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Choosing How to Choose: Election Methods Update!

Libby Medley, Program/Events Chair

As the 2016 election ends, our Oregon League is using a statewide study to reflect on the experience from a procedural point of view.

Were you a sincere voter? Or did you vote for someone who was not your first choice in order to fulfill a strategic ploy?

Did you wish for some way to indicate your true opinions of the candidates rather than being limited to selecting one or not voting?

Under our current single-winner system, plurality voting, you get one vote, and the candidate with the most votes wins. While simple to understand, it can be frustrating. **And it doesn't have to be this way.**

Voting methods for winner-take-all elections go beyond **plurality**, to include **delayed runoff, approval, range or ranked choice voting** for a single seat. Which voting method you prefer will depend on which criteria you think are most important. Looking for change?

In a multi-member position, there are several election method choices. **Bloc types** are traditional in the U.S.; examples include city council members that are elected at-large. **Semi-Proportional** methods allow voters multiple votes in the same race. The top vote-receivers win the number of seats that are available. **Proportional representation** methods allow voters to simultaneously elect multiple candidates for multiple seats in one race.

Other considerations include **the role of political parties** in how our elections are conducted, and the **impact on voting administration**, from hardware and software to training and voter education.



- **Please read the every member material** in this Clackson, **review the consensus questions** and **share your thoughts with others at a Unit meeting**. Which method best combines fairness and voting clarity for each type of race?
- Visit www.LWVOR.org to read and/or print the full study and other resources. **Enjoy the two short videos to gain additional insight.**

League at its best

Judi Umaki and Marge Easley

October was a very busy month for our League's Voter Service volunteers, and the numbers say it all. In **four** public ballot measure presentations we helped inform well over **200** interested voters. **700** LWVOR Voters' Guides were distributed throughout the county to libraries and retirement facilities as well as to a large conference of people involved in early childhood education.

We also facilitated **two** candidates' forums: Clackamas County Commissioners, October 13, co-sponsored by the Wilsonville Public Library and filmed by Willamette Falls Media Center; and West Linn City Councilors, October 20, co-sponsored by the West Linn

Neighborhood Association Presidents and filmed by TVCTV.

Lastly, we continued our Video Voters' Guide partnership with TVCTV in Beaverton by conducting televised interviews with **thirty-four** local, state, and U.S. candidates during the week of October 3rd. These interviews were also posted on the state League website www.lwvor.org/voterresources.

Stellar volunteers Katie Lu, Marge Easley, Robi Ingram-Rich, Sylvia Smith, Jean Hoffman, Nancy Tolin, Nancy Pratt, Mike Taylor, Pamela Ashland, Hilly Alexander, and Karen Faw all stepped up to the plate and made our League look great!

NEW IMPROVED RAFFLE

As our December 3rd Winter Party approaches, it's time to start digging through your cupboards and imaginations.

Closet "finds" are always welcome. Some members have promised poinsettias, wine and wreaths. How about baked goods or a certificate to bake at a later date? What other items might people like to bid on?

Get creative! Let's make it fun! Call or email Judi Umaki at 503-637-5773; gordonjudiu@msn.com for ideas, pickup or drop off info by Thursday, Dec. 1

Coming Events

Unit Meetings: Election Methods Consensus:

Monday, November 14: Fireside Room at Oswego Pointe (5065 Foothills Rd in Lake Oswego). Social at 5:30 pm with discussion starting at 6:00 pm. Bring a brown bag meal and a drink. Betty Barber (503-675-0594)

Wednesday, November 16: 3:00, Sandpiper Room, Provincial House, Mary's Woods (17400 Holy Names Drive, Lake Oswego). Jean Hoffman (503-697-0833).

Thursday, November 17: 9:15 at the home of Sylvia Smith (5133 SW Timbergrove St., Lake Oswego). Sylvia Smith (503-639-4272).

