Approval Voting

Ammon Gruwell

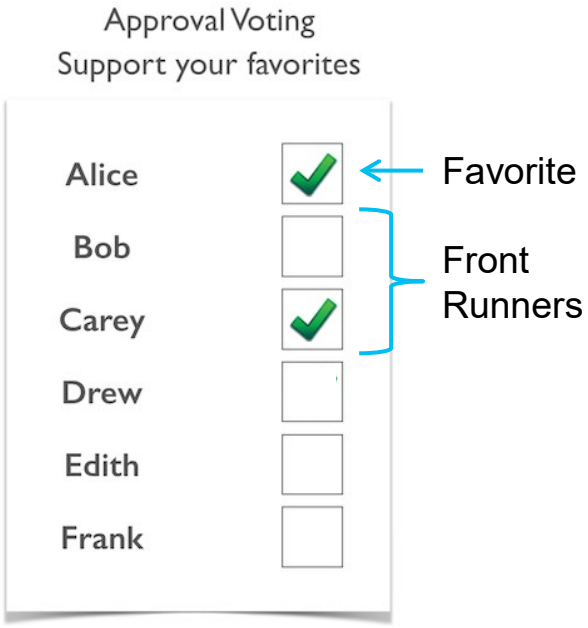
- Longtime Election Reform Advocate
- Founder of the Utah Center for Electoral Reform
- Electrical Engineer
- Former UT Legislative Candidate

Approval Voting

- Vote for as many candidates as you like
- The candidate with the most votes wins
- Advantages:
  - Motivates honest voting
  - Reduces election costs
  - Avoids vote splitting
  - Avoids spoiled elections
  - Simple to implement
  - Higher winning mandates

Approval Motivates Honest Voting

- With Approval, voters can always support their favorite candidate, and not be restricted to choosing between front-runners
- If you're going to support your preferred front-runner, there's no reason to not also support your non-front-runner favorite



Approval Reduces Election Costs

- Analysis from the Utah Association of Counties found large cost savings from Approval
- Eliminating municipal primaries could save SLC over half a million dollars per election year

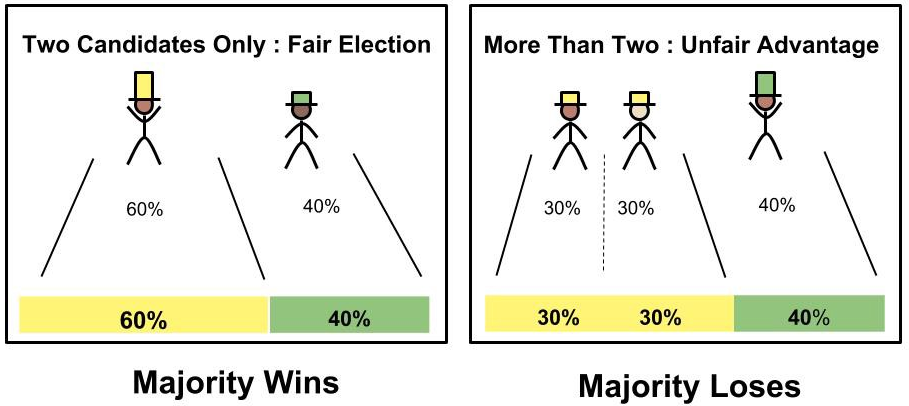
Net Savings for Salt Lake City Elections

Category	Estimated Costs/Savings with Approval
No Primary Election	$623,000
Education	($94,533)
Cost - Additional Costs	($0)
NET SAVINGS	$528,467

Approval Avoids Vote Splitting

- Dividing a majority voting bloc between 2+ candidates can cause a minority voting bloc to win
- By allowing voters to support multiple similar candidates, Approval avoids vote splitting without needing multiple rounds or vote transfers

Divided and Conquered = The "Spoiler Effect"



