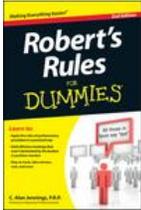


How to Determine Voting Results per Roberts Rules

# How to Determine Voting Results per Robert's Rules



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## [Robert's Rules For Dummies, 2nd Edition](#)

By [C. Alan Jennings, PRP, PRP](#)

Robert's Rules are designed to protect the minority against the "tyranny of the majority." According to the true definition and practice of democracy, *might* doesn't always make *right*. The primary democratic concept that everyone has an equal voice means that the minority, even a minority of one, has rights that must be respected.

Parliamentary law establishes two fundamental voting thresholds:

- **Majority vote:** Except when governed by a specific rule to the contrary, a *majority vote* is the fundamental requirement to pass a motion. A *majority*, simply stated, is *more than half*. And a majority vote refers to more than half of the votes actually cast, not to more than half of the votes that could be cast if everybody voted.

Unless a motion receives a majority vote, the motion is lost. If the vote is tied, it doesn't receive a majority vote, so it's lost.

- **Two-thirds vote:** As a means of balancing the rights of the entire group with the rights of individuals, some decisions require the affirmative consent of at least twice the number of members as are not in favor. This vote is called a *two-thirds vote* and refers to two-thirds of the votes cast.

According to Robert's Rules, a two-thirds vote is required:

- To suspend or change a rule already adopted
- To close or limit debate on a motion
- To prevent the consideration of a motion

- To close nominations or polls

## Crossing voting thresholds

Voting results can also be determined according to a number of different variations on the basic majority and two-thirds votes. These variations relate not only to the threshold numbers required, but also to the number of members to be counted in determining that threshold.

- **Majority (or two-thirds) of the members present and voting.** The *majority vote* and the *two-thirds vote*, if expressed without further qualification, are votes based on the total votes cast.
- **Majority (or two-thirds) of the members present.** Sometimes by design (and often by mistake), a voting threshold is stated as “a majority (or two-thirds) of the members present.” If a member is in the room and chooses not to vote, his neutrality has the effect of a negative vote because his presence is counted when determining the result.
- **Majority of the entire membership.** In some cases, permitting a question to be decided by a *majority of the entire membership* is just as protective of the rights of individuals as deciding that question by a *two-thirds vote*. Sometimes this threshold is used as an alternative to a two-thirds vote in matters for which no previous notice has been given.
- **Plurality.** A *plurality vote* is the most votes cast for any choice in a field of three or more. The candidate or option receiving the most votes in such a situation has a *plurality*. A plurality isn’t necessarily a majority; try to avoid it, because it can designate a winner that the majority of the members oppose.

According to Robert’s Rules, when a ballot has more than two choices, balloting must continue until one choice achieves a majority. If reballoting isn’t practical, such as when conducting a vote by mail, you really need to use some form of preferential voting. A plurality never elects unless your bylaws authorize it.

- **Cumulative voting.** Some types of organizations, especially ones prone to factionalism, want to ensure that minority factions can achieve at least minimal representation on boards and committees. This aim is accomplished through *cumulative voting*.

Using this approach, when several seats are to be filled, as on a board, each member may cast as many votes as there are seats to be filled; votes may be cast in any combination and for any number of candidates.

## Handling tie votes

Because a tie vote isn’t a majority, if your motion requires a majority vote, the motion is *lost* if it receives a tie vote. Therefore, a tie vote is as much of a decision as a majority vote in opposition.

If the vote is by ballot, the presiding officer votes with everybody else, and a tie vote is either a lost motion or a failed election. If you’re electing an officer, you must reballot until someone receives a majority.

However, if the vote is by voice, by rising, or by counted vote, the presiding officer properly casts a vote only after the results are known and if he wants his vote to affect the outcome. However, if he doesn't want to change the outcome, the presiding officer shouldn't vote at all; by reserving his vote, he preserves the appearance of impartiality while presiding.

## Challenging a vote

If you want to challenge a vote (not the same as challenging the action you voted on), you generally have to be fast. Any motion to challenge the conduct of the vote has to be initiated before any debate on business has started. Several options are available when the time is right.

- **Calling for a division of the assembly.** This is the ground-level challenge. You hear the ayes and the nays, and you don't think there was any way to discern the winner from your group's utterance. So you call for a division, which is the chairman's cue to conduct a rising vote (or a show of hands in a small group). You don't even need to get recognized.
- **Retaking the vote by another method.** Asking the chairman or the assembly to order a counted vote may produce a different result. The goal is to determine without doubt the will of the assembly. Timely action is required.
- **Recounting the vote.** The membership can order a recount as late as the next regular session of the assembly (as long as it hasn't been so long as to constitute a quarterly time interval).

### About the Book Author

**C. Alan Jennings** is a Professional Registered Parliamentarian (PRP) credentialed by the National Association of Parliamentarians. He is past president of the Louisiana Association of Parliamentarians, and is a member of the American Institute of Parliamentarians.

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