

Voting Methods and Diverse Representation

How the choice of voting method influences the representation of women and people of color

Marcus Ogren (they/them), April 10, 2022

Topics

Single-winner vs. multi-winner elections

Better single-winner voting methods

Proportional representation

Single-winner Plurality

Vote for 1	
Michael	<input type="radio"/>
Lamonte	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Keysha	<input type="radio"/>

Block Plurality

Vote for up to 3 candidate	
Rachel	<input type="radio"/>
Harold	<input type="radio"/>
Gabriela	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Anna	<input type="radio"/>
Felipe	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Elijah	<input type="radio"/>

Single-winner districts vs. multi-winner block voting

On average, single-winner districts are better for Blacks and Latines, but multi-winner elections are better for women.

Single-winner districts *only* help racial/ethnic minorities when those minorities are geographically concentrated such that they can comprise the majority of a district.

When Black voters are highly dispersed, multi-winner elections appear to be better for them.

Only Black *men* benefit from single-winner districts; there is no discernible effect for Black women.

Trounstine, J. and Valdini, M.E. (2008), The Context Matters: The Effects of Single-Member versus At-Large Districts on City Council Diversity. American Journal of Political Science, 52: 554-569.

Why districts (sometimes) work for minorities

When minority group is concentrated enough to form the majority of voters in a district, they can ensure the election of a candidate from that minority group.

For single-winner districts to help minority groups:

- The district lines must be drawn with an eye towards clustering minority voters into just a few districts.
- The minority needs to be geographically clustered such that this is actually possible.

Why are multi-winner elections better for women?

Honestly, we don't know. Some potential explanations:

- Single-winner Plurality leads to more negative campaigning since candidates can't say, "Vote for me too."
- Voters like voting for both women and men (impossible in single-winner Plurality) because:
 - They want gender balance in city councils/legislatures
 - Voting for four men but no women feels sexist
- Political parties and other groups that recruit and endorse candidates want to be (or at least appear) diverse.

Better single-winner voting methods

City Council						
Rank up to 6 candidates. Mark no more than 1 oval in each column.	First choice 1st	Second choice 2nd	Third choice 3rd	Fourth choice 4th	Fifth choice 5th	Sixth choice 6th
Valarie Altman Orange Party	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
George Hovis Yellow Party	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Althea Sharp Purple Party	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mary Tawa Lime Party	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Joe Li Tan Party	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Phil Wilkie Independent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Approval Voting Ballot

Vote for ALL the candidates you approve of:

Black Panther



Iron Man



Captain America



Thanos



Thor



STAR VOTING

SCORE - THEN - AUTOMATIC - RUNOFF

- Give your favorite(s) five stars.
- Give your last choice(s) zero stars.
- Show preference order and level of support.
- Equal scores indicate no preference.
- Those left blank receive zero stars.

	Worst					Best
Score Candidates:	0	1	2	3	4	5
Abby	0	1	2	3	4	5
Ben	0	1	2	3	4	5
Carmen	0	1	2	3	4	5
DeAndre	0	1	2	3	4	5
Eric	0	1	2	3	4	5

The two highest scoring candidates are finalists.
Your vote goes to the the finalist you prefer.

Voters can do more than “choose one”!

All of these voting methods protect against vote-splitting

Why could these voting methods help minorities?

Much less vote-splitting between members of the same ethnic group

Fear of vote-splitting should no longer incentivize political parties and other groups from discouraging candidates from running

“Electability” doesn’t matter much

Why could these voting methods help women?

Negative campaigning is less effective

- The prospect of an arduous mudslinging campaign may deter women from running.
- The average female candidate may have a more collaborative/less aggressive campaign style, which is more effective when being a voter's second choice can help her win.

Without a major fear of vote-splitting, women should be less likely to be told, “Wait your turn.”

“Electability” doesn’t matter much

What's our evidence?

