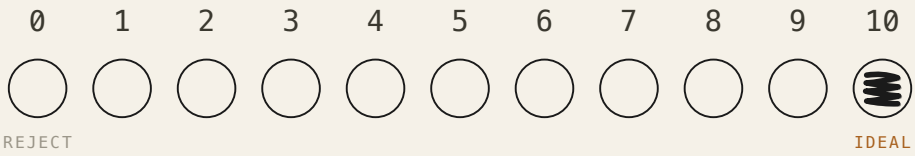
RATE EVERY CANDIDATE · ELECT THE BEST

SCORE THE VOTE



How One Change to the Ballot Fixes Everything That's Broken

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SCORETHEVOTE.COM

Chapter 1

Introduction: We Can Fix This

You walk into a booth. You pick one name. You leave.

That's it. That's the entire conversation American democracy is willing to have with you. The most consequential act of citizenship — the one people marched and bled and died for — reduced to a single question: *which one?* Not how much. Not what you'd accept. Not whom you fear. Just: which one.

Now think about everything you carried into that booth. You didn't show up with one opinion; you showed up with a dozen. A candidate you actually believed in. Another you could live with. A third you'd swallow hard and vote for if that's what it took to keep the worst one out. Months of headlines and arguments and kitchen-table math, weighed into a real judgment about who should lead this country — and the ballot had room for almost none of it. Pick one. Say nothing about the rest. Leave.

Something is wrong with how we pick our leaders. The voting booth is where it starts.

It isn't only an Election Day feeling. It's every week in between: another subpar politician you never wanted advocating positions that don't seem to align with the interests of America and all Americans, another visit to the voting booth where your strongest motive is voting against a candidate, not for one. You can feel all of that without

being able to name what's causing it. Nobody ever handed you a diagnosis, let alone a cure. That powerlessness isn't a personal failing. It was built for you, by the people it protects.

That feeling isn't cynicism, and it isn't your imagination. It's the rational response to three failures stacked one on top of another.

A **failure of leadership** — politicians who govern for the next primary instead of the next generation, who treat compromise as betrayal and the center as a place to be ambushed from both sides.

A **failure of party** — two machines that stopped trying to earn your vote a long time ago and learned to settle for frightening you away from the other side.

And underneath both, a **failure of execution** — a democracy that asks for your voice and then hands you an instrument too crude to carry it. One mark for one name. No way to say who you support completely (a 10), who you support only partway (a 6), or who you're terrified of (a 0). Your entire political conscience, flattened into a single oval.

Here's what that single mark really does: it concentrates power into exactly two parties — and hands them a monopoly they abuse as a matter of routine. Plurality voting doesn't tolerate the two-party system so much as manufacture it. Every third choice becomes a spoiler, every independent a "wasted vote," until a whole country's worth of opinion collapses into two big tents.

And the people running those tents don't answer to the country. They answer to whoever turns out for their primary — the most activist, most extreme slice of each party — and to the donors who bankroll them. For everyone else, the door is bolted from the inside. A new

party can't break in. An independent can't survive the spoiler math. The advantage is structural, permanent, and entirely undeserved.

Notice that nothing in that diagnosis names a party. This isn't a red book or a blue book. Whichever side of the aisle you call home — or if you walked away from both years ago — the machinery works against you the same way. Fixing it isn't a left cause or a right cause. It's maintenance.

We were promised self-government. What we got is the lesser of two evils, rebranded every four years as a moral emergency.

We deserve better than that — and not better personalities drawn from the same broken pipeline. Better **rules**. A ballot that rewards a candidate for representing all of us instead of inflaming just enough of us.

So here is the central conviction of this book: America is not short on leaders. It's full of people who would govern honestly and represent all of us — people you'd be proud to vote for — and the ballot keeps them off the field before the race even starts. They don't run, because under plurality voting a good candidate is just a spoiler.

Change the ballot, and you don't have to go looking for better leaders. You simply unlock the door and let the ones we already have walk through it.

Stated plainly, before a single chart or citation: **one change to how we vote — just one — would fundamentally change who wins.** It would give us leaders who answer to the people, not to their party and not to themselves. That isn't a slogan or a wish. It's a mechanism — and by the end of this book you'll understand exactly how it works, and why the math, the evidence, and the real-world results all point the same way.

