

Multi-winner Elections in the US: Case Study Proposal: Party Delegate Selection

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LWVBC Voting Methods meeting

Introduction

Many of us have been pushing for more widespread adoption of election methods that promote Proportional Representation (PR), to make more votes count, to produce more representative elected bodies, to eliminate or reduce gerrymandering, and for many other reasons.

Most voters in the US are unfamiliar with PR, but they shouldn't be.

Many of us use it every 4 years.

I'm talking about nearly all the Democratic presidential primaries, and many of the Republican primaries

Green Papers

[The Green Papers Election Glossary](#) has this to say:

PROPORTIONAL PRIMARY Seeing the WINNER-TAKE-ALL primary as unfairly reducing the input of significant minority factions within the party in the presidential nominating process, the McGovern-Fraser reforms of the early-to-mid 1970's successfully promoted the so-called "PROPORTIONAL" type of primary as an alternative to be used in the Democratic Party's nomination process. In the PROPORTIONAL type of presidential preference primary, the district delegates are apportioned among the top vote-getters in each (usually congressional, but occasionally state legislative) district while the at-large delegates are apportioned among the top vote-getters statewide by the percentage of the vote received above a certain threshold (most often 15 percent: a figure actually mandated by the rules of the Democratic Party since 1992)

Green Papers continued...

This is the system used by the vast majority of the states holding presidential primaries in the Democratic Party; the Republican party (where WINNER-TAKE-ALL primaries are still permitted) uses it in far fewer states than the Democrats and, in the vast majority of these, the GOP usually started using the PROPORTIONAL type only because Democrat-dominated State Legislatures of the mid-to-late 1970's passed laws forcing both parties to use this type of presidential preference primary. The major difference between the two parties' PROPORTIONAL primaries is in the thresholds used by the Republicans, which can vary from as much as 20 percent or more to as little as virtually 0 percent. (as noted below, the Democrats are currently required by party rules to use a 15 percent threshold in all their PROPORTIONAL primaries).

Based on one contest

Thus, Proportional representation, but for all party decisions, driven by preferences in "highest contested race" for given assembly

Other situations

Such proportional allocation methods are also used starting at the grassroots in many other party settings, e.g. for seating delegates in county and state conventions based on caucuses.

Leveraging this experience

How can we flesh out this experience and history of PR in the US, and figure out good ways to use it to inform our discussions of good PR methods, and for advocacy for PR?

Auditing

- I'll briefly note that this also has a variety of implications for risk-limiting audits of elections, which Colorado has been pioneering recently. If the goal is to audit whether the detailed outcome of the election is correct, i.e. the full delegate allocation, the effective margins become very close even when it is very clear which candidate won the state. For related calculations which can be easily reproduced online for free, see [IPython notebook and paper with Risk-limiting audit code for Proportional Representation via Highest Averages](#). That's one reason for wanting detailed, easily-parsed data.
- Rhode Island probably planning to just audit the winner, not the delegate selection numbers, unfortunately

Resources

Celeste: <https://www.coloradodems.org/delegate-selection-plan/>

Delegates to assemblies shall be allocated in a fashion that fairly reflects the preferences expressed in a poll based on the highest contested race in the state or district for which the assembly is being held

- Also note Aragon in the blockchain world!

Questions

The history and data could be very interesting to analyze

- Can anyone point to a more detailed history of PR methods by parties?
- Does anyone have good easy-to-parse data feeds for how these allocations have been made? It looks like the GreenPapers have lots of detailed data, like Colorado Democratic Delegation 2016, but I don't know if they have it all organized for easy download and analysis.
- Does anyone know of a concise encoding of the exact methods used in each jurisdiction for each election? Again, Green Papers has lots of detail ([The Math Behind the Democratic Delegate Allocation - 2016](#)), but I'd love to see code that could reproduce all the historical allocation calculations based on the data.

Related topics

From Celeste:

“Multi-winner elections for an eventual single-seat position.”