Not enough elections have been held under Approval Voting or STAR Voting to conduct a useful study. Our best evidence comes from a study of Bay Area elections under Instant Runoff Voting (IRV), which found that:

- Under IRV, a larger fraction of **candidates** come from racial/ethnic minorities
- Under IRV, a larger fraction of **winners** are women, but this difference came from fewer women winning in the control cities and the evidence is weaker
- There were also more female candidates and more minority winners, but this wasn't statistically significant

John, S., Smith, H., & Zack, E. August 2018. The alternative vote: Do changes in single-member voting systems affect descriptive representation of women and minorities?

Proportional Representation

STAR VOTING SCORE - THEN - AUTOMATIC - RUNOFFS

This election will elect _ winners.

- Give your favorite(s) five stars.
- Give your last choice(s) zero stars.
- Show preference order and level of support.
- Equal scores indicate no preference.
- Those left blank receive zero stars.

	Worst					Best
Score Candidates:	0	1	2	3	4	5
Abby	0	1	2	3	4	5
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Eric	0	1	2	3	4	5

Winners in Proportional STAR Voting are selected in rounds. Each round elects the candidate with the highest total score, and then designates that candidate's strongest supporters as represented. Subsequent rounds include all voters who are not yet fully represented.

City Council

Rank up to 6 candidates.

Mark no more than 1 oval in each column.

	First choice	Second choice	Third choice	Fourth choice	Fifth choice	Sixth choice
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
Valarie Altman Orange Party	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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Phil Wilkie Independent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

 **Cumulative Voting (semi-proportional)**

Sample Ballot (filled)

You have three votes.

You may distribute your votes as you wish; you may give one, two, or all three votes to one candidate. The three candidates with the most votes win.

Maria Moderate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Rachel Right	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leroy Left	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Rex Rural	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Elijah End Corruption	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Felicia Fund College	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Chen Cut Taxes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

All of these voting methods elect multiple candidates at once - they can't be used in single-winner districts

All of these voting methods **ensure** that a sizable minority group can get representation

Proportional Representation and Minorities

By strongly supporting its own candidates, a sizable minority group can ensure it is represented - even if the group is spread out geographically.

When a minority group isn't large enough, other factors may play a role:

- Parties may want to recruit minority candidates to appear diverse
- Relatively small numbers of non-minority voters who want diversity can more easily help elect minority candidates.

Empirically, Cumulative Voting (a semi-proportional voting method) yields greater Black representation than Block Plurality or single-winner districts.

