

Same Ballot, Different Tabulation Methods

By the Voting Methods Team

The ballot on the left is a plurality (aka “choose-one” or first-past-the-post) ballot.

Quick Quiz: What kind of ballot is on the right?

PLURALITY	
Vote for one candidate	
	Arthur
	Bertha
	Cristobal
	Dolly
	Edouard
	Fay
	Gonzalo
	Hanna
	Isaias
	Josephine
	Kyle
	Laura

MYSTERY VOTING METHOD	
Mark 1 for your first choice, 2 for your second choice and so on.	
	Arthur
	Bertha
	Cristobal
	Dolly
	Edouard
	Fay
	Gonzalo
	Hanna
	Isaias
	Josephine
	Kyle
	Laura

Did you answer “RCV” or “Ranked Choice Voting”? If you did, then you might be correct, but you might not. We don’t have enough information to determine the ballot’s voting method. We only know that the voter ranks her choices so we can call it a ranked-voting ballot or Ranking ballot as SurveyMonkey names it. (The SurveyMonkey website provides a variety of free online voting platforms.)

Let’s review the essential elements of a voting method in the table below.

Essential Elements of a Voting Method with Corresponding Examples

A voting method defines	Examples Based on Borda Count – A Ranking Method
1) the form of the ballot,	Rank preferences starting with 1 for your first choice, 2 for your second choice, and so on up to 9 choices
2) what constitutes a valid vote,	You must give a different ranking to different candidates. You must rank a candidate with 1 but lower rankings are optional.
3) how to count votes, and	Award the first choice 9 points, the second choice 8 points, the third choice 7 points, and so on, with the ninth choice awarded 1 point.
4) an algorithm for determining the outcome of the election	Add up all the points each candidate receives. The candidate with the largest sum (or weighted average if you want results from 0 to 9) wins.

Recently an organization wanted to elect 9 people in a multi-winner contest. They could have picked boring ole plurality-block voting where you vote for up to 9 candidates and the top 9 vote-getters win, but – good for them – they wanted to give the voters more expressiveness. They said, “Let’s use ranked choice voting.” Great!

EXCEPT that the organization used SurveyMonkey’s Ranking method which operates as described in the Example section of the Voting Method table above. SurveyMonkey uses Borda Count, not multi-winner RCV!

RCV can refer to several variations of voting methods, but they all involve transferring votes. You’ve probably heard, “If your first choice is eliminated, then your vote is transferred to your second choice.”

Plurality and Borda Count are summation methods. Each ballot contributes independently to the candidates’ totals. On election night, officials can report candidates’ running totals as the vote tabulation progresses. In contrast, RCV’s vote-transfer feature depends on how candidates are faring on all the ballots so preliminary results may be delayed until all or almost all the ballots are processed.

Colorado statute only permits the two traditional RCV methods: single-winner instant-runoff voting (IRV) and multi-winner single transferable vote (STV). In both methods, the ballot looks identical. (See the August 2018 LWVBC Voter article “RCV: Two Better Ways to Vote.”)

Watch the following Minnesota Public Radio videos to see how traditional RCV vote tabulation works.

Single-Winner IRV: [MPR News: Instant Runoff Voting Explained](#) (1½ minutes)

Multi-Winner STV (but called IRV 2.0 in the film): [How Instant Runoff Voting works 2.0: Multiple winners](#) (3 minutes)

“Ranked voting” is the general term used by the Colorado Secretary of State and our Voting Methods Team when referring to a voter ranking choices on a ballot. Ranked voting includes – but isn’t limited to – Borda Count, different vote-transfer forms of RCV, and Bucklin Voting (aka the Grand Junction System used in Pueblo, Denver, CO Springs, Fort Collins and more than 60 cities in the US in the 20th century).

Watch the following Carneades.org videos to learn more about Borda Count and Bucklin voting.

Borda Count: [The Borda Count \(Voting Theory\)](#) (Watch the first 2½ minutes.)

Bucklin Voting: [Bucklin Voting \(Voting System\)](#) (Watch the first 2 minutes or so.)

The next time you want to conduct an informal poll or carry out a voting experiment, consider trying one of the free user-friendly online voting platforms in the table below. Remember that tabulation is an integral part of the voting method! If the online ballot doesn’t clearly state how the votes will be tallied, the poll creator should clarify that before any votes are cast.

Please note that any online voting system is highly vulnerable to many forms of attack.

No public elections should offer online voting, as explained by the National Academies in

Securing the Vote - Protecting American Democracy (2018):

<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25120/securing-the-vote-protecting-american-democracy>

Conduct Free Online Informal Polls Using a Better Voting Method

Website or App's Name for the Voting Method	Website	What the Voter Does	Who is the Winner?	Standard Name of this Better Voting Method
Doodle Poll <i>Use "text" option rather than "month" or "week" to name your candidates. Include "if need be" (aka tepid support) for more voter expressiveness.</i>	https://doodle.com/	Vote for as many candidates as you support. Another way to think about this voting method is to say that you are voting yes or no on each candidate.	Candidate with the most votes	Approval Voting
Checkboxes	surveymonkey.com			
Vote-Yes-Or-No option	http://voteupapp.com/			
Rate-on-Sliding-Scale Option	http://voteupapp.com/	Give each candidate a score within the range provided, e.g., 0 to 5. You may give the same score to more than one candidate.	Candidate with the highest average score wins.	Range Voting (arguably identical to Score Voting)
Matrix/Rating Scale <i>Use weights.</i>	surveymonkey.com			Score Voting with averages
STAR (Score Then Automatic Runoff) Voting	https://star.vote/		Of the candidates with the two highest sum of scores, the one scored higher by more voters wins.	Score Runoff Voting
Ranking [This is not RCV!]	surveymonkey.com	Rank candidates where 1 shows the most support. Give different rankings to different candidates.	The higher the ranking, the more points a candidate is awarded. The candidate with the highest weighted average wins.	Borda Count

Online Polling Options for Advanced Users
with More Knowledge of Technology and Voting Methods

Website Name	Features	Better Voting Methods Available
HeliosVoting.org	Most secure online voting system using open-source code and end-to-end verification	Approval Voting
OpaVote.com (paid service with free trial)	"... the leading provider of ranked choice elections."	Approval Voting Coombs Method, IRV, STV Borda Count, Bucklin Voting Condorcet (see below)
Condorcet Internet Voting Service (CIVS) https://civs.cs.cornell.edu/	"better than IRV at identifying consensus candidates" and uses open-source code	Condorcet -- ensures the winner beats all competitors in head-to-head contests