

Patricia Breslin

From: Jordan Frank <jordanfrank@me.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 16, 2023 3:57 PM
To: Patricia Breslin
Subject: Voting System - Comment

Hi Patricia — Sam's newsletter said to email public comment to you.

- Jordan Frank, Resident, Providence, RI

Summary:

The role of a Democratic governing system is for the government to serve as the voice of the people. Our voting system has shown that it is vulnerable in ways that we could easily elect a person that is not the preference of the people.

** This is a recommendation for **

- If there are more than 4 candidates: Non partisan primary with rank choice voting (not requiring that you rank every candidate).
- If there are 4 or less candidates, go straight to General election without a primary.
- A general election with up to 4 candidates from the Rank Choice primary

This method would allow up to the best 4 candidates, regardless of party, to advance to the general election. At the level of 4 candidates, there is some resiliency in the candidate pool (in case one has to drop out due to health, scandal, or some other reason) and 4 is a reasonable number of people for voters to study and make an informed choice.

NOTE: I favor 4, but changing 4 to 3 candidates makes good sense too.

Full Story:

The people have voice through the officials whom they vote to represent their voice.

But what if the voting system is broken? What if it even leaves doubt about being broken?

In the year 2000, When Bush beat Gore by about 540 votes in Florida, what would have happened if Ralph Nader's 97,421 votes were redistributed? Or the votes from the 4th and 5th candidate, both who got more than 540 votes? A lot of ink in the media was wasted on this question.

Rank choice voting would have definitively solved that riddle.

Closer to home in Rhode Island, look at our most recent Democratic Gubernatorial primary.

Out of a total ~ 113,598 votes in the Democratic primary, McKee had a slim majority.

McKee 37,288 — 3.4% of the state's 1.09M people.
Foulkes 33,931
Gorbea 29,811
Brown 9,021
Munoz 3,547

If we could wave a wand and reallocate Munoz and Brown's votes to the top 3, Gorbea and Foulkes could have outperformed McKee easily. If we then took out Gorbea, we could have had a totally different outcome. But we will never know. With RCV, we would know.

Looking to the most recent general election. McKee got to advance to the general, where a Democrat win was highly likely, with only 3.4% of the state's 1.09 Million strong population voting for him in the primary. In a heavily Democratic state, McKee basically won the general election before it started, with only 3.4% of the population definitely behind him.

3.4% is not the voice of the people. If, by stroke of luck, the choice coincides with the preference of the people, we will never know.

Meanwhile, consider the Republican primary. Kalus won with 17,188 votes. That is less than all of McKee, Foulkes, and Gorbea.

Kalus 17,188
Riccitelli 3,351

Total ~20,539

So, with very low support, an unpopular Kalus got to go into the General with McKee, as did a few independent candidates.

Foulkes and Gorbea both got almost twice the votes that Kalus received in the primary. Why didn't they get to advance?

The solution for this is Non-Partisan Primaries and Rank Choice Voting.

In the Non-Partisan Primary, everyone gets to rank all or up to a certain number of candidates. The top two, three, or possibly four get to advance to the General Election.

In our last Gubernatorial election, we could have seen two or three Democratic party candidates in the General. We wouldn't have needed to be distracted by a Republican, green, moderate or other candidate which wasn't popular enough to deserve being in the general election round.

Besides this system of Non-Partisan Primaries and Rank Choice Voting providing a more honest result, it is also vital to understand that it lets everyone have a voice.

Specifically, and in the last election, it would let the Republican, Green, Moderate or Libertarian leaning voters have a voice about which of the Democratic party candidates best meet their values and needs. Voters would no longer have to choose between party and preference. They would get their voice back.

The combination of these two methods, Non-Partisan Primaries and RCV, is the recipe for Democracy - it is the necessary means to the most basic end of building a government that represents the voice of the people.

Some issues worth mentioning:

Q. How do you handle a non-partisan primary where there are a lot of candidates (say, more than 5)?

One issue is that in a 10 person race, whether any given voter come up with a logical ranking of more than a few of the 10.

Another issue is concern that socio-economic disadvantaged people tend to rank less candidates than people that are not.

The solution is to allow each voter to only rank up to a limit of up to 3 or 5 candidates. The voter effectively abstains from voting on the additional candidates over the maximum they can rank.

Note that every additional un-ranked candidate is just treated equally - the voter is not affecting the result for those candidates.

Q. The constitution requires pluralistic voting. How can we start the transition?

The legislature can change the primary voting methods. Moving to a Non-Partisan primary resulting in a 2 candidate general election will ensure a majority on the pluralistic voting method required by the constitution.

Meanwhile, an effort to change the constitution could eventually allow the voting method to allow a non-pluralistic approach that demonstrates a majority preference for one candidate.

Q. What is the ideal number of candidates in a general election?

The role of the primary should be to screen out candidates that really have no chance to survive a general election.

From there, it doesn't really matter if there are 2 or up to 5 candidates in the general election.

California reduces to 2 (maybe for constitutional rather than logical reasons). Alaska reduces to 4 candidates.

Reduction to two candidates is not ideal. What if one candidate becomes sick? What if some negative blemish is found on their record? A resilient process calls for at least 3, maybe 4 candidates in a general election.