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# STAR Voting Helps Create Smooth Party Elections

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On Sunday, the CD3 Committee hosted a meeting to elect new delegates and alternatives to the DPO Standing Committees. The committee used [STAR Voting](#) to run the election, and the voting system worked well to smoothly and quickly elect a group of candidates supported by the majority of all voters. Two months earlier, in January, the Multnomah County Democrats used STAR Voting to elect officers, as well as SCC Delegates and Alternates. That meeting had numerous interruptions and got sidetracked into long discussions, but aside from a wrong link being sent out at one point, the actual voting process (the act of voting and tabulating results) went smoothly and quickly. Indeed, had we been using the former system, the meeting could have taken even longer!

While most people felt comfortable using the STAR ballot and voting required minimal instructions, it is worth noting that giving proper instructions for any new voting system is important. In both sets of elections, candidates from traditionally underrepresented communities did well. From a field of over 100 candidates in the January Organizing Meeting, 20 candidates who were people of color or from other marginalized communities beat the other 80% of candidates to win 25 of 39 delegate positions (64% of the seats.), showing that STAR did not disadvantage minority candidates in that race. Similarly, at the CD3 Committee Meeting, while representing less than half the overall candidates, candidates from traditionally marginalized communities won 60% of the delegate and alternate positions.

For those who have questions about STAR Voting at the 2021 Reorg, we've gathered some Q&A from experts who watched the elections.

## Some Questions & Answers about the 2021 MultDems Reorg

**Q: The last election for MultDems used a different voting method. What was the new system?**

A: In September of 2019 Multnomah County Democrats voted by a supermajority to adopt STAR Voting for all internal elections with three or more candidates. Officers are now elected using single-winner STAR Voting, and for multi-winner races such as for State Central Committee and congressional district delegates Bloc STAR is used.

The new system was first used in a Party Reorganization (regular election for party offices) on January 23rd, 2021.

# How does STAR Voting work?

**STAR VOTING**  
SCORE - THEN - AUTOMATIC - RUNOFF

Score candidates from 0 - 5 stars.  
Those you leave blank receive a zero. If you don't have a preference you can give candidates the same score.

Candidates:	Worst					Best
	0	1	2	3	4	
Abby	0	1	2	3	4	5
Ben	0	1	2	3	4	5
Carmen	0	1	2	3	4	5
DeAndre	0	1	2	3	4	5
Eric	0	1	2	3	4	5

The two highest scoring candidates are finalists.  
The finalist preferred by the majority wins.

**Scoring**

The two highest scoring candidates are finalists.

Candidates:	Totals:
Carmen	624,057
Ben	509,742
DeAndre	387,143
Abby	37,708
Eric	2,789

Carmen and Ben advance to the Automatic Runoff.

**Runoff**

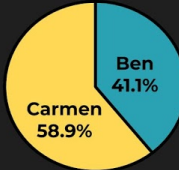
Your vote goes to the finalist you prefer.

Candidates:	Worst					Best
	0	1	2	3	4	
Abby	0	1	2	3	4	5
Ben	0	1	2	3	4	5
Carmen	0	1	2	3	4	5
DeAndre	0	1	2	3	4	5
Eric	0	1	2	3	4	5

This vote goes to Carmen because she was scored higher than Ben.

**Results**

The finalist preferred by the majority wins!



**Carmen**  
58.9%

**Ben**  
41.1%

For multi-winner elections this process continues until all seats have been filled.

**Whether or not your favorite can win, your vote goes to the finalist you preferred!**

**Q: Is there a voter guide for how to vote in the new system?**

A: Yes. This link to the guide on how to vote with STAR Voting from the Equal Vote Coalition can be found [here](#), in both [English](#) and [Spanish](#). These resources are available in additional languages on request by emailing [elections@equal.vote](mailto:elections@equal.vote)

**Q: Results were gender balanced. What does that mean and how does it work?**

A: All multi-winner elections for Multnomah County Democrats are gender balanced, with neither male or female identifying candidates able to win more than 1/2 + 1 of the seats for each delegation. All candidates are listed on the same ballot, and non-binary candidates are able to win a seat anytime they have the most support, regardless of gender.

Gender balancing is an additional step that's performed after the STAR Voting election is tallied. The election is tallied according to STAR Voting, and a candidate ranking is generated, showing who came in 1st place, 2nd place etc. Gender balanced winners are then selected by going down this list alternating between male and female candidates and electing non-binary candidates any time they are at the top of the list.

