# Approval Voting

## How It Works

Approval voting is a super simple alternative to the current voting system. Instead of voting for only one candidate, voters can vote for as many candidates as they want. The votes are tallied, and the candidate with the most votes wins.

## Voter Expression

Voters don't need to choose between the "lesser-of-two evils" since they can vote for all the candidates they like. Voters can vote for their favorite candidate, regardless of whether or not they have a good chance of winning.

## No Spoiler Effect

Vote splitting is when voters split their vote between multiple similar candidates, causing a dissimilar candidate to win. This "spoiler effect" is a common problem of the current system, where candidates often win with less than 50% of the vote. Since voters vote for each candidate independently under approval voting, the spoiler effect is virtually non-existent.

## Consensus Winners

Approval voting tends to elect candidates with the highest favorability ratings and those that would beat all rivals head-to-head. Polarizing candidates that only appeal to small portions of the population won't get as many votes as more broadly appealing candidates.

## Campaign Civility

Since voters can vote for more than one candidate, approval voting encourages civil campaigning. Candidates don't need to convince voters to not vote for their rivals, they just need to convince voters to also vote for them.

## Accurate Reflection of Support

Every candidate/party receives an accurate reflection of how many people support them. This allows the winners to gauge support for ideas by looking at how well the other candidates/parties did, and helps the losers build momentum for future elections and influence current policy conversations.

# Approval Voting vs Ranked-Choice Voting

Approval voting and ranked-choice voting are two of the most popular alternative voting methods in use today. While ranked-choice voting has been around longer and is more well known, approval voting is a more effective voting method than ranked-choice voting (RCV) based on many factors.

## Ballot Complexity

Ballots with approval voting are substantially the same as they are today -- the instructions simply change to "vote for one or more candidates". Ballots with RCV need space for voters to choose their first choice, second choice, and so on, which increases the ballot length.

## Vote By Mail

Since the ballots are much longer under RCV, the cost of voting by mail is increased. This cost would not change with approval voting.

## Tabulation

Approval voting allows tallying to be done at multiple locations or precincts. Those separate tallies can then be aggregated to determine the winner. RCV, however, cannot be counted in precincts or separate locations -- it must be counted in a centralized area.

## Result Complexity

Approval voting results are easy to understand: a simple list of the candidates along with how many votes they received. The results of an election using RCV are more complex, as you can potentially have many runoff rounds.

## Spoiler Effect

Since voters can vote for each candidate independently under approval voting, the spoiler effect is virtually non-existent. While RCV does a good job at mitigating the spoiler effect when there are only two strong candidates, it struggles when there are three or more strong candidates. This is exactly what happened in the 2009 Burlington mayoral election, where the winning candidate under RCV would have lost in a head-to-head election against a candidate that was eliminated by a spoiler.

| Point | Approval | RCV |
|---|---|---|
| Ballot length | No increase | At least doubles |
| Primary/General Implementation | Either | Either |
| Vote by mail | No change | Increased mailing costs due to longer ballot |
| Tabulation | <ul><li>Publish preliminary counts and update</li><li>Each precinct counts and totals added</li><li>Each county certifies own tabulation</li></ul> | <ul><li>Must wait for all ballots (no preliminary results)</li><li>Central tabulation</li></ul> |
| Equipment | Compatible with any equipment | Requires compatible equipment |
| Spoiler effect | Eliminates | Reduces (but does not eliminate) |
| Spoiled ballots | Voters can vote for as many candidates as they want, decreasing the risk of spoiled ballots | Increased spoiled ballots, as voters cannot rank two candidates equally |

Successful elections
Fargo, ND
St. Louis - passed in Nov 2020, implemented Mar 2021 (four months)