Friday, November 18: 9:30 am, Willamette View, 12705 SE River View Road, Portland. New location in Court Building in the 4th floor parlor. The building is across from the Plaza where meetings are usually held. Call June Routson (503-786-3856) or Nancy Pratt (503-652-6583) for directions.

Election Methods Update Study: Executive Summary

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 this Assembly to do strict justice at all times, it should be an equal representation, or in other words equal interest among the people should have equal interest in it. Great care should be taken to effect this, and to prevent unfair, partial, and corrupt elections. -John Adams

Have we taken all the care we can to ensure fair, impartial and representative elections? In addition to fighting voter disenfranchisement and the corrupting influence of money, are there ways to design the way we vote to help ensure our elected officials speak for the people and our legislative bodies are more nearly a miniature portrait of the people at large?

In this report we build on the work of the 2008 Election Methods Committee to present and evaluate voting methods and election systems that are currently in use in the U.S. or around the world and that could be considered for adoption in Oregon. In Benton County, one such system will be on the ballot in November 2016.

Single-Winner Election Systems

There are multiple options for electing a single winner. A single-winner election could be for a single position, such as a Mayor or Governor, or for a single legislator from a certain geographic area, such as the one congressperson representing a particular district, or a councilor representing the whole city. Oregon currently uses first-past-the-post, plurality voting, but there are other possibilities.

Plurality is the American status quo. It's easy to use and understand, but it discourages sincere voting and, compared to other methods, is less effective at electing the candidate who is most representative of the people.

Delayed runoff is an improvement on plurality in electing representative candidates. It requires two elections, one to narrow the field to two candidates and one to select between the two, usually involving lower voter turnout in one of the elections.

Range voting requires voters to rate each candidate on a scale, say from 1 to 5. The candidate with the highest average rating wins. If all voters vote sincerely, range voting is extremely good at selecting the most representative candidate. It is, unfortunately, very susceptible to strategic voting as opposed to sincere voting.

Approval voting enables voters to indicate whether or not they approve of each candidate for the position. The candidate with the most approvals wins. Approval voting is second best to range voting in electing the most representative candidate and second worst to range voting in encouraging strategic voting.

Ranked choice voting is known as instant runoff voting when used to select a single candidate. Studies show it to be nearly as good as range voting in selecting the most representative candidate and best of all systems considered in encouraging sincere voting.

Multiple Winner Election Systems

Because each district is politically diverse, electing just one representative per district will not yield a legislative body that is “an exact portrait of the people at large.” Most western democracies elect multiple candidates from each district so that legislators can represent the different political views within each district. There are several election systems for electing multiple legislators per district.

Bloc types exist in Oregon. In this system, the entire electorate elects multiple candidates to a legislative body, electing each candidate in separate races. For example, all residents of the City of Portland elect four councilors, plus a Mayor. Each council candidate runs for a numbered council seat against other candidates who filed for that numbered seat. This system has been shown to be *less* representative than dividing the area into districts and electing a candidate from each district, because the majority opinion of the entire area determines the outcome of all the races.

Semi-proportional systems, including cumulative and limited voting allow voters multiple votes in the same race. The highest vote-getters win. These systems can lead to more representation for all groups if minority political groups carefully coordinate their voting strategy and focus all their votes on a single candidate to ensure a candidate representing them wins one of the positions.

Proportional representation systems are favored by most political scholars as the most representative systems. Most western democracies use a form of proportional representation voting to elect legislative bodies. A pool of candidates contends for the available seats in a district. There are several ways to elect representatives that reflect the major political opinions of the district:

Party list voting allows voters to choose a candidate from a party list (open list voting, the most common form of voting in developed democracies) or simply to choose a party (closed list voting). In open list voting, a vote counts for that candidate and for the candidate’s party. The party wins seats in proportion to the number of votes for candidates on its list, with candidates given the party’s seats in proportion to their number of votes they receive. In closed list voting the party’s pre-determined list of candidates win positions in proportion to the number of votes for that party.

