



Vote Splitting: The Root of Electoral Evils

Our current **choose-one Plurality Voting method** allows voters to express an opinion about only one candidate. This works fine—when there are only two candidates. Add a third, and you get **vote splitting**: the most similar candidates split their common supporters' votes, and can lose to another less preferred candidate—possibly even the least preferred!

The Vote-Splitting Cycle

Fear of being a “spoiler” deters many candidates from entering the race, denying voters a real choice. Often enough more candidates run anyway, forcing voters to play a game: guessing how other voters will vote. For this they consider candidates’ “viability” — not only their qualifications, but their popularity, funding, and media support. Campaign money becomes necessary not just to make candidates known, but to signal that they are serious. Facing the “wasted-vote dilemma,” many voters abandon their favorite candidates for the few who seem to have the best chances — the bandwagon effect.

Any third candidate who nevertheless does get significant votes succeeds only in splitting the vote and spoiling the election, giving victory to a less favored candidate. Whatever the outcome, most voters are left dissatisfied. Plurality Voting is not merely simple, but simplistic—it gathers too little information to reliably elect the candidate with the most support.

Candidate	FL Vote %
Bush	48.85
Gore	48.84
Nader	1.64
Buchanan	0.29
Browne	0.28

Spoiler Example

Gore would have won the 2000 US presidential election against Bush had left-wing spoiler Nader not split the vote.

What Makes a Good Voting Method

A good voting method has several essential qualities, starting with the fundamental two: **Accuracy** and **Simplicity**. Over the expected range of election scenarios, the voting method must produce results that accurately reflect the will of the electorate, at an acceptable logistical cost. To produce such results, we need three more qualities: **Expressiveness**, **Sincerity**, and **Equality**. Voters must be able and willing to express a reasonably full and sincere opinion, and the presence of similar candidates should not hurt or help them. The Equality criterion in particular is key to preventing vote splitting. Finally, we need a way to measure and support **Consensus** (e.g. majority or super-majority under choose-one Plurality Voting) for groups or important decisions that require it.

How would this look to voters?

Every voting method can be implemented physically in different ways, but the common favored format is the **grid ballot**:

Rate each candidate from 0 to 5	0	1	2	3	4	5
Candidate A Party A	○	○	●	○	○	○
Candidate B Party B	○	○	○	○	○	●
Candidate C Party C	●	○	○	○	○	○
Candidate D Party D	○	○	●	○	○	○

Who benefits from better voting methods?

Major-party supporters

- Better primaries, without vote splitting and spoilers
- Less negative campaigning, more post-primary unity
- No minor-party spoilers

Minor-party supporters

- Other parties see minor-party candidates as allies, not spoilers
- Results reflect a party's true support

The general public

- Compromise results more accurately reflecting “the will of the people”
- More civility and consensus, less polarization and acrimony
- Parties compete to serve voters, not deep-pocketed funders

“Make things as simple as possible, but no simpler.”
~Albert Einstein

Evaluative Voting Methods Reduce Vote Splitting

Voting methods fall into three categories: **allocative** (where you “give your vote” to a candidate), **comparative** (usually expressed by ranking), and **evaluative** (expressed by rating). In the Voter Satisfaction Efficiency (VSE) chart, all the colored bars represent rating methods, while all the gray bars are ranking methods. Choose-one Plurality Voting is markedly worse than the others because allocative voting methods tend to split. Evaluative methods tend not to split, because candidates are rated **independently**.

What are these relatively good voting methods?

Score Voting is the mother of evaluative voting methods: rate each candidate individually on a scale (typically 0-5).

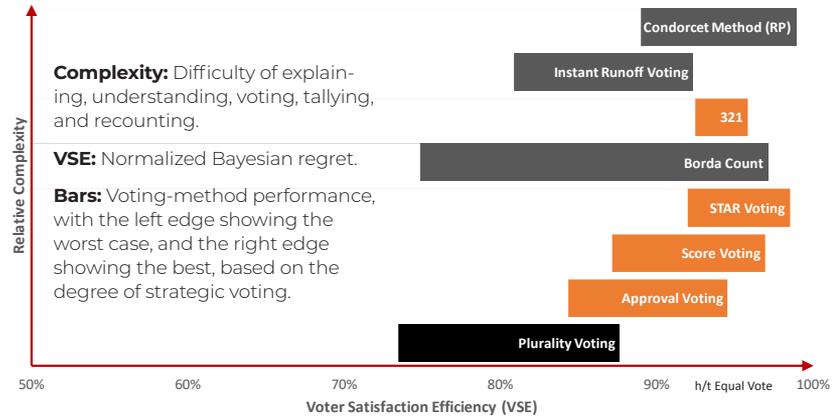
STAR Voting is Score Voting with a second tallying stage. The two highest rated candidates are finalists; the winner is the one preferred by the majority. STAR Voting better resists strategic voting.

3-2-1 Voting grades candidates on a 3-value Likert scale. Of the three candidates with the most “Likes”, select the two with the fewest “Dislikes”, and then the one more often preferred to the other. 3-2-1 Voting both resists strategy and promotes consensus.

Approval Voting is the simplest form of Score Voting, on a binary scale of 0 or 1: approve as many candidates as you like. AV can use today’s ballots and software!

Fill in the bubble for each candidate who you approve of	
George W. Bush Republican Party	<input type="radio"/>
Al Gore Democratic Party	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Harry Browne Libertarian Party	<input type="radio"/>
Ralph Nader Green Party	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Pat Buchanan Reform Party	<input type="radio"/>

Comparing Single-Winner Election Methods by VSE and Complexity Based on Bayesian-regret computer simulation



When friends choose a movie, or businesses choose a supplier, they often use some form of Score Voting, because good results matter: friends want to stay friends, and businesses want to stay in business. So why do we use choose-one Plurality Voting in politics?

Fortunately the US and state constitutions seldom mention voting methods, let alone mandate one, so reform is possible at the state and local levels. However, few people know that alternative voting methods even exist. We need to raise awareness, in our schools and colleges; among journalists, politicians, and party activists; and throughout the electorate.



Honeybees are the only other animals known to vote, and they use an evaluative method!

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