

## Abstract

Approval voting (AV) is a voting system in which voters can vote for, or approve of, as many candidates as they like in multicandidate elections. In 1987 and 1988, four scientific and engineering societies, collectively comprising several hundred thousand members, used AV for the first time. Since then, about half a dozen other societies have adopted AV. Usually its adoption was seriously debated, but other times pragmatic or political considerations proved decisive in its selection.

While AV has an ancient pedigree, its recent history is the focus of this paper. Ballot data from some of the societies that adopted AV are used to compare theoretical results with experience, including the nature of voting under AV and the kinds of candidates that are elected. Although the use of AV is generally considered to have been successful in the societies—living up to the rhetoric of its proponents—AV has been a controversial reform.

AV is not currently used in any public elections, despite efforts to institute it, so its success should be judged as mixed. The chief reason for its nonadoption in public elections, and by some societies, seems to be a lack of key “insider” support.

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