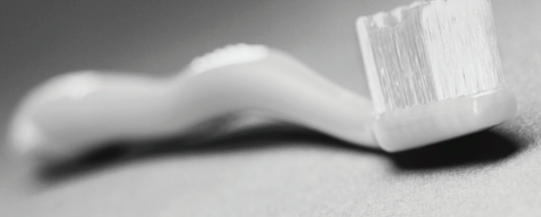


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**STAR from A1**

to save candidates money while campaigning, greatly reduce voters and candidates gaming the political system and, eventually, doing away with the need for partisan politics all together.

It's a tall order, particularly when looking back at the difficulties that have faced the American electorate in the preceding decades that have created labels like "spoiler candidates" and "strategic voting."

But is STAR really the right choice to fix these electoral ills? Is it a fool proof system, or are there lingering issues about the process that still need to be resolved? To find that answer, it's best to look at what the STAR system is and how it relates to the electoral problems of the past.

**The System:**

The current method of voting used in Lane County, along with most of the U.S., is what is called plurality voting. That is, a person is given a list of candidates and the voter picks one.

STAR voting on the other hand, is an alternative, two-step voting process that involves voters scoring candidates.

The initiative Roberts is advocating for is broken into two parts, the first of which is to do away with May primaries for the non-partisan Lane County races for commissioners, sheriffs, assessor and district attorneys.

Instead, the votes would take place during the main November election.

Currently, these races are mostly decided in May. If a candidate wins the race with a plurality of votes, that person becomes the winner.

In the example of the May West Lane County Commissioner race between Jay Bozievich, Nora Kent and Beverly Hills, Bozievich received 55.75 percent of the vote, compared to Kent's 38.61 percent and Hills' 5.39 percent. Bozievich received over 50 percent, so he will move along to the November general election ballot as the only choice, clinching the win.

But having the vote in May presents issues including lower voter turnout than in general elections, so a smaller portion of the population could potentially choose the commissioner race winners.

And that population is generally partisan. Since it's a primary, most voters are concerned with voting for their candidates in the general election. Independent voters, or those disinterested in who wins a party's nomination, may not get their voice heard.

In addition, a winner isn't always declared in May. This is what happened in the East Lane County Commissioner race. Out of six candidates, none received 50 percent. The two highest candidates received 31.25 percent and 30.69 per-

cent. Per Lane County rules, those top two vote getters will spill into a runoff in the November election.

Even though one will eventually win a plurality of votes in November, the candidates got to that opportunity through a minority of partisan electors in May, not a definitive majority.

The first step of STAR is the initial vote made by the public. Instead of choosing just one candidate, the voter gets to rate each candidate between 0-5, with 5 being a score in favor, and 0 being a score of no-confidence. It's akin to rating a business on Yelp or giving a star rating for a movie.

"The main advantage is you get the opportunity to vote honestly for whichever candidates you like," Roberts said. "You can give whichever candidate you want a five, and then give your second favorite candidate a four or a three. Or you can give your least favorite candidate a zero, and you give the one that's just slightly better than that a one. So, every step along the way, you show your preference."

The theory goes, if a person is faced with two candidates that they like, they're not forced to vote one over the other. Doing that can have detrimental effects on elections. An example of this would be the 2000 election with Ralph Nader and Al Gore.

With STAR, a person can show approval for both candidates without compromising their vote. After the initial vote is completed, the top two candidates are put into an automatic runoff. It's there that votes will be reexamined, where the candidate who scored higher most often is given the win.

"It's about voting honestly and non-strategically," Roberts said about the runoff.

She stated that without the runoff, it's possible that people would just rate who they like with fives, and who they don't like zeros. This is known as "bullet voting."

"They'll just try to 'bullet vote' all candidates they want to advance, and zero for candidates they don't want to advance," she said. "So, the automatic runoff is a step that incentivizes honest voting. If you know there is going to be a runoff, and if you give one candidate higher than another, and that one person gets your vote, that will inspire people to vote more honestly."

An example of how this works can be seen in the recent Whiteaker Community Council election in Eugene, where the system was given its first (and so far, only) live test.

**Data to Choose Representatives:**

The Whiteaker Community Council used the STAR method for its non-partisan, at-large seats. There were 11 positions open, with 14 people running for the seats.

Did the voting process create any major shifts in how the vote ended up?