Approval Avoids Spoiled Elections

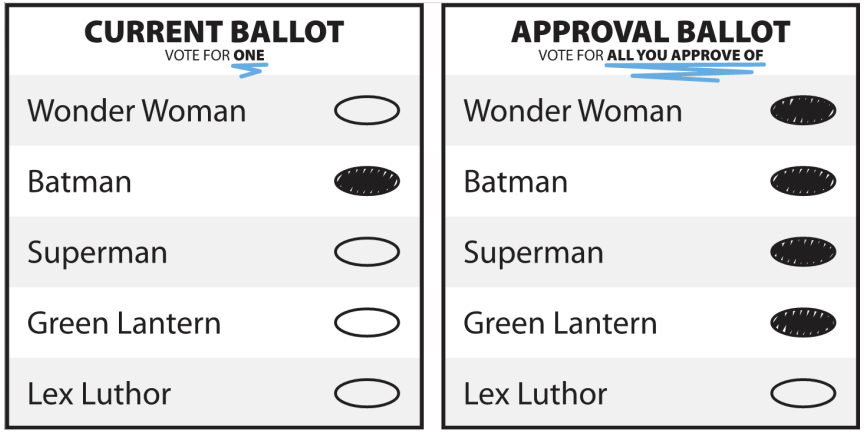
- Similar to vote splitting, spoilers can throw the election
- Under approval, third party supporters can vote for their preferred front-runner as well to avoid throwing their vote away

U.S. House, Utah District 4 General Election, 2012 [hide]			
Party	Candidate	Vote %	Votes
Democratic	✔**Jim Matheson** ***Incumbent***	48.8%	119,803
Republican	Mia B. Love	48.5%	119,035
Libertarian	Jim L. Vein	2.6%	6,439
Total Votes			**245,277**

Source: Utah Lieutenant Governor "Official Election Results, 2012 General Election"

Approval is Simple to Implement

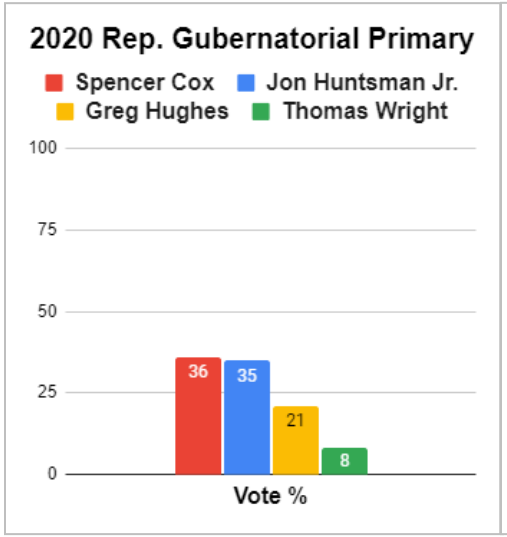
- Simple change to instructions
  - Similar to current multi-seat city elections
- No new voting machines
- No special software or training
- No votes are reallocated or moved during counting
- Doesn't alter the role of the Lt. Governor



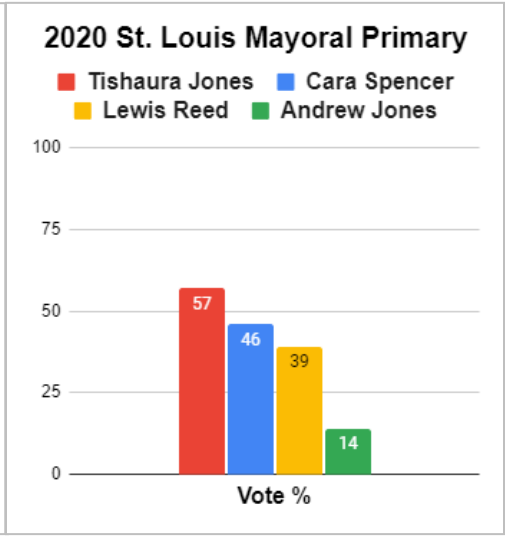
Approval Results In Higher Winning Mandates

- Crowded plurality races must sum to 100%, resulting in low winning percentages
- A higher winning percentage with Approval gives a stronger mandate to lead

