Multi-Winner Proportional Voting Methods.”

- [Fair Vote Canada](#) – not to be confused with the US organization FairVote – is a very strong proponent of proportional representation and stresses that Instant-Runoff Voting (which is called the Alternative Vote in the rest of the English-speaking world) does not lead to proportional representation. *[Only FairVote (US) was mentioned during the caucus, so Fair Vote Canada is included here for completeness.]*



**The US Fair Representation Act (FRA)** would create multi-member congressional districts and use proportional RCV (STV) to elect US Representatives. (Recent versions of this bill also call for IRV to elect US Senators.) Colorado would probably have a 3-member district and a 5-member district – odd numbers of members are preferable. Rep Joe Neguse is a co-sponsor of the FRA. We didn’t watch a video about the FRA during the caucus, but here is a 6-minute video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vS62N5b5L7Y>

**3 Lessons from Instant-Runoff Voting (IRV) Elections** – see slides available on the [VM Library](#) under “Websites of Advocates for Better Voting Methods – Ranked-Choice Voting”

- Maine 2020 – Only your first choice is guaranteed to be counted in IRV.
- New York City 2021 – You can win an IRV election with less than a majority of votes. This is because of “exhausted” ballots, i.e., ballots in which all the ranked candidates have been eliminated. In a June 18, 2021 online (June 20 print) *NY Times* guest opinion, Rob Richie, president of FairVote, a national organization that advocates for RCV, wrote, “the best way to guarantee your ballot counts in every round of the tally is to include at least four of the five most viable candidates.” The NYC Democratic mayoral primary ballot had 13 candidates. Voters were limited to 5 rankings.
- Alaska 2022 – IRV does not always elect the “correct” winner.

No voting method is perfect, but almost all are better than Plurality Voting. Of better voting methods, we have the most data from IRV. A community should consider the pros and cons of a variety of single-winner and multi-winner voting methods before settling on one.

**Incorrect Use of “Majority”** – No voting method can guarantee a majority winner when there are more than 2 candidates running. When a Voter Representation / Electoral Systems position was being

considered for LWVUS concurrence, LWVCO successfully advocated to remove the “majority” criterion. The slides for a 2019 LWVCO convention caucus that focused on the “majority” problem in the proposed concurrence is in the [VM Library](#) under “Archives for Single-Winner Voting Methods.”

### **Other forms of Ranked-Choice Voting (RCV)**

- **Preferential Block Voting (PBV)** - Utah uses this multi-winner non-proportional form of RCV in several municipalities. RCV for CO and the national RCV Resource Center have distanced themselves from this “abomination.” We watched the Preferential Block Voting video – also available in the “[What Is RCV Anyway?](#)” article – and pointed out that the voters who ranked yellow #1 didn’t help elect anyone, while some voters got three of their rankings counted as votes for winning candidates. Not fair! LWV member deb McDonough was instrumental in the successful campaign to get Portland, Maine’s PBV elections changed to STV/pRCV. Yay!
- **Bottoms-Up 15% Threshold RCV for allocating delegates to a presidential nominating convention** – A few states used this voting method in 2020 for their Democratic Party presidential primary. We saw a short video of this method, available in the “[What Is RCV Anyway?](#)” article under the descriptor 15% Threshold Proportional Allocation.
- **Bottoms-Up Top-2 RCV** – Seattle has adopted this method with an anticipated 2027 implementation date. The tabulation is identical to Instant-Runoff Voting, except that you stop when 2 candidates remain. In Seattle those 2 candidates will proceed to the general election. *[Seattle’s Bottoms-Up Top-2 RCV was not discussed during the caucus, but see SB23-301 below.]*

### **[SB23-301](#) Voting in Presidential Primary Elections**

This bill was introduced late in the session and “killed” by the sponsor in its first hearing. It had 2 parts:

- In 2024 military and overseas voters would fill out a non-RCV ranked ballot. If their first choice dies, withdraws or is disqualified before Election Day, then their vote would go to their second choice. In 2020 many votes were not counted because Klobuchar and Buttigieg dropped out before Election Day but after many Coloradans had turned in their ballots.
- In 2028 all CO voters could vote a ranked ballot. The Sec of State would report the Bottoms-Up Top-2 RCV results, but political parties would probably use the Bottoms-Up 15% Threshold RCV results to allocate delegates to more than 2 candidates. Four candidates in 2020 got at least 15% of the recorded vote and earned delegates: Biden, Sanders, Warren and Bloomberg.

**Problems and Backlash against RCV** – reported in *Voter* articles posted at bottom of [VM Central](#).

- [Alaskans for Honest Elections](#) want to revert to a party primary system with Plurality Voting
- A 2022 Oakland, CA school board contest’s certified results were overturned when the ballots were re-examined. News articles stated that the problem was voters not naming a first choice on their IRV ballot, but actually the tabulation software did not tally the first-choice write-ins, resulting in first eliminating the actual eventual winner instead of the write-in candidates. The incorrect winner was sworn into office, but later resigned in the face of a lawsuit.
- Governors signed [Idaho House Bill 179](#) and [South Dakota Senate Bill 55](#) to ban RCV. In 2022 RCV bans passed in [Tennessee \(SB 1820\)](#) and [Florida \(SB 524\)](#).

### **Some RCV Bans were Rejected When Combined with Other Non-Plurality Voting Methods**

Governors vetoed [Arizona House Bill 2552](#) which would have banned every voting method except Plurality and [North Dakota House Bill 1273](#) would have banned RCV (not used in ND) and Approval Voting (used in Fargo). The LWV of Red River Valley (ND/MN) worked hard to reject ND HB1273. One of the LWVRRV activists is Whitney Oxendahl, who is also the LWVUS Vote411 Project Coordinator.

### **Approval and STAR Voting are Other Good Voting Methods**

LWVBC created a 25-minute [Vicky Voter](#) presentation on various single-winner voting methods. You can find it at the bottom of [VM Central](#) webpage. The VM Library also has a 35-minute presentation on proportional representation with [Vera Voter](#) using various voting methods for a multi-winner contest.

- **Approval Voting**
  - We visited the Prop D campaign website (<https://stlapproves.org/>) where we saw the LWV Metro St Louis endorsement of the nonpartisan Top-2 Approval Voting primary.
  - We saw that [St Louis Approval Voting primary election results](#) report percent support {divide by the number of ballots) instead of percent of the votes. The percents could be more than 100% because a voter is allowed to vote for all the candidates they support.
  - Advantages: Overvoting is impossible, no extra ballot space needed, and such simple implementation that St Louis used it in an election about 4 months after adopting it.
- **STAR (Score Then Automatic Runoff) Voting**
  - We visited the Equal Vote Coalition website (<https://www.equal.vote/>) and saw how STAR Voting ballots are tabulated. You might also want to watch the [5-minute video](#) at the top of the webpage that explains the “equal vote” and the coalition’s goals.
  - Biggest advantage: most expressive of the methods discussed in terms of both marking one’s ballot and recording the voter’s voice

----- Thanks for attending and asking questions! -----