

Ranked Ballots

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This little document discusses why I think ranked ballots are an excellent idea.

Imagine there is an election for dogcatcher, and there are three candidates:

- Furd: loves cats but hates dogs
- Twery: likes both cats and dogs, but loves neither
- Choo: hates cats but loves dogs

In a ranked ballot, each voter would indicate their preferences from first to last on the ballot. The ballot on the left is from someone who was bitten by a dog as a child and wants to exterminate them all. The ballot on the right is from someone who is a dog lover.

Furd	①
Twery	②
Choo	③

Scared of dogs

Furd	③
Twery	②
Choo	①

Loves dogs

Prior to the vote, polls in the newspaper indicate the Furd is leading, and Choo is last.

Furd	40%
Twery	35%
Choo	25%

Pre-Election Poll

If the polls are correct and this is how the vote turns out, then in our current system Furd wins and lots of dogs are going to die. So a dog lover who wants Choo to win is confronted with a problem after seeing the poll result: should he or she vote “strategically” for Twery to insure that Furd does not win or should she or he instead vote with their heart for Choo.

But in a ranked ballot system, if after the first round no candidate has a majority of first choice votes, then the last place candidate is dropped and all of that candidate's votes are given to whoever was the voter's second choice. If all the people who voted for Choo reasonably listed Twery as their second choice, then in the next round of tallying the vote, Twery now has $35 + 25 = 60\%$ while Furd still has 40%. Twery now has a majority, wins, and the dogs live! So everybody gets to choose their favourite candidate, but also gets to choose their second choice.

The system easily works for multiple candidates: the computer tallying the vote keeps dropping the lowest candidates and distributing the vote according to each voter's next choice until some candidate has a majority.

This system is already in use by all of Canada's political parties to choose their leaders, by some cities in the U.S., national elections in Australia, and more. To learn more go to:

<http://www.123toronto.ca/main.htm>

[Any similarity of the made-up dogcatcher election to the recent election for mayor of Toronto is probably not a coincidence.]