Plurality Election

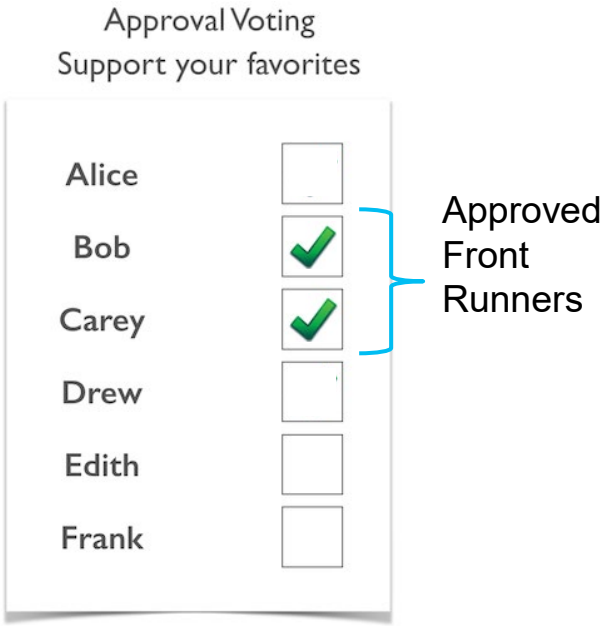


Approval Election



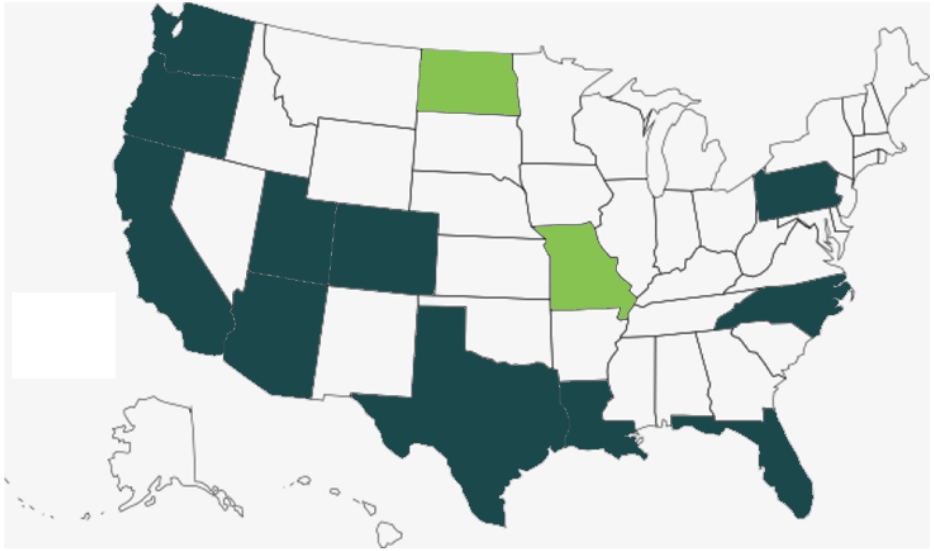
Criticisms of Approval Voting

- Inability to express a preference between two approved candidates
  - Only matters when both are front-runners
- Doesn't guarantee a majority winner
  - Reflects true level of support instead of an artificial majority
  - Neither do runoff methods



Alternative Voting Methods in the US

- Approval Voting has been successfully implemented in 2 US cities
  - Fargo, North Dakota
  - St. Louis, Missouri
- Efforts to enact Approval Voting in 12 other states



