# Another Look at Council Elections in Boulder County

By Mark Parsons of the Voting Methods Team

The LWVBC Voting Methods Team has been exploring alternative, more expressive ways to present election results, especially for multi-winner elections. The three bar graphs below present the results of the Boulder and Lafayette City Council elections and the Longmont at-large council members election. We contrast the traditional reporting format in blue with a more illustrative format in red. The only difference is how the percentage is calculated. Instead of dividing a candidate's votes by the total number of votes, we divide by the total number of ballots cast (i.e., the number of people who voted). We believe this approach gives a better indication of the support from the electorate. In essence, presenting the percentage of ballots normalizes the results. One need not know how many people were running nor how many seats were being filled to understand whether or not winners have broad support.

Using this approach, we offer a few observations. First the number of candidates matters a lot. In Lafayette, with four winners from only five candidates, it is perhaps not surprising that all the winning candidates got more than half the voters to support them. In Longmont, with three times as many candidates as winners, the support is not as pronounced. A closer look at the Boulder results offers additional insights.

First off, the broad support (52.4%) for Mark Wallach is quite notable. In the last five Boulder City Council elections, only one other candidate has received 50% of voter support (Bob Yates with 50.1% in 2019). Perhaps this is reflective of the fact that Mark was the only incumbent running, but it also shows that individual candidates matter even in an election dominated by "slates". Candidates endorsed by the Coalition took three of the five seats and received more votes overall (see Table 1), but Mr. Wallach, a Forward Boulder candidate, was the strong overall winner. It is also noteworthy that all the female candidates won regardless of their slate.

*Table 1: Boulder City Council Votes by "Slate"*

| Slate | Total votes | % votes |
|---|---|---|
| Forward Boulder | 60,755 | 44.92% |
| Boulder Coalition | 62,165 | 45.96% |
| Neither | 12,337 | 9.12% |

That said, endorsements clearly do make a difference. All the slate candidates did relatively well. All but one received at least 40% of voter support in comparison with the poor support for the two non-slate candidates. Furthermore, many voters do not vote for as many candidates as are allowed, "undervoting", as shown in Table 2.
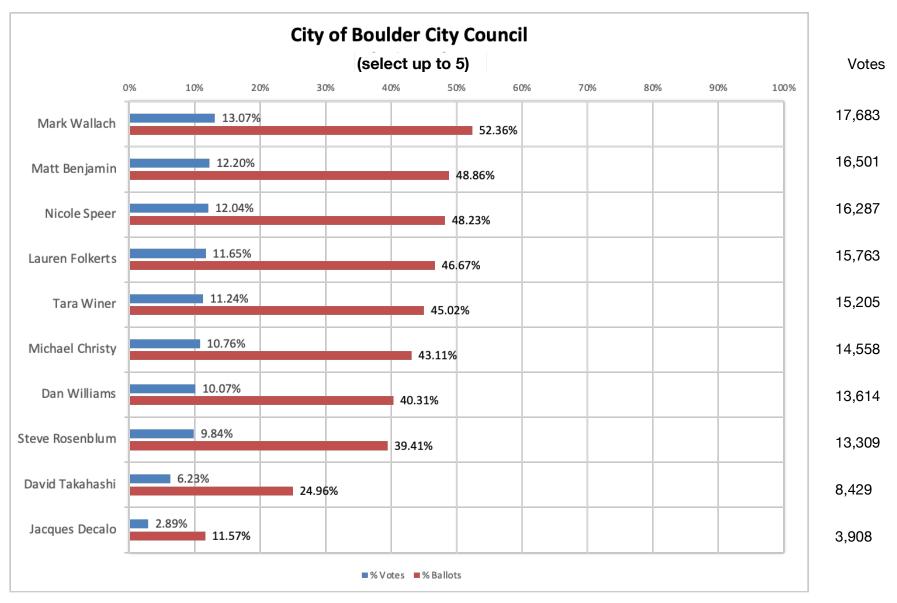
*Table 2: "Undervote" in Council Elections*

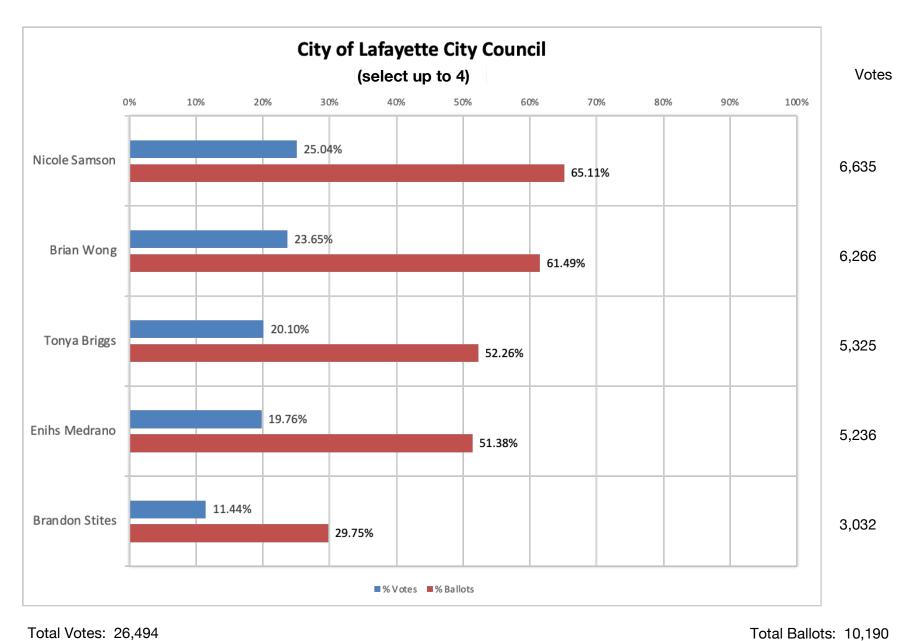