Because the rot isn't only in the people we elect. It's in the math we use to elect them.

Democracy has a math problem — and you've already seen it. It's the booth. It's the single mark asked to stand in for your entire political worldview: every priority, every compromise, every nuance. One mark can't carry all that. It never could.

The reform movement knows this. Ranked choice voting has grabbed headlines. STAR voting has its evangelists. But there's a simpler, more powerful solution hiding in plain sight — one backed by decades of social choice theory, computer simulations, and real-world use.

It's called score voting, and the whole idea fits on an index card: **give every candidate a score from 0 to 10. Highest total wins.**

That's the entire system. No ranking, no rounds, no eliminations, no fine print. For the first time, the ballot can hold what you actually think — full support, partial support, flat rejection — about every name on it, all at once. Giving a 10 to the candidate you love takes nothing away from the one you could live with. The spoiler problem doesn't get patched; it stops existing.

And it's the best way to fix American elections.

This book makes that case. Not by dismissing other reforms — RCV and STAR are allies in the fight against plurality voting, and we'll give them their due. But when you compare the systems head-to-head on the metrics that actually matter — voter satisfaction, resistance to strategy, simplicity, and mathematical optimality — score voting wins. Consistently.

But this isn't just a book of arguments. It's a toolkit.

By the time you're done, you'll have the talking points to explain score voting to anyone — your skeptical uncle at Thanksgiving, your coworker who thinks voting reform sounds complicated, your friend who's given up on politics entirely. Clear, concise, impossible to dismiss.

You'll also have a path forward. If you finish this book and want to do more than nod along — if you want to actually be part of the movement — we'll show you exactly how. Where to plug in. What organizations are doing the work. How to bring score voting to your city, your county, your state.

And we'll get concrete. Not "raise awareness" platitudes — real actions. Draft ballot language. Volunteer pipelines. Donation targets. Conversations to start. Campaigns to join.

The shape of the book is simple: first the disease, then the cure, then the fight. This book doesn't end when you close it. It ends when your ballot changes.

Let's start with the disease.

Chapter 2

The Plurality Problem

> *Democracy is the worst form of government — except for all the others that have been tried.*
>
> — Winston Churchill, House of Commons, 1947

One Vote, Zero Nuance

Plurality voting — pick one, most votes wins — is the worst commonly used voting system in the world.

That sounds like hyperbole. It's closer to a measured fact. In the summer of 2010, the world's leading voting theorists — the people who spend their careers studying how election rules behave — gathered at a château in Normandy for a workshop on voting procedures. At the closing session they ran the obvious experiment: a vote, among the experts, to elect the best voting rule. Eighteen systems were on the ballot.

Plurality voting — the rule the United States uses for nearly every office from school board to president — received zero support. Not last place among eighteen. *Zero*. Given a free choice, not one of the people who understand election math best was willing to endorse the system the world's oldest democracy actually runs on.[1]

[1] Jean-François Laslier, "And the Loser Is… Plurality Voting," in *Electoral Systems: Paradoxes, Assumptions, and Procedures*, ed. Dan S. Felsen-



Figure 2.1: The experts' verdict. At a 2010 workshop in Normandy, the world's voting theorists elected the best of eighteen voting rules, by approval ballot. An evaluate-everybody ballot won. Plurality — the American default — received zero approvals.

Why such unanimous contempt? Look at the instrument.

thal and Moshé Machover (Berlin: Springer, 2012). The vote was held at the Voting Procedures workshop in Normandy, France, in July 2010. The experts voted by approval — and approval voting won.

