

Mechanics,
Opportunities
+ Perils

DEMOCRACY 2020

REED Alumni College



REED COLLEGE

DEMOCRACY AND HEURISTICS:
HOW RANKED CHOICE VOTING HELPS
MITIGATE COGNITIVE BIASES

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Target Question

How much would you contribute to save an endangered species?

How happy are you with your life these days?

How popular will the president be six months from now?

Heuristic Question

How much emotion do I feel when I think about dolphins?

What is my mood right now?

How popular is the president right now?

From Kahneman's (2011) *Thinking, Fast and Slow*



COGNITIVE BIASES AND HEURISTICS

- Confirmation Bias
- Availability Heuristic
- Anchoring-and-Adjustment
- Set Effects
- Status Quo Bias
- Negativity Bias
- Halo Effect
- Stereotypes and all the -isms



FPTP VOTING

“First-past-the-post”

- Vote for 1 person
- Plurality rather than majority
- May lead to run-offs
- Costly and leads to less representation

Vote for one option.

Joe Smith

John Citizen

Jane Doe

Fred Rubble

Mary Hill

HEURISTIC TYPES

Memory-based

- Availability Heuristic
- Narrative Bias

Affect-based

- Negativity Bias

Anchoring

- Overton Window
- Set Effects

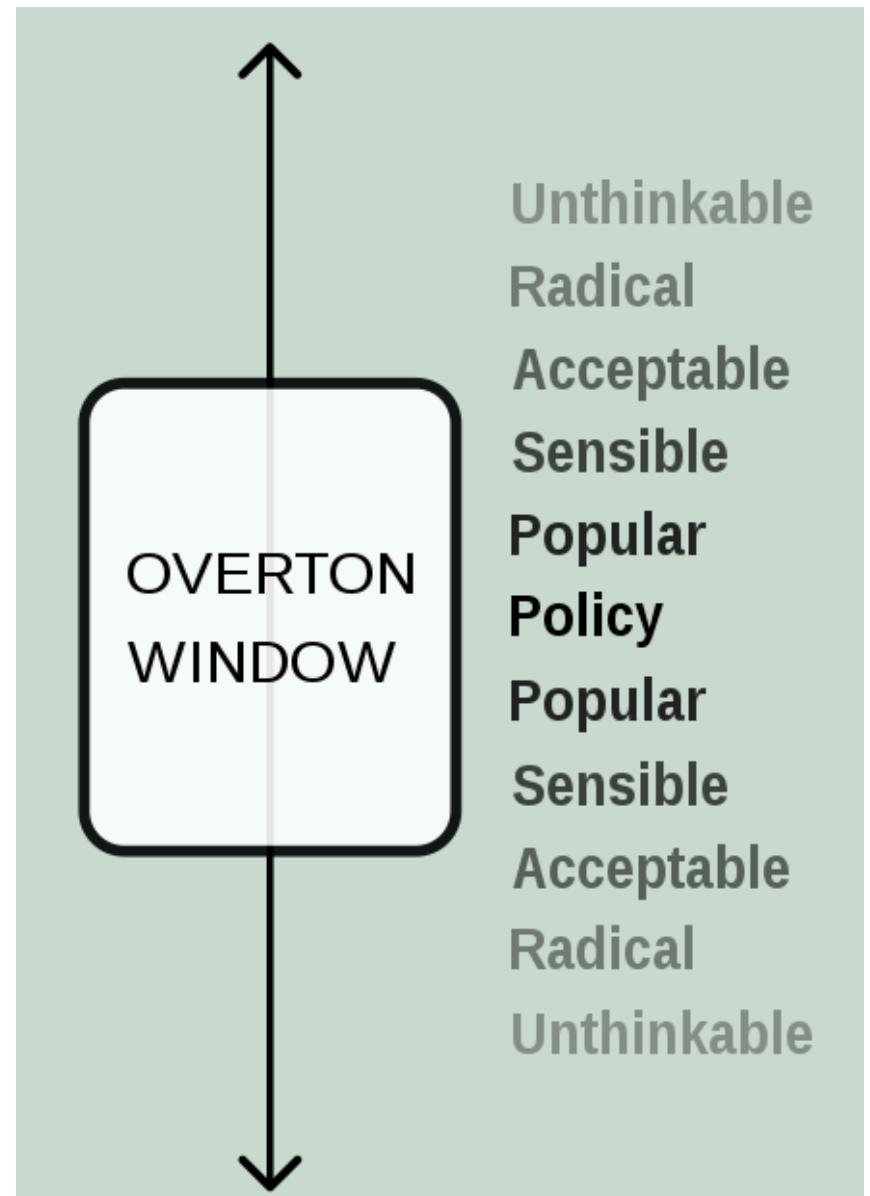


WINDOW OF DISCOURSE

How the Politically Unthinkable Can Become Mainstream



"Medicare for all" is one of several ideas that were once dismissed out of hand but are now being discussed in mainstream circles. Tom Brenner/The New York Times



SET EFFECTS

- Many moons ago *The Economist* had several subscription options:
 - 1-year **print only** subscription - \$59.99
 - 1-year **online** subscription - \$125.00
 - 1-year combined **print & online** subscription - \$125.00
- Which offer do you think was most popular?

SET EFFECTS

Print Only - \$59.99

16%

Print Only - \$59.99

68%

Online Only - \$125.00

0%

Print & Online - \$125.00

84%

Print & Online - \$125.00

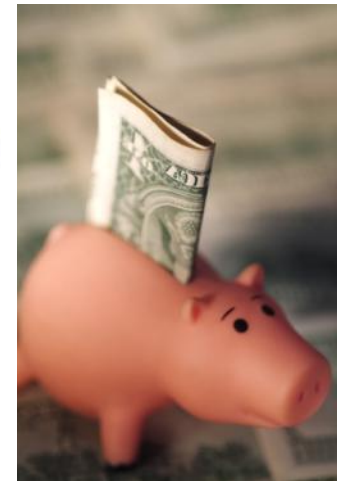
32%

SIMONSON & TVERSKY (1992)

First group could have either \$9 or a nice pen



Second group could have \$9, a nice pen, or an uglier pen



SIMONSON & TVERSKY (1992)