Mixed-member proportional voting, a newer system, is the one most election experts favor. It retains a local representative while allowing for overall proportionality of the legislature. Voters get two votes: one for a local representative from a single-winner local district, and one for a party. Parties win seats in proportion to the number of votes each party receives.

Single-transferrable vote systems are the second choice of election experts. Candidates run in a pool for a number of seats. For example, all candidates for Portland City Council would run together for any of the four council seats, rather than splitting up into different races for individually numbered seats, as they do now. Voters rank the candidates and any candidate who passes a certain threshold of support wins a seat. For American voters, this proportional system has the added attraction of allowing voters to vote for individual candidates, not for parties.

The minimum level of the threshold, to avoid electing representatives with very small support groups, and the size of the district are important design considerations for proportional systems.

Political Parties and Oregon Reforms

In Oregon, a candidate can list up to three parties on the ballot, assuming all three have nominated the candidate. This **aggregated fusion voting** gives voters more information about the candidate. A full fusion voting system would list each candidate as many times on the ballot as there are parties nominating her. By choosing which place on the ballot to vote for the candidate, voters indicate support for that party. **Full fusion** would give candidates more information about the sources of their support.

The purpose of partisan races in primary elections is to select major party candidates to run for partisan seats, like State Senator or Governor, in November general elections. Major parties in Oregon are the Democrat, Republican, and Independent parties. Voters not registered with one of these parties are excluded from partisan races in the primary. Proposed reforms include a **limited open** primary, in which unaffiliated voters can vote by choosing which party's ballot to receive, an **open** primary in which all voters choose which party's ballot to receive on election day (a consideration with Oregon's vote-by-mail system), and **top-two** primaries, in which all voters, regardless of party affiliation, vote on all candidates for each seat and the top two vote-getters, regardless of party, advance to the general election. See delayed runoff above.

Administration of Alternate Methods

Changes in election methods may also require changes in voting administration hardware and software, training and voter education campaigns, as well as updates to other aspects of election administration. The three Oregon county clerks (Jackson, Lane, and Multnomah counties) interviewed as part of our research all agreed that complexity and cost of equipment are important concerns and should be included along with other criteria when considering administering different voting methods.

Election Methods Study Update Consensus Questions

INTRODUCTION

Alternatives to current election methods and voting systems exist in other states and the world and some are being proposed for Oregon.

Question 1. Do you agree that the League should have an actionable position on these alternatives?

_____ (yes, no, undecided)

If not, why not? _____

SINGLE-WINNER SYSTEMS

When electing a single person to fill a position, voting methods include the current plurality, range voting, approval voting, and ranked-choice voting (aka instant runoff voting). These methods have different advantages and disadvantages.

Question 2a. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is "not important" 2 is "a little important," 3 is "somewhat important," 4 is "important," and 5 is "very important", rate the following criteria of voting methods in importance with respect to single-winner systems:

- 1 2 3 4 5 The system elects the candidate with the broadest support of the people although that person may not be the first choice of a plurality of voters.
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system elects the winner who is the first choice candidate of a majority (50%+1) of the electorate
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system is easy to use and understand
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system promotes sincere voting over strategic voting
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system encourages voter turnout and voter engagement
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system encourages those with minority opinions to vote
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system discourages negative campaigning
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system is easy to administer by elections officials
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system is not overly burdensome to taxpayers
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system is resistant to Gerrymandering
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system provides for the greatest level of voter representation

Comments: _____

Question 2b. Do you agree that alternative voting methods exist that can promote democratic choice better than our current plurality method under some circumstances?

_____ (yes, no, undecided)

Comments: _____

Question 2c. Range voting allows voters to express their opinion about candidates on a scale, e.g., from 0 to 5. When voters vote sincerely, it produces a very representative outcome. It is very susceptible to strategic voting (which proponents often present as a benefit to knowledgeable voters), so it does not encourage sincere voting. It is relatively easy to understand and to administer. Would you approve of range voting in preference to the current plurality system?

