

2009-2011 Communications Committee

National Association of Parliamentarians Lorenzo Cuesta, PRP May 4, 2011

Counting of the Ballots

This is a script to demonstrate to members what votes are taken into account in determining the number of votes cast for the purpose of computing the majority. The ballot counters under the chair of the elections committee are counting ballots. Debate requirements are relaxed. The script contains 7 speaking parts.

The camera must be ready to capture the next speaker. The participants should be seated in a classroom arrangement. The topic should be handled with casual seriousness. [Instructions in square brackets are not intended to be read aloud.]

This script seeks to illustrate

- 1. How to count illegal, unintelligible, and blank ballots;
- 2. How to define a majority; and
- 3. How to determine the number of votes cast for the purpose of computing the majority.

We join the monthly meeting of the San Diego Bird Watchers Society, during the 'Special Orders' section of their agenda.

The election for the office of Field Trip Coordinator has 2 candidate and several write-ins. The ballot counters are working behind closed doors. As allowed by Robert's Rules, the election is a Special Order.

Ch: Have all the ballots been stacked by candidates and reviewed by at least 2 different tellers each?

A: Yes. But, we also have a stack of problem ballots and do not know how to count them.

B: Those don't matter, because it is clear that Ann Avocet has won the election. She has the most votes.

Ch: Ms. B. Our bylaws state that a majority of the votes is required for a candidate to be elected. Having the most votes means the candidate has a plurality, but that may not be a majority of the votes.

C: What about the quorum? Shouldn't the winning candidate also have a number of votes equal to the quorum?

A quorum and a notice are necessary to make the election legal. Neither has anything to do with the number of votes required to be elected.



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D: I get it. Since we have 100 members, a candidate must receive a majority of 100, which is 51 votes, to be elected.

Ch: Actually, a candidate needs a majority of the votes cast, not a majority of the members in attendance or on our rolls.

E: We counted 79 votes cast. So a candidate must receive 40 votes to be elected, right?

Ch: That is almost right. First, we have to see those problem ballots. For each, problem we have to consult Robert's Rules to decide how we should count each problem ballot.

A: First group: We have 2 blank ballots. We have to award them to the candidate with the lowest number of votes, right?

Ch: Robert's Rules considers blank ballots as scraps of paper that we must not count in any way. So our number of votes cast is now 79 minus 2 = 77, agree?

B: Yes. But in a second group we have 4 other problem ballots for individuals who are either not members of our society or they are characters in that new animated film on angry birds.

Ch: These ballots are valid ballots from our members. But the members voted for illegal candidates. We must count these ballots. Our count is still 77 ballots cast.

C: In a third group, we have 2 more problem ballots. They are all write-ins and the handwriting is completely unintelligible.

Ch: These ballots are valid ballots from our members. But their votes are unintelligible. We must count these ballots. Our count is still 77 ballots cast.

Ch: Since there are no other problem ballots, let's fill in the Tellers' Report. Number of votes cast = 77 Number for election =

D: That's a majority of 77 which is 50% plus 1, right?Ch: Actually a majority is any number greater than half.In our case, any number greater than half of 77, is 38.5, or 39 whole votes.

Ch: If a majority were 50% plus 1, the math would give us a different number. 50% of 77 is 38.5, plus 1, equals 39.5. This means it would take 40 whole votes to be elected. A count of 39 and a count of 40 are almost the same, but this difference could be a problem during an election.



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E: So we do have a winner. Ann Avocet has the necessary 39 votes to be elected. But what if no one had received the necessary votes to be elected? Then what?

A: We drop the candidate with the lowest votes and run the election again, right? Ch: No, Robert's Rules never arbitrarily disqualifies a candidate from an election. We would run the election again without disqualifying anyone.

Ch: Let's finish filling in the Tellers' Report and have all of us sign it. It will be included in its entirety in the minutes. As the chair I will read the report to the chair. She will read it to the assembly and declare the elected candidate.

The tellers' report is as follows: Number of votes cast = 77 Number required for election = 39 Ava Avocet received 39 votes Betty Bittern received 27 votes Crystal Crane received 5 votes Illegal votes We had 4 votes for illegal candidates We had 2 unintelligible votes

Let us rise and report.