"Bipolar Voting" Not a New Idea

**Note: This letter was originally slated to appear in the September, 2001 issue of* PS: Political Science and Politics, *but due to editorial mishap the publication was delayed. PS apologizes for the delay.*

Ferguson and Lowi (2001) propose "bipolar voting" as a solution to the electoral ills of the nation. But their idea of allowing voters to vote either for a candidate (+1 vote) or against a candidate (−1 vote) is not new; it was previously analyzed under the rubric of "negative voting" in Brams (1978) and Brams and Fishburn (1983).

In three-candidate races, negative voting is equivalent to approval voting:

- voting for a candidate is the same as approving of just one;
- voting against a candidate is the same as approving of the other two.

However, if there are four or more candidates, negative voting gives the voter less opportunity to express her preferences. For example, if she thinks that two candidates are acceptable and two are not, at best she can vote for one of the two acceptable candidates, or she can vote against one of the two unacceptable candidates. Under approval voting, by contrast, this voter can express herself "perfectly" by approving of the two acceptable candidates. Thus, approval voting is more flexible than negative voting for expressing preferences.

"Disapproval voting" would allow the voter in the aforementioned example to vote against the two unacceptable candidates. While approving of one set of candidates is logically equivalent to disapproving of the complementary set, psychologically it is probably a different experience. I favor approval voting, because I believe the negativity of present-day campaigns should not be reinforced by a balloting method that asks voters to vote against candidates.

Steven J. Brams
New York University

References

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Ferguson, Daniel, and Theodore Lowi. 2001. "Reforming American Electoral Politics: Let's Take 'No' for an Answer." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 34, 2 (June): 277–280.

Retirees as Active Participants

As a recent retiree (at least in the official sense), it occurs to me that APSA might do a better job of both benefitting from the valuable experience of those no longer full-time teaching, and meeting their/our needs at this stage in our careers. We can provide a sense of historical memory, keep an eye on our origins and the evolution of our discipline, especially if provision is made to keep us active and involved rather than edged out of the mainstream. Thus, let me propose creation of a committee whose mission it is to do these things.

J. David Singer
University of Michigan

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