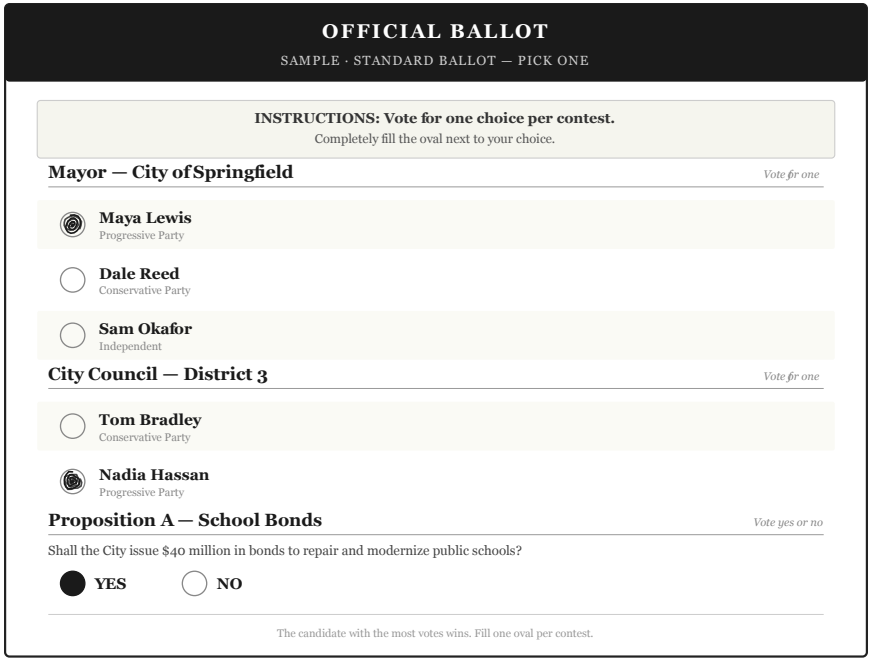


Figure 2.2: The ballot you mark today. Every contest — and the bond measure — asks the same blunt question: pick exactly one, fill the oval, done. That single mark is the whole of your voice. There's no way to say a second choice was nearly as good, or that you couldn't stand a third.

Count what that ballot lets you do. Five candidates in a race means there are exactly five legal messages you're allowed to send. Your actual opinion — the layered, weighted judgment you carried into the booth — is one of millions. Everything you think beyond "this one" gets thrown away at the curtain. The rest of this chapter is about what that thrown-away information costs.

The Spoiler Effect

Florida, November 2000. After thirty-six days of recounts and lawsuits, the certified margin between George W. Bush and Al Gore stood at 537 votes — out of nearly six million cast.[2] On that same ballot, Ralph Nader drew 97,488 votes: 181 times the margin of victory.

You don't need to believe that every Nader voter secretly preferred Gore. You need almost none of them to. If one Nader voter in 180 had marked Gore instead, the presidency changes hands — the other 99.4 percent could have stayed exactly where they were.

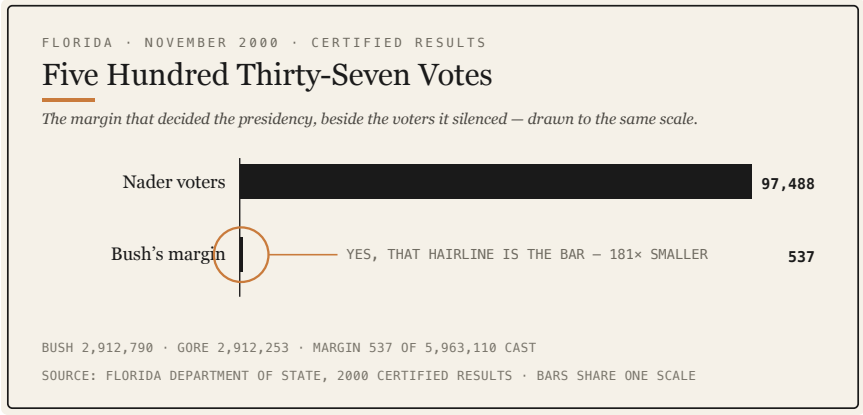


Figure 2.3: Drawn to the same scale: Ralph Nader's 97,488 Florida votes beside George W. Bush's certified 537-vote margin. The ballot gave those 97,488 voters no way to express a second preference — and the hairline decided the presidency.

Here's the part that matters: Nader didn't spoil that election because he was a bad candidate. He spoiled it because the system couldn't handle more than two options. Plurality offered his 97,488 voters

[2] Certified Florida results, 2000: Bush 2,912,790; Gore 2,912,253; Nader 97,488 — a margin of 537 votes out of 5,963,110.

no way to say “Nader first, but Gore over Bush” — so their full opinion was thrown away at the curtain, and the candidate most of them presumably wanted least moved into the White House.