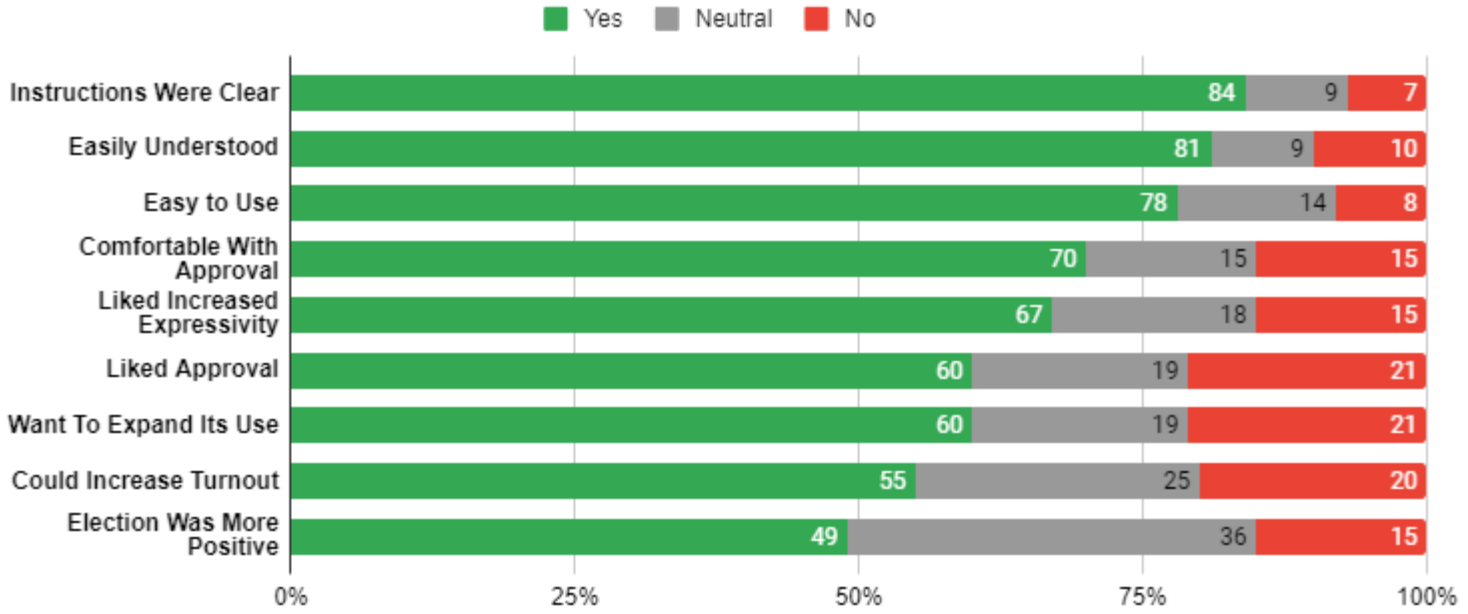
Approval Voting in Fargo & St. Louis

» Approval Voting ballot initiatives passed with over 60% support

2020 St. Louis Mayoral Primary

2020 Fargo City Commission Race

St. Louis Approval Polling Data



Poll of Utahns About Alternative Voting Methods

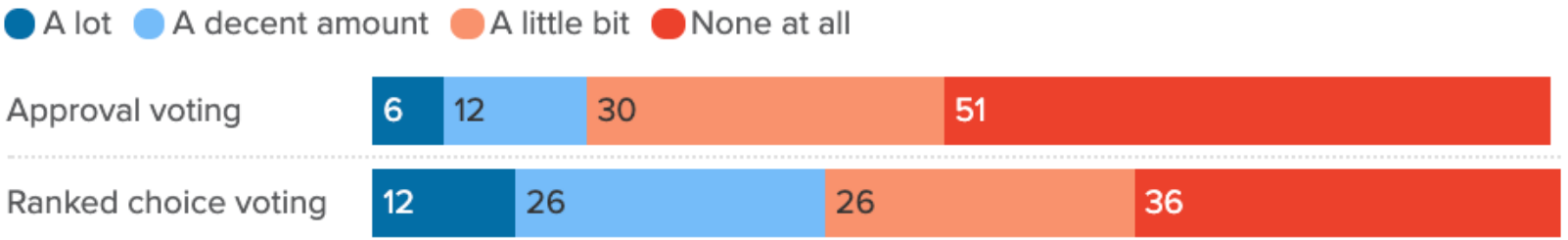
- Utah Approves won an in-kind grant in January to explore attitudes throughout the state
- Poll conducted by:
  - The Center For Election Science
  - Change Research
- Time Frame: May 12-16, 2021
- Sample Size: 828
- 98% Voted in last election