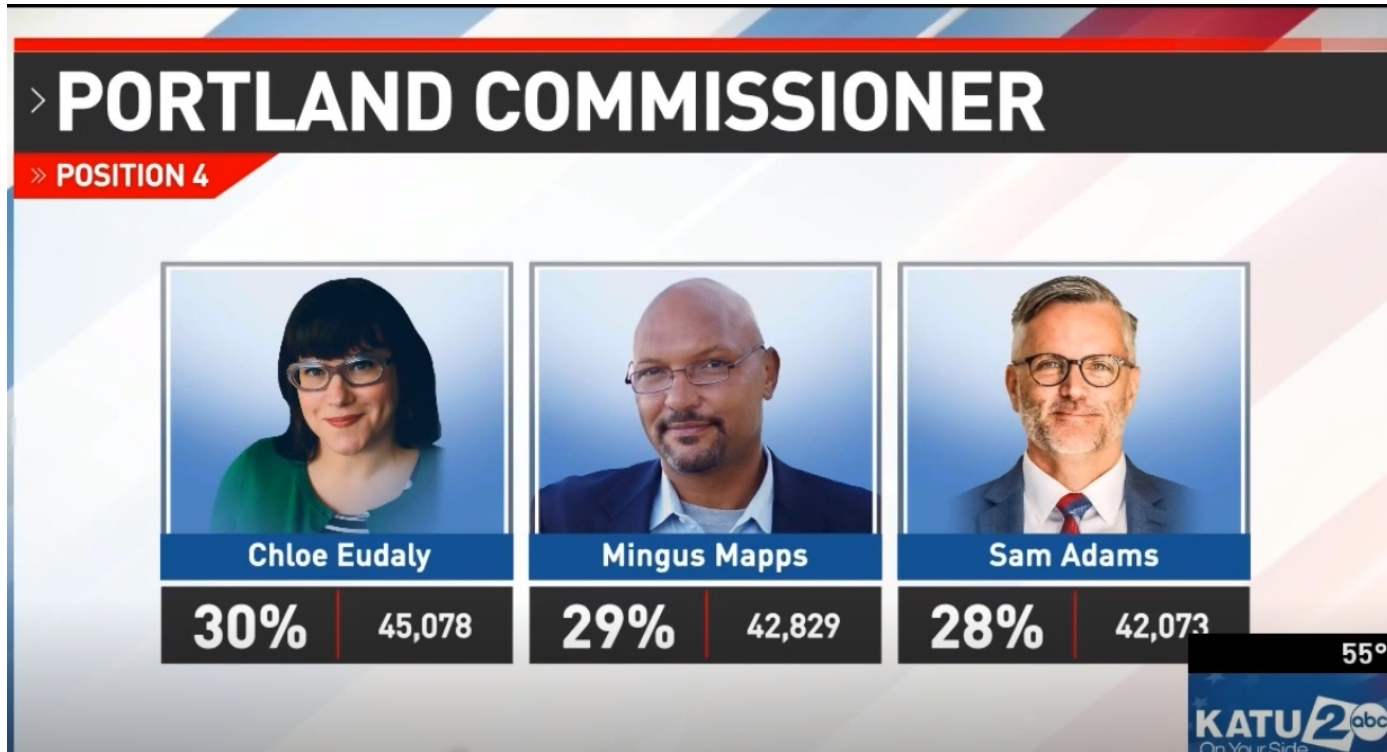


\$9
Nice pen
Ugly pen
N

| Group A | Group B |
|---------|---------|
| 64% | 52% |
| 36% | 46% |
| | 2% |
| 106 | 115 |



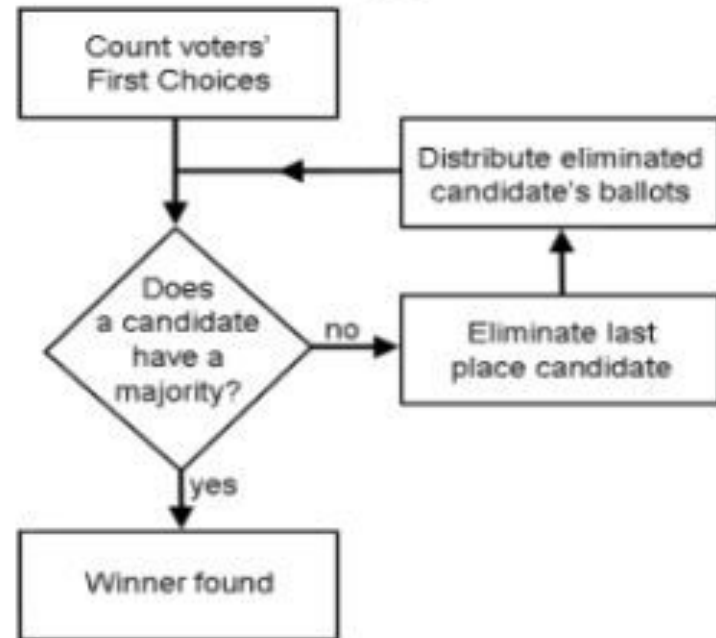
Game Theory or “Strategic Voting” in the “First-past-the-post” system



Primary results from Tuesday, May 19, 2020 showed a close race (KATU Graphic)

Ranked Choice/ Instant Runoff Voting:

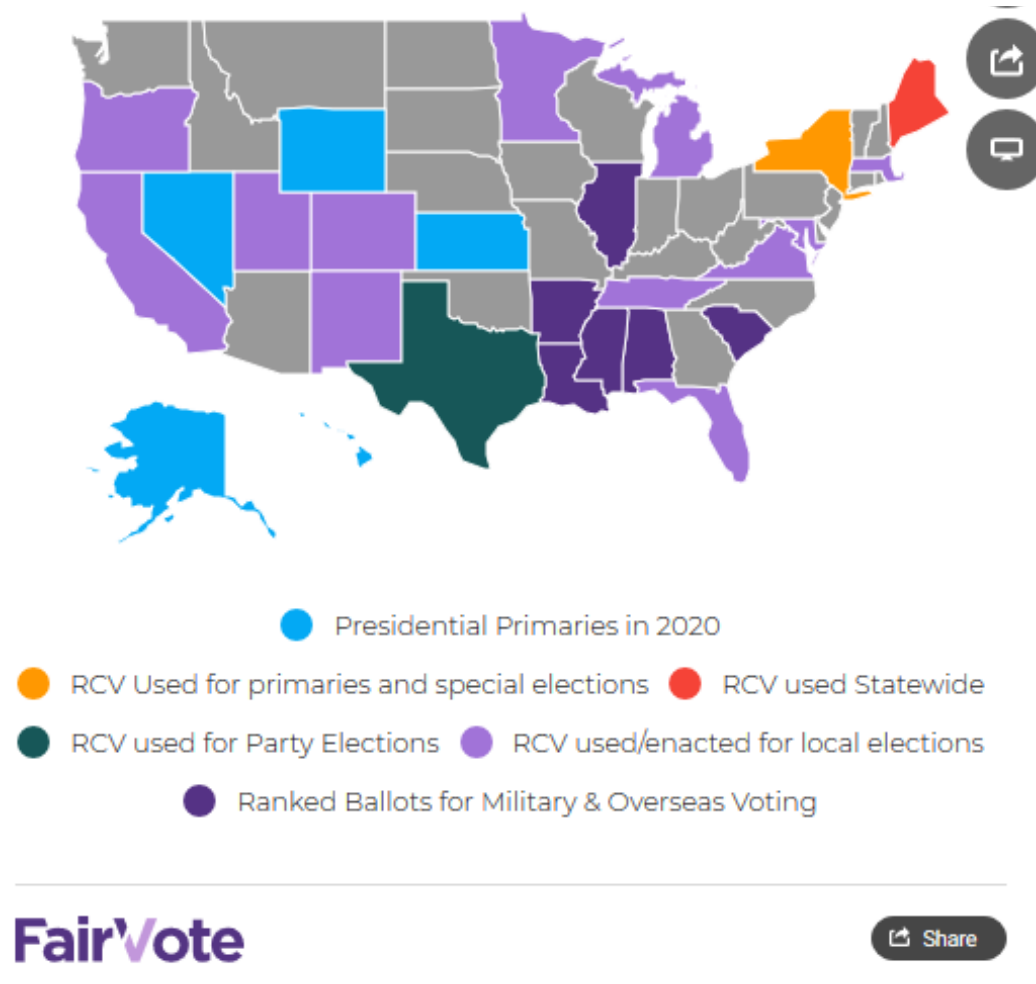
IRV counting flowchart



Infographic from democracychronicles.org



Only Maine implemented state-wide RCV



Ranked Choice Voting in the U.S. (FairVote graphic)



HEURISTIC TYPES

Memory-based


- Availability Heuristic
- Narrative Bias

Affect-based

- Negativity Bias

Anchoring

- Overton Window
- Set Effects

 **Your Ranked-Choice Ballot**

| Rank up to 4 candidates. Mark no more than 1 oval in each column. | First Choice | Second Choice | Third Choice | Fourth Choice |
|--|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Candidate A | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Candidate B | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Candidate C | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Candidate D | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> |

SUMMARY

- Humans have cognitive biases
- Present electoral systems take advantage of these biases
- Ranked Choice Voting may lessen the effects of these biases



THANK YOU!

- Calyx and Alumni Programs
- Michael Losi ('21)

