**Decision-making**

In a multi-party democracy, in a modern pluralist society, many topics are complex. In the corresponding debate, everything should be allowed to be, not only ‘on the table’, but also on the subsequent ballot paper.

Consider, then, a parliament of 20 members, voting on four options, ***A, B, C*** and ***D***, according to the voters’ profile shown in Table I.

**Table I A Voters’ Profile**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Preferences | Number of voters |
| 9 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 1 |
| 1st  | ***A*** | ***B*** | ***C*** | ***D*** | ***D*** |
| 2nd  | ***B*** | ***C*** | ***B*** | ***C*** | ***B*** |
| 3rd  | ***C*** | ***D*** | ***D*** | ***B*** | ***C*** |
| 4th  | ***D*** | ***A*** | ***A*** | ***A*** | ***A*** |

A cursory glance at the preferences cast would suggest that option ***A*** is very divisive, while option ***B*** is probably the most popular overall. So now let us consider what happens in any analysis.

**Plurality Vote**

If the above ballots are counted according to the rules laid down for a plurality vote, the methodology which is often used in the Danish parliament, then all the 2nd and subsequent preferences are ignored, only the 1st preferences are considered, and the outcome is as follows:

(i) ***A*** – 9, ***B*** – 2, ***C*** – 4, ***D*** – 5

so the winner is option ***A***.

**The Two-round System, trs**

The Norwegian parliament allows for, but vary rarely uses, a two-round system. This consists of a plurality vote, as above, but if no option gains a majority, it is followed by a majority vote between the two leading options, in this instance, ***A*** and ***D***. Well, all six of the ***B*** and ***C*** supporters prefer ***D*** to ***A***, so the outcome is now:

(ii) ***A*** – 9, ***D*** – 11

so the winner is option D.

**The Alternative Vote, av**[[1]](#footnote-1)

A third system, the alternative vote, av, is a series of plurality votes, with the supposedly least popular option being eliminated and its votes transferred after each round. The first stage score, then, was as above:

(i) ***A*** – 9, ***B*** – 2, ***C*** – 4, ***D*** – 5

So option ***B*** is eliminated in the second stage, and its votes are transferred in accordance with its supporters’ wishes to their 2nd preference, option ***C.*** So the next stage reads as follows:

(iii) ***A*** – 9, ***C*** – 6, ***D*** – 5

so ***D*** is now eliminated, and all 5 votes go to option ***C***,

(iv) ***A*** – 9, ***C*** – 11

so the winner is ***C***.

**Modified Borda count, mbc**

Finally, and uniquely, in a modified Borda count, mbc, all the preferences cast by all the voters are taken into account. Every 1st preference gets 4 points, every 2nd gets 3 points, and so on, so the outcome is as shown:

(v) ***A*** – 47, ***B*** – 58, ***C*** – 54, ***D*** – 41

so the winner is option ***B***.

\* \* \* \* \*

The democratic decision, therefore, is either ***A*** or ***B*** or ***C*** or ***D***! From the original cursory glance, however, option ***B*** is the accurate answer, and option ***A*** hopelessly inaccurate.

1. It is also known as single transferable vote, stv, (in Europe), instant run-off voting, irv, (in the Americas) and preference voting, pv, (in Australasia). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)