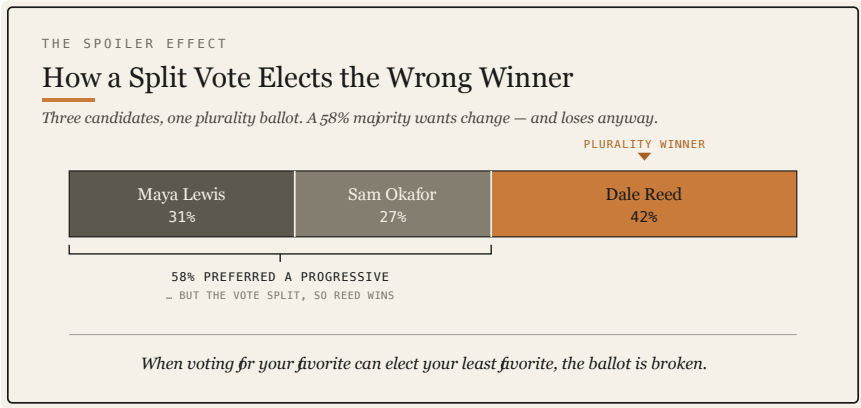


Figure 2.4: The spoiler effect in miniature. A 58% majority prefers a progressive, but their votes split between two similar candidates — so the candidate most voters ranked last wins with just 42%.

And if Florida feels like a partisan wound, rewind to 1912. Theodore Roosevelt, denied the Republican nomination, ran anyway — and he and William Howard Taft split the Republican electorate nearly down the middle. More than half the country voted for one of the two Republicans; Woodrow Wilson won the presidency with 42 percent.[3] The spoiler effect has no party. It punishes whichever side fields one candidate too many, and it has been doing so for over a century.

Any voting system where voting for your favorite can cause your least-favorite to win is fundamentally broken.

[3] 1912 popular vote: Wilson 41.8%, Roosevelt 27.4%, Taft 23.2%.

Duverger's Law

In 1951, the French political scientist Maurice Duverger wrote down what observers had suspected for a century: "the simple-majority single-ballot system favours the two-party system." Political science has so few reliable regularities that this one earned a name — Duverger's law — and the United States is its cleanest specimen.[4]

The law runs on two gears. The first is mechanical: in winner-take-all races, a party with 15 percent support everywhere wins exactly nothing anywhere. The second gear is you. Knowing all that, you won't waste your vote on a sure loser — so the sure loser loses even more surely. Donors run the same calculation months earlier; reporters, earlier still. Run that loop every two years for a few decades and a whole spectrum of political opinion grinds down to two survivors. (Strong regional parties can bend the law — Canada and Britain elect a few — but at the district level, the grind toward two holds nearly everywhere plurality is used.)

The two-party stranglehold on American politics isn't a cultural accident. It's a mathematical inevitability of the ballot design.

[4] Maurice Duverger, *Les Partis politiques* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1951). William H. Riker traces the rule's history — and its promotion to a "law" — in "The Two-Party System and Duverger's Law," *American Political Science Review* 76, no. 4 (1982).

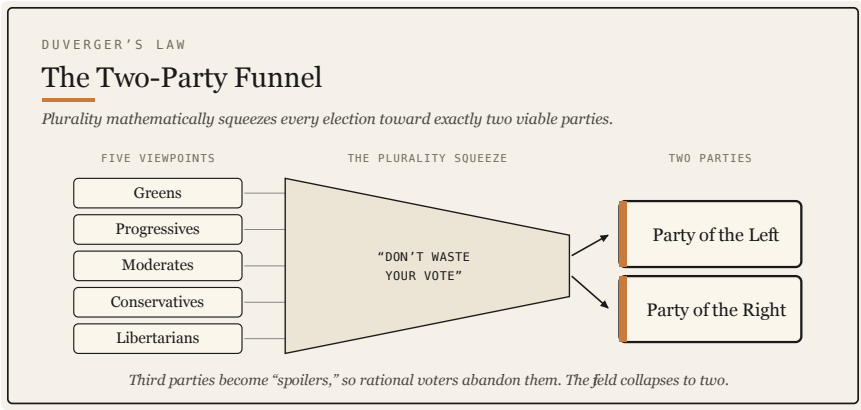


Figure 2.5: Why plurality produces two parties. When a third choice can only "spoil" the race, rational voters abandon it — and a spectrum of viewpoints collapses into two big-tent parties.