"It's possible for there to have been some changes in the last seat or two, but the first nine or so all had very solid support," Brad Foster of the Whiteaker council said. "If I had to bet, I'd say it ended up pretty much as it

would have."

Foster does see promise in the system and believes it's ready for a larger trial in Lane County.

"I also think STAR voting might help bring more diversity into local politics," he said. "Races with multiple candidates from the same party are somewhat rare and appear to be actively discouraged by party activists. Under the STAR format, it wouldn't matter if several people with similar, but slightly different, platforms ran in those races since voters could fine-tune their votes."

"Overall, it was great. This was a big improvement on our prior system of casting votes for up to 11 candidates. The old system felt like we were voting someone off the island by not including them in the 11, but STAR allowed us to grade the candidates in a more refined way."

Foster also found some unexpected results in the data.

"The software gave us a bit of interesting data," he said. "It ranked the candidates by their total points. It also looked at the election as though each seat was independent and compared the top two point-getters in the pool head-to-head. Those two methods of ranking have a couple of differences. So, Candidate A might get more points than Candidate B in the score portion, but Candidate B might win the automatic run-off. I think it worked that way for two of the eleven."

What happened in the Whiteaker race was that for two candidates, the initial voting score was higher than their adjusted runoff score.

To explain, we'll call "Candidate A" dogs, and "Candidate B" cats.

Dogs were very polarizing to the voters in the initial voting stage. Out of six votes, two voters really loved them, giving them a score of five.

Two voters were rather lukewarm on the animals, giving them a three. Two more voters absolutely hated dogs, giving them a big zero. On the whole, dogs gained 16 points.

Cat support was a little broader. Two people gave them a four, two people gave them a three, one person gave them a one and only a single voter gave felines a zero. The total vote for cats was 15.

In plurality voting, dogs would have come up the winner of the race, 16-15.

But was that vote actually indicative of how voters were feeling about the choices of household pets? Yes, some people really loved dogs, but just as many people hated them. For man's best friend, they were pretty polarizing.

Cats, on the other hand, actually had broader support of the public. Sure, people weren't as passionate about cats, but people also didn't hate them as much. Felines appealed to a broader population of voters.

This is where the importance of STAR's runoff comes in. It takes the top two winners of the initial election, then counts how many times each voter scored one animal over the other.

In two instances, dogs scored

higher over cats. In one instance, dogs scored lower. But in three instances, cats actually scored higher.

"We believe that STAR voting will help elect representatives with a broader base of support," Roberts said. "You're going to see candidates winning that have lots of threes and fours, those candidates that everyone can say, 'Wow, I think they're good candidates,' rather than the polar extremes."

Is it possible that candidates who receive a majority of initial votes will lose an election? Yes, as was shown in Whiteaker.

Nonpartisan organization FairVote, which champions electoral reforms, stated that because of this possibility, STAR runs the risk of violating fundamental democratic principles.

STAR proponents believe that without the rating and runoff of STAR, the intricacies that go into a person's reasoning when it comes to voting is lost in the numbers. Even though the initial tally may equal a majority vote, that doesn't necessarily mean the majority wholeheartedly agrees with the choice.

"Using data to choose your representative leads to the more scientifically or mathematically based result," Roberts said. "The data shows what you prefer compared to the other candidates, and that information is used to elect the representatives to support the people that they want the most."

It should be noted that while FairVote had multiple concerns regarding STAR, it remained neutral on the system, neither condemning or endorsing it.

"We don't see STAR Voting as politically viable nor likely to work like its advocates believe," FairVote wrote in December 2017. Instead of continuing to look at STAR, the organization stated they would continue to look at Rank Choice Voting, another form of alternative voting.

No matter what type of alternative voting solution someone supports, the point is that, in many cases, existing plurality voting can inhibit people from electing representatives that voters like the most. This can be caused by political parties, candidates, or sometimes the voters themselves.

**Spoilers:**

One of the driving forces of STAR voting is to eliminate the "spoiler" candidate, someone who cannot possibly win an election, but gain enough support to throw an election for a similar candidate. The most common example given is the 2000 presidential race, where Green Party candidate Ralph Nader was considered a spoiler.

The last, major battleground for that election was in Florida, where only 537 votes separated Al Gore and George Bush, who would go on to win the election. That contentious election saw arguments on multiple fronts regarding how votes were tabulated, how people were registered and the readability of the voting cards. But some of the blame was placed solely on Nader being in the race.

See **SPOILERS 8A**

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