

APPROVAL VOTING

You will be responsible for knowing the "Approval Voting" system on the second midterm in our class. This method is *not* in your book, so I'm listing the basics here. (I won't test you on anything more than the basics, I promise.) I also talked about this method in class, so you can look at your class notes.

The Approval Voting method does not use "preference ballots" and "preference schedules," which is probably why it's not included in your textbook. In fact, the ballots are very different: instead of saying, "My first choice is candidate X, my second choice is..." and so on, voters simply list which candidates are acceptable to them. They could list just one candidate, or two, or even ten if they happen to like a lot of candidates.

In some sense this is like an approval rating, which is where the method gets its name. This is where a pollster calls you up and asks if you have a favorable view of one candidate or another. If you say, "Yes," it basically means you'd be ok with that person winning the election.

Without further ado, here's the system:

- (1) Each voter writes down the names of all the candidates which are acceptable to her.
- (2) Any time a candidate's name appears on anybody's ballot, that candidate gets 1 point.
- (3) Whichever candidate has the most points wins.

Example. Let's look at the 2000 Presidential Election. Suppose the election were between John McCain, George Bush, and Al Gore, and instead of the Electoral College system, we're going to use approval voting. For simplicity let's assume there are exactly 100 voters.

- 20 people write down "Gore" on their ballot.
- 35 people write down "Gore, McCain" on their ballot.
- 25 people write down "Bush, McCain" on their ballot.
- 20 people write down "Bush" on their ballot.

Al Gore gets a point every time his name is written down, so he gets $20 + 35 = 55$ points. We can find the point totals for the other candidates in the same way:

Gore	$20 + 35 = 55$
McCain	$35 + 25 = 60$
Bush	$20 + 25 = 45$

So John McCain would win, with 60 points. Both George Bush and Al Gore are left wondering what happened.

While it's impossible to say what would have really happened if the election were run this way, it's a pretty good guess; it reflects the fact that John McCain had the highest approval rating among the three candidates. (Moderate Republicans and moderate Democrats alike had favorable opinions of him, whereas the more hardline Republicans and Democrats would only accept Bush and Gore, respectively.)

Some people are big fans of this system. They claim it allows voters the best chance to express their views. Here are a couple of examples of what they mean. Suppose we're holding an election using the Approval Voting system.

- I might be voting because I really want one particular candidate to win. In that case I'd only write down that one candidate on my ballot.
- I might be voting because I want to make sure that one candidate *loses*. In other words, I might be indifferent about *A*, *B*, and *C*, but I can't stand *D* and will do anything possible to make sure *D* does not win the election. Approval voting lets me cast a ballot which gives points to everybody else: "*A*, *B*, *C*." That kind of ballot makes my feelings very clear: I'd like *anybody* but *D*!!
- This method works well for the "in-between" voters, as well. In Minnesota's 2002 elections, somebody who really liked the Green Party, but was afraid of "wasting their vote" could have cast a ballot with Ken Pentel's name (the Green Party candidate) and anybody else's name(s). (Tim Pawlenty, Tim Penny, or Roger Moe.)