Strategic Voting Is the Norm

Ask Americans what they want, and they'll tell you. Gallup has tracked the question for two decades; in 2023 it recorded an all-time high — 63 percent of Americans said the two parties do such a poor job representing the country that a third major party is needed.[5]

Then watch what those same Americans do. In each of the last two presidential elections, every third-party and independent candidate combined drew about two votes in a hundred.

[5] Gallup, "Support for Third U.S. Political Party Up to 63%," October 2023. Demand remained at 58 percent in 2024 — a majority, as it has been for most of the past two decades.

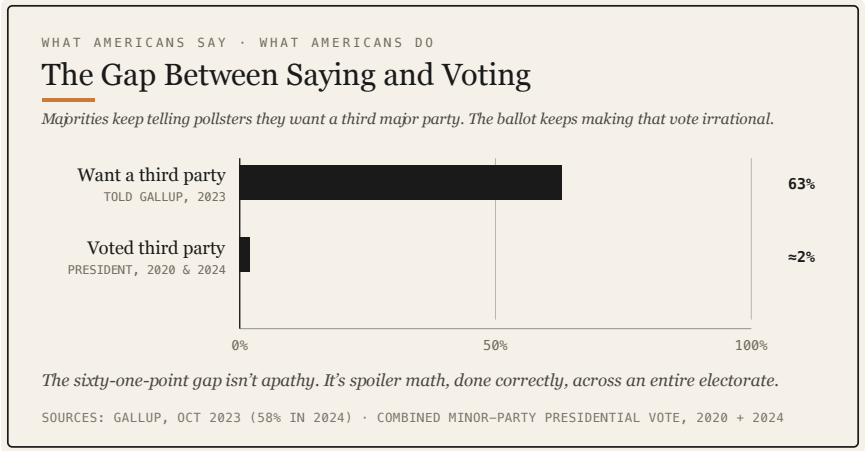


Figure 2.6: The gap between saying and voting. Sixty-three percent of Americans told Gallup a third major party is needed; about two percent voted for one. The sixty-one-point difference is spoiler math, not apathy.

Sixty-three percent want the option; two percent exercise it. That gap isn't hypocrisy, and it isn't apathy. It's arithmetic. Americans can do the spoiler math in their heads — Florida taught it to a generation — so they hold their noses and vote for whichever major-party candidate frightens them less.

The pollsters can even measure the nose-holding. In 2020, Pew Research asked Joe Biden's voters whether their ballot was mainly a vote *for* him or *against* his opponent: 63 percent said against.[6] Sit with that. The majority of the winning coalition in a presidential election wasn't expressing support for anyone. The most powerful office on Earth, filled by tens of millions of votes cast in *opposition*.

[6] Pew Research Center pre-election surveys: 63 percent of Biden supporters in 2020 described their choice as primarily a vote against Trump; in 2024, 51 percent of Kamala Harris's voters said the same.

Under plurality, voting against candidates is the norm, not the exception. "Don't waste your vote" isn't cynicism — it's rational behavior in a broken system. The solution isn't to shame voters for being strategic. It's to give them a system where honesty is the best strategy.

That system is eleven bubbles wide. Let's look at it.

KEEP READING.

That was chapters 1 and 2 of 19: the disease. Next comes the cure, then the fight. The full book is 88 pages, about an hour's read.

THE CURE

3 What Is Score Voting?
4 The Reform Landscape
5 Simplicity Wins
6 The Strategy Question
7 Voter Satisfaction Efficiency
8 Where Score Voting Works
9 RCV: Credit Where It's Due
10 STAR Voting: The Hybrid
11 The Math Chapter

THE FIGHT

12 Primaries and the Extremism Machine
13 The Media and Education Challenge
14 Money and Elections
15 Constitutional and Legal Questions
16 The Objections
17 Building the Movement
18 The Path to Fifty States
19 Your Move

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