Trinity Forum Concept – Rank Choice Voting

Summary: Rank Choice voting is where voters are asked to identify their 2nd and 3rd preferences in addition to their first choice in an election. In this system, if no candidate in the clear majority winner, the candidate with the least number of votes is removed from the race and their votes are distributed to the voter’s second choices. This process repeats until a candidate has a clear majority. Some argue this is a fair way to run elections and results more often in candidates representing the aggregate will of the people. Others express skepticism that such a system can be gamed by political consultants to result in wins for candidates who would otherwise be unlikely to win in a traditional election. To explore the Rank Choice approach, Trinity will conduct some test elections with students during forum.

**The Setup:** At the beginning of Forum, students are informed that they will be having an election to choose one representative student who will then grant a House Point bonus to one of Trinty’s four houses. There are four candidates, each from one of the houses. These candidates will have been chosen by Chris and Jon in advance of the forum (strategy for choices and whether they know in advance TBD).

**Round 1: Traditional Election**

Students use an app to vote for one of the four candidates.

Sample Ballot:

PLACE AN X NEXT TO THE CANDIDATE YOU WISH TO VOTE FOR

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Fred F (Baxter) |
|  | Wilma F (Craig) |
|  | Barney R (Maclennan) |
|  | Betty R (Urquhart) |

A screen shows the live election results. A grid on the screen should show the breakout of how each house voted:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***House*** | ***Votes for Baxter*** | ***Votes for Craig*** | ***Votes for Maclennan*** | ***Votes for Urquhart*** |
| Baxter | 54 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Craig | 0 | 55 | 0 | 0 |
| Maclennan | 1 | 0 | 53 | 2 |
| Urquhart | 0 | 1 | 0 | 54 |
| **Total** | 55 | 56 | 53 | 57 |

It is highly probable that the election will be nearly evenly split between the four candidates since students will assume the winning candidate will give their own house the House point bonus.

**Discussion 1:**

* Identify the top vote getter
* Ask if students object to this winner (yes they will, since ¾ of them will be disappointed
* Ask what would make it fairer
  + Expected solution: A candidate must win the majority of the vote to win.
  + Expected observation: A majority is unlikely.
* Proposal: Rank-choice voting
  + Each person will vote for their first, second, third choice.
  + The winner will have the option to allocate up to 25% of the house bonus to one other house.

**Round 2: Baseline Ranked Choice Election**

Sample Ballot:

PLACE A 1 NEXT TO YOUR FIRST CHOICE. PLACE A 2 NEXT TO YOUR SECOND CHOICE AND A 3 NEXT TO YOUR THIRD CHOICE (OPTIONAL)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Fred F (Baxter) |
|  | Wilma F (Craig) |
|  | Barney R (Maclennan) |
|  | Betty R (Urquhart) |

A screen shows the live election results showing only 1st choices:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***House*** | ***Votes for Baxter*** | ***Votes for Craig*** | ***Votes for Maclennan*** | ***Votes for Urquhart*** |
| Baxter | 54 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Craig | 0 | 55 | 0 | 0 |
| Maclennan | 1 | 0 | 53 | 2 |
| Urquhart | 0 | 1 | 0 | 54 |
| **Total** | 55 | 56 | 53 | 57 |

Chris observes that no single candidate has a majority of votes, and that Maclennan has the fewest votes, so they have been eliminated and their votes will be redistributed. The screen is updated:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***House*** | ***Votes for Baxter*** | ***Votes for Craig*** | ***Votes for Maclennan*** | ***Votes for Urquhart*** |
| Baxter | 54 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Craig | 0 | 55 | 0 | 0 |
| Maclennan | 24 | 13 | 0 | 19 |
| Urquhart | 0 | 1 | 0 | 54 |
| **Total** | 78 | 69 | 0 | 74 |

Chris Observes that there is still not a majority winner, but Craig has the fewest votes so Craig is eliminated. Craig’s votes will be redistributed, and the 13 Maclennan votes for Craig will be redistributed to their 2nd choice. The screen is updated:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***House*** | ***Votes for Baxter*** | ***Votes for Craig*** | ***Votes for Maclennan*** | ***Votes for Urquhart*** |
| Baxter | 54 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Craig | 20 | 0 | 0 | 35 |
| Maclennan | 27 | 0 | 0 | 29 |
| Urquhart | 0 | 0 | 0 | 55 |
| **Total** | 101 | 69 | 0 | 120 |

Now there is a clear winner (Urquhart). The winning candidate is asked how he will divide the points (if at all).

Student discuss whether this was “fairer”. Feedback on how it can be improved more.

**Round 3:**

A third round is announced and Students are informed that there will be another election with a second House Point Bonus awarded. This round will be run with the same rules as round 2, except the candidates will be given the chance to make a 30 second pitch to voters as to why they should be elected. They are given a few minutes to consult with their friends on strategy before their pitches. In an optimal scenario, some candidates will take the high road and argue for their character while other candidates will flat out promise other houses that they will be rewarded for how they vote for their second choice.

The voting process and reveal should go the same as round 2. With discussion afterwords.

*Possible Twist:* The thesis that rank choice voting can be “gamed” could be tested by a 5th player (not an official candidate, but one who has freedom to circulate between the houses) coordinates a strategy to try to get the house with the least number of students to win. I’m unclear how to implement this approach or if its even necessary.