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## Utah lawmakers slam the brakes on a plan to expand alternative voting methods

A legislative committee narrowly rejected a plan to add approval voting to a pilot program for municipal elections.



(Rick Egan | The Salt Lake Tribune) A Utah legislative committee voted down a proposal to expand alternative voting methods available to cities under a pilot program.



election options available to cities under a pilot program begun in 2019.

Utah cities can, if they choose, use ranked choice voting for municipal elections.

[That's what 23 cities did this year](#) for nonpartisan municipal elections. A bill adding a new method, known as approval voting, was on the table Wednesday. Lawmakers narrowly rejected the proposal, which stunned groups backing the bill.

Ranked choice voting has voters rank candidates from first to last place. The first-place votes are counted and, if no one gets a majority, the last-place candidate is eliminated, and those votes are redistributed to the second choice. The counting continues until one candidate has a majority.

[Approval voting](#) is even simpler. Voters can vote for as many candidates as they want. Those votes are counted up, and the most votes win. St. Louis, Missouri, and Fargo, North Dakota [have both used approval voting in elections](#).

Lawmakers expressed confusion about the new method and whether it was even necessary.

“I don’t think it’s been tried enough throughout the country. I don’t think there are demands for it. No one even knows what it is, so there’s a lot more work that needs to be done in selling this as an option,” Rep. Cory Malloy, R-Lehi, said.

Nate Allen with [Utah Approves](#), the group pushing to add approval voting to the list of options, argued there was no harm in adding the method as an option since there was no requirement for cities to use it.



“We’re being asked to allow cities to have a choice as to whether or not they use approval voting. It costs us absolutely nothing to allow a city that wants to opt in to this method to do so.” Sen. Daniel Thatcher, R-West Valley City, said in support.


Josh Daniels, Utah County Clerk, says municipal elections are a great place to experiment with new voting methods, which is why the pilot program makes sense for cities that want to try something different.

“From a state perspective, oftentimes when they’re going to do something new with their process, they’ll do it during a municipal election year because the election process is a little smaller,” Daniels said.

Davis County Clerk Ricky Hatch predicted as many as 30 cities in Utah would jump at the chance to implement approval voting. As it stands, they will not get that chance. The committee narrowly voted against recommending the bill to the full Legislature during the 2022 session, which begins in January.

After the vote, Ammon Gruwell of Utah Approves was frustrated as he did not expect lawmakers to reject the bill.

“It was disappointing that they didn’t really have any valid arguments against approval voting, much less the idea that it should be an option for cities. This should be a local control issue,” Gruwell said.

He added Wednesday’s defeat is not the end of the road. They’re hoping to convince an individual legislator to sponsor a bill in the 2022 session to add approval voting t 

“Approval voting is not done here in Utah. There’s a lot of support that will grow as people start to understand it better,” Gruwell said.



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