_____ (yes, no, undecided)

Why or why not? _____

Question 2d. Approval voting allows voters to say whether they approve of each candidate for the office. When voters vote sincerely, it produces a fairly representative outcome. It is very susceptible to strategic voting, so it does not encourage sincere voting. It is relatively easy to understand and to administer. Would you approve of approval voting in preference to the current plurality system? _____ (yes, no, undecided)

Why or why not? _____

Question 2e. Ranked-choice voting (aka instant runoff voting) allows voters to rank-order the candidates. When voters vote sincerely, it produces a very representative outcome. It is not susceptible to strategic voting, so it encourages sincere voting. It is somewhat more difficult than other systems to understand and to administer. Would you approve of ranked-choice voting in preference to the current plurality system? _____ (yes, no, undecided)

Why or why not? _____

MULTIPLE WINNER SYSTEMS

When a legislative body has more than one member, the members can be elected individually, one per district, as we currently do for the Oregon House of Representatives, or they can be elected as a bloc, with each candidate competing for a single position, as we do for the U.S. Senate, or they can be elected in proportion to their support in the population they will govern. Proportional representation can be semi-proportional or fully proportional.

Question 3a. John Adams famously said that legislative bodies should be “in miniature, an exact portrait of the people at large.” Do you agree that legislative bodies should proportionally reflect the people they represent? _____ (yes, no, undecided)

Comments: _____

Question 3b. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is “not important” 2 is “a little important,” 3 is “somewhat important,” 4 is “important,” and 5 is “very important”, rate the following criteria of voting methods in importance with respect to multiple-winner systems:

- 1 2 3 4 5 Allows voters to vote for a specific individual (instead of a party or platform)
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system promotes a stable government that does not have to be re-organized between elections
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system promotes a stable government by protecting the two-party system.
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system promotes stable policy outcomes that do not change abruptly when power changes hands

- 1 2 3 4 5 The system elects a legislature that proportionally reflects the overall electorate
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system is easy to use and understand
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system encourages voter turnout and voter engagement
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system encourages those with minority opinions to vote
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system discourages negative campaigning
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system is easy to administer by elections officials
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system encourages cooperation across party lines
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system enables voters to elect local representatives from their geographic area
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system is not overly burdensome to taxpayers
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system is resistant to Gerrymandering
- 1 2 3 4 5 The system provides for the greatest level of voter representation

Comments: _____

Question 3c. One voting method to achieve proportional representation is closed list, in which parties present a list of candidates, voters vote for the party of their choice, and the number of candidates elected from that party depends on the number of voters who chose it. Would you approve of closed list voting in preference to the current single-winner majority or bloc system? _____ (yes, no, undecided)

Why or why not? _____

Question 3d.

One voting method to achieve proportional representation system is open list, in which voters vote for individual candidates listed by party, and the vote counts for the candidate and for the candidate's party. The party wins seats in proportion to the number of votes for candidates in their list, and candidates with the most votes win. Would you approve of open list voting in preference to the current single-winner majority or bloc system? _____ (yes, no, undecided)

Why or why not? _____

Question 3e. One voting method to achieve proportional representation system is mixed member proportional, in which voters vote for individual candidates in their local district and also for a party. The most popular local candidates win district seats, and each party wins party seats in proportion to the number of votes for the party. Would you approve of mixed member proportional voting in preference to the current single-winner majority or bloc system? _____ (yes, no, undecided)

Why or why not? _____

Question 3f. One voting method for a proportional representation system is the single transferrable vote, in which voters rank candidates as in ranked-choice voting, and any candidate who passes a threshold wins a seat, with votes above the threshold for any candidate going to the voters' second choices. (This is the only proportional system that would apply to non-partisan offices.) Would you approve of the single transferrable vote in preference to the current single-winner majority or bloc system? _____ (yes, no, undecided)