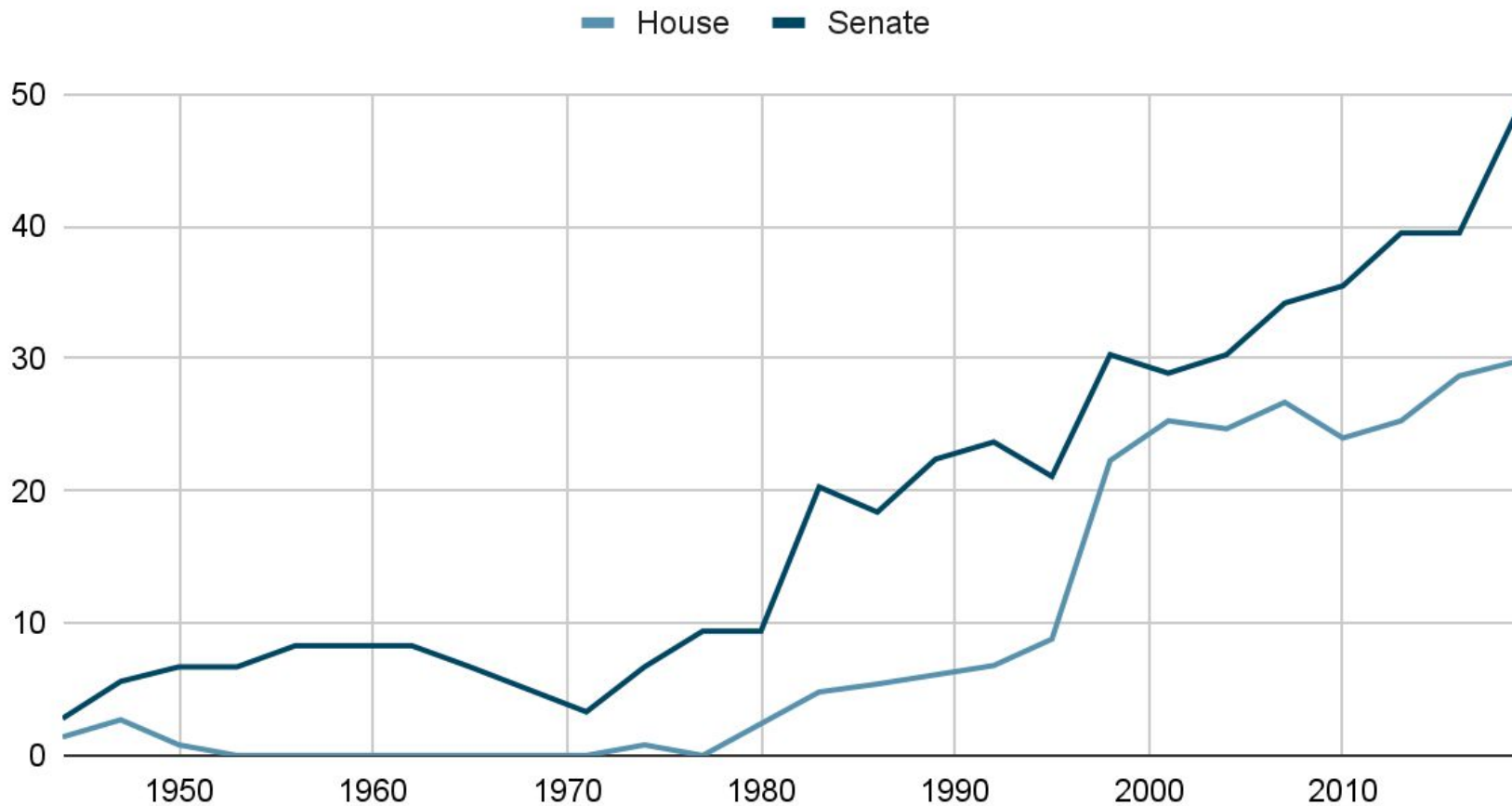
Proportional Representation and Women

Proportional representation requires multi-winner elections, so the advantages of Block Plurality generally apply.

Internationally, proportional representation is correlated with greater women's representation - but there are cultural differences that matter much more than the institutional differences, and we can't say how much of this difference is causal.

The clearest comparison comes from Australia, where the House is elected from single-winner districts with IRV (single-winner RCV) and the Senate from multi-member districts with Single Transferable Voting (proportional RCV).

% Women in the Parliament of Australia



This is complicated!

Everything is dependent on the cultural context, and whether a particular voting method is good for a minority group depends on the voting behavior, geographical distribution, and size of the group

Even if a reform is helpful in two different contexts, it may be helpful for different reasons in one context than the other.

We have little evidence as to *why* some voting methods are better for women; our hypotheses are difficult to test.

What we've seen in the Bay Area and Australia is useful evidence, but it won't necessarily generalize to the entire US.

Conclusions

In the context of Plurality elections, single-winner districts are better for clustered minorities, but Block Plurality seems better for women and unclustered minorities.

Single-winner voting methods that allow voters to support multiple candidates are better for minorities than single-winner Plurality.

Proportional representation does everything - it provides multi-winner elections (helping women) while ensuring that significant minorities get representation.

Better voting methods are a valuable tool for achieving equitable representation, but they aren't always a silver bullet.