Majority Judgment Voting

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How some voters are deprived of their right to choose

Neither simple plurality (first past the post) voting in one or more rounds nor preferential voting expresses the will of a large part of the electorate in our democracies. People see their vote as wasted when they have to choose a winner and "need" to vote strategically. In addition, those voting systems are easily manipulated since they allow a party to win a close election by moving a small number of votes.

Kenneth Arrow's Impossibility Theorem demonstrates how the expression of the will of voters is poorly represented in current voting systems. The theorem postulates that, to be ideal, a voting system must:
- always identify a winner (Condorcet's Paradox);
- prevent the addition or removal of a minor candidate from influencing the
     final result;
- ensure that all votes are treated equally.

When the criteria of the theorem are considered, it can be seen that, currently, the will of the people is not fully reflected in the results in our democracies. Canada's election history alone provides a large number of results that do not reflect the voters' choice and the expression of their will.

After using an outmoded system for 150 years, we have the means to place Canada in the forefront of innovation in terms of expressing the will of the people.

A response to Arrow's theorem

Majority Judgment Voting was developed by French researchers Michel Balinski, Directeur de Recherche de classe exceptionnelle, C.N.R.S., École Polytechnique, Paris, and Rida Laraki, Professeur, Département d'Économie, École Polytechnique. This voting system seems to respond to Arrow's theorem much more satisfactorily:
- it identifies a much more representative winner;
- it is immune to distortions caused by the presence of minor candidates;
- every voter's choice is considered in the final result.

Voters express a judgment about all candidates using the following grades:
- excellent
- very good
- good
- satisfactory
- acceptable
- poor
- reject

This system allows each voter to play an active role in choosing a candidate by ensuring that each vote counts. Candidates too are assured of being fairly assessed by all voters.

An experiment with Majority Judgment Voting in the presidential elections in France

The recent results of the presidential elections in France clearly indicate the anomalies that arise from the use of the simple plurality system.

In 2002, the results in the first round of voting allowed Jean-Marie Le Pen to move through to the second round by edging out Lionel Jospin, who finished third and was eliminated. (There were 16 candidates in the first round.)
- Jacques Chirac   19.9%
- Jean-Marie Le Pen   16.9%
- Lionel Jospin   16.2%

In the second round, Chirac trounced Le Pen:
- Jacques Chirac   82.2%
- Jean-Marie Le Pen   17.7%

In 2007, voters were asked to voluntarily take part in an experiment with Majority Judgment Voting as they left three polling stations in Orsay, a suburb of Paris. At that time, the presidential elections had 12 candidates.

Voting results and rankings for 5 candidates:

	Orsay	Ranking	France as a whole	Ranking
Ségoline Royal	29.9%	1	25.9%	2
Nicolas Sarkozy	29.0%	2	31.2%	1
François Bayrou	25.5%	3	18.6%	3
Jean-Marie Le Pen	5.9%	4	10.4%	4
Dominique Voynet	1.7%	7	1.6%	8

As they left the polling stations, voters were invited to use Majority Judgment Voting. Of the 2,360 voters, 1,752 (74%) took part in the experiment.

	Greater than MG	Median Grade (MG)	Less than MG	Ranking
François Bayrou	44.3%	Good +	30.6%	1
Ségoline Royal	39.4%	Good -	41.5%	2
Nicolas Sarkozy	38.9%	Good -	46.9%	3
Dominique Voynet	29.8%	Acceptable -	46.6%	4
Jean-Marie Le Pen	25.7%	Reject	0.0%	12

In 2012, an OpinionWay poll commissioned by Terra Nova allowed a representative sample of voters to try the majority judgment system. At that time, the presidential election had 10 candidates.

This is the result for 5 candidates:

	France as a whole	Ranking
François Hollande	28.6%	1
Nicolas Sarkozy	27.3%	2
Marine Le Pen	17.9%	3
Jean-Luc Mélanchon	11.0%	4
François Bayrou	9.1%	5

And this is the result of the survey (sample 993):

	Greater than MG	Median Grade (MG)	Less than MG	Ranking
François Hollande	44.0%	Good +	43.3%	1
François Bayrou	34.1%	Good -	40.7%	2
Nicolas Sarkozy	49.2%	Acceptable +	39.6%	3
Jean-Luc Mélanchon	42.5%	Acceptable +	40.4%	4
Marine Le Pen	46.1%	Poor -	47.6%	8

Conclusion

Majority Judgment Voting recommends itself as more inclusive and more objective than simple plurality or preferential systems. It invites voters to express their opinions on each of the candidates on the ballot. As a result, the system exposes all candidates to the clear expression of popular opinion towards them.

The dividing line that the median grade represents shelters the system from attempts at manipulation by one camp or another, since that operation would need an inordinate number of votes to be transferred to have any success. In addition, the likelihood of ties is considerably reduced compared to other voting systems.

It seems clear to me that this voting will have a real effect on electoral habits and voter behaviour. We can also look forward to renewed popular participation in the electoral process and a higher rate of voter satisfaction.

Brief Bibliography

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