Why or why not? _____

Question 3g. Semi-proportional systems use limited or cumulative voting methods, in which voters have a number of votes and can give all of them to one candidate or spread them between candidates. If voters coordinate their voting strategy very carefully, minorities can achieve more

representation than in single-winner systems. Would you approve of semi-proportional systems in preference to the current single-winner majority or bloc system? _____ (yes, no, undecided)

Why or why not? _____

THE PARTY PROCESS IN OREGON

Question 4a. Oregon allows a form of fusion voting where candidates endorsed by multiple parties can list those parties by their names on the ballot. An alternative is full fusion, where a candidate is listed multiple times on the ballot, once for each party nominating her. Full fusion enhances information candidates receive about their supporters and helps small parties maintain ballot access in future elections. Would you approve of full fusion voting for Oregon?

_____ (yes, no, undecided)

Why or why not? _____

Question 4b. If proportional representation were chosen for Oregon, primary elections could be unnecessary. However, in the absence of proportional representation, there are several alternative types of primary elections, some of which allow more choice by unaffiliated voters. Indicate which of the following primary election types have your approval (you may choose as many as you like):

- ___ *Closed.* Voters only get their party’s ballot. Voters not registered with one of the major parties do not vote. (This is our current system.)
- ___ *Limited open.* Non-affiliated voters choose which party’s ballot to receive. Voters registered with a party only receive their own party’s ballot.
- ___ *Open.* Voters request whatever party’s ballot they want on the day of the election.
- ___ *Top-Two.* Primaries are not party based. All voters receive the same ballot. The top two vote getters, regardless of party, advance to the general election.

Comments: _____

ADMINISTRATION OF ALTERNATE METHODS

Creating the ballots, educating voters, and counting the votes will require additional effort by our hard-working elections officers if alternative voting methods are chosen.

Question 5. Any new voting method should be instituted only after voters in the district affected agree to provide the financial support necessary to the appropriate elections administrators to make technical changes and to educate voters.

___ True

___ False

Comments: _____

**SAVE THE DATE:
LWV CLACKAMAS COUNTY WINTER HOLIDAY BRUNCH**

**Saturday, Dec. 3rd
9:30 A.M. To Noon
Clackamas Meeting & Banquet Facility
15815 SE 82nd Drive, Clackamas, OR
Cost: \$13**



Mark your Calendar Now! Join in celebrating the holidays with the Clackamas County LWV at our Holiday Party Brunch. We will gather at 9:30 for brunch, drinks and another fun raffle. Speaker to be arranged. Look for further information later in November.

RSVP: Judi Umaki, gordonjudiu@msn.com or 503-636-5773. Please make your reservations by no later than Tuesday, November 29. Please let us know if you are coming! We must submit a head count in advance.

BRING YOUR CHECKBOOKS! Raffle tickets will be \$1 each or 6 for \$5.

DRIVING DIRECTIONS to Clackamas Meeting & Banquet Facility:

From I-205, traveling either north or south, take Exit 12 (Estacada/Mt. Hood). Heading east, get in the left lane for an immediate left turn onto the first street, 82nd Drive. Turn left into Denny's parking lot. The meeting room is on the right side of the building.



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
of Clackamas County
PO Box 411
Lake Oswego, OR 97034
lwvclackamas@lwvclackamas.org
www.lwvclackamas.org

Join the League of Women Voters!

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email

- I am a new member.
- I am renewing my membership.
- This is a gift membership. (Please provide the recipient's contact information above.)
- I am interested in volunteering for the League. Please contact me.

Annual dues: \$70 Individual. \$105 Household. \$35 Full-time student attending an accredited institution or adult under age 35. Membership grants are available.

Total Enclosed _____

Please make checks payable to League of Women Voters of Clackamas County.

Mail to: LWVCC, PO Box 411, Lake Oswego, OR 97034