THE CENTER FOR Election Science

CHANGE RESEARCH™

How Much Utah Voters Have Heard About Voting Methods

CHANGE RESEARCH™



Voting Method Awareness by Party ID

Party ID of Those Familiar With Approval Voting, Ranked Choice Voting, Or Both

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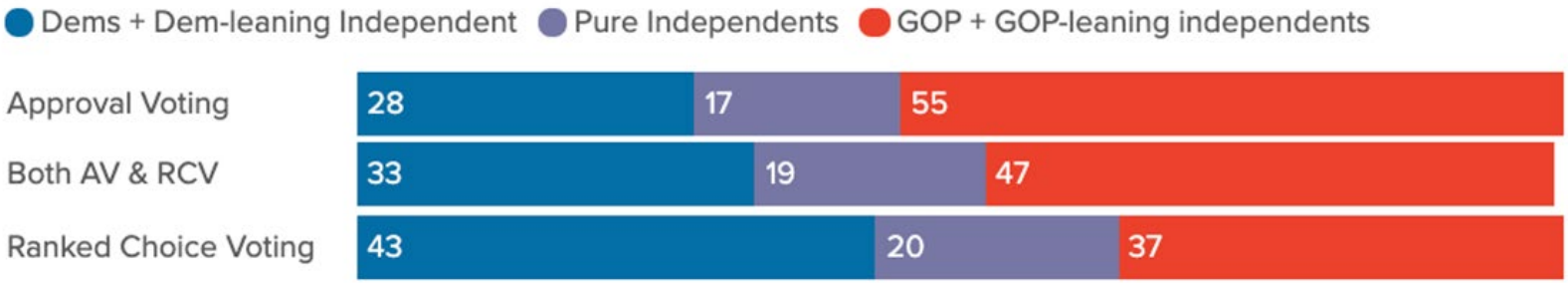


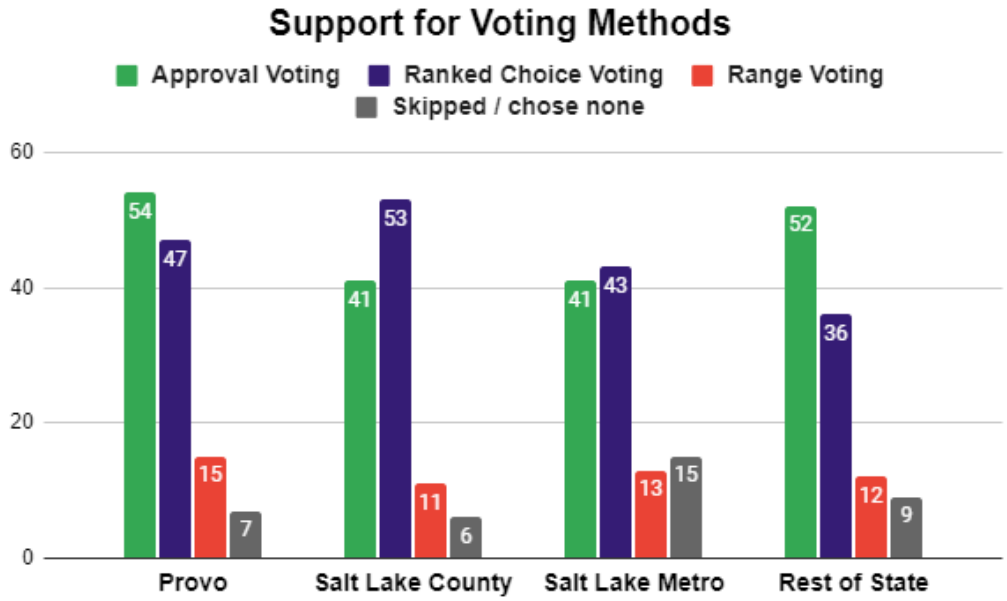
Support For Voting Methods

CHANGE RESEARCH™

"If the State of Utah was considering these methods to determine an election winner, which of these would you support today? Select all that apply."

Support for Voting Methods in Utah by Region

- RCV is most popular in Salt Lake County
- Approval favored in most of the rest of the state



Approval Voting Summary

- **Is Approval an improvement over Plurality?**
  - It costs less, improves outcomes, and encourages honesty & expressivity
- **Do voters like Approval?**
  - Voters in St. Louis liked Approval over Plurality by a 3:1 ratio
- **Do Utah voters want Approval?**
  - It's the most popular voting method among the 91% of Utahns supporting at least one form of ballot reform
- **Do any Utah Cities want to try Approval?**
  - Provo rejected RCV hoping that other methods like approval would soon be available
  - With strong county clerk support, many others could follow
- **If we're already piloting RCV, why not study Approval Voting as well to determine which voting method is really best for Utah?**