**Q: Why did the meeting take so long?**

A: This was the first electronic Reorg meeting hosted by the Multnomah County Democrats, which is the largest county party in the state. The meeting was 100% staffed by volunteers, and included over 320 participants. There were some significant technological hurdles with credentialing, volunteer coordination, and tech support for participants, as well as the logistics of emailing multiple resources to so many people, both before and during the meeting.

Party bylaws are clear that participants should not be automatically muted, but with so many people on the call, waiting to be called on was challenging in some cases, due to the volume of participants.

A few issues came up with technology and a few mistakes were made, including a mix up with the sample ballot and real ballot links, and incorrect voting links were distributed a couple of times. Correcting the mistake ended up requiring the body to debate and then approve proposed solutions and extended timelines.

Mistakes happen and democracy can be messy, but the meeting length didn't have anything to do with STAR Voting. Results were available following voting within the expected time frame.

**Q: What takeaways were there from the Bloc STAR election outcomes?**

A: In the MultCo election, diversity won big and polarizing candidates from both factions appear to have done worse than in the past, though that is an inherently subjective determination. [Here are the diversity results](#). "From a field of 100+ candidates, 20 diverse candidates (all but two,) won 25 of 39 delegate positions (64%.)"

**Q: Slates encouraged voters to give their candidates 5 stars. Did that give them an advantage?**

A: The old system, Bloc Plurality is notorious for being SUPER gameable. Factions who all voted as a block for a slate, and voted for exactly the number of candidates as the seats available, got a huge advantage in the old system. That's why slates have historically been such a big deal. Individuals who didn't vote with the block were at a huge disadvantage with the old system.

Bloc STAR mitigates those issues, making slates less powerful, and making it less important to vote for the exact number of candidates running. Of course getting good endorsement will always be helpful, and of course voters will ideally score at least as many candidates as there are seats, but if there are 10 seats you do not need to give 5 stars to all 10 candidates, unless there are 10 you truly love. You should show your honest preference order.

**Q: Is Bloc STAR vulnerable to strategic voting?**

A: With any new system people experiment with how to game it. With Bloc STAR the key to good strategy is the same as in single-winner. Give your favorites 5, your worst candidates 0, and show your preference order and level of support for the rest. In short, honesty is the best policy.

Even if voters are strategic in Bloc STAR the results will be much more representative, and those who vote strategically will have less of an edge. No voting method can eliminate all possibilities for strategic voting, but in STAR Voting strategic voting is not incentivized or effective.

Attempting strategic voting in STAR can backfire, and most voters will get the best results if they are honest. For example, a voter who only loves 9 candidates but who strategically decides to give 5 stars to 21 candidates because there are 21 winners for SCC is giving up their power to have a say in which of those 21 will win, or in what order. If you honestly just want any of the 21 to win that is an honest

good vote. If you want your favorites to win the top spots then you should only give top scores to your favorites. A good vote in this situation would be to give a top score to your 9 favorites, and then give other candidates you hope will win 4 stars, or the number of stars you think they deserve showing your honest preference order.

**Q: Do people who give less high scores have less power?**

A: No. Your scores will help your favorites pull ahead of the rest. If you have lots of favorites give lots of high scores, if you only have one favorite then only give your top score to them. It's up to you to decide what your honest vote looks like. Showing your preference order and level of support for the candidates helps ensure that your scores help the best candidates advance to the runoff and hopefully win each seat.

A key point here is that in the runoff, each ballot is one vote. Whether voters give lots of 5s or just a few your final vote will go to the finalist you prefer. The runoff is binary, and it actually will correct for any strategic voting or distortion from normal variations in voting behavior, to the extent possible.

**Q: Do we propose voting like this, with multi-winner Bloc STAR and lots of winners, for governmental elections?**

A: No. The SCC elected 21 delegates off one ballot. That's not a situation we ever see in Oregon governmental elections. Having this many winners in a single governmental election would compromise geographic representation, so it's not recommended.

Multi-winner bloc voting may be a good option for a few limited situations where a small multi-member district makes sense, but in general At-Large elections are not recommended for a number of reasons that are beyond the scope of this FAQ.

This system makes good sense for delegate elections and is a big step up from what we had before. In the future Proportional representation could be another good option worth considering.

**Q: Would Bloc STAR be good for a primary?**

A: Yes. Bloc STAR would be the best choice for a top 5 primary as it would eliminate vote splitting and accurately advance the top 5 most viable candidates.

With STAR voting primaries could be eliminated entirely, or they could advance the top 10 or top 5. We like 5 when a primary is needed, but in most cases it's better to just skip the primary, which is more inclusive, cheapest, and has real advantages for reducing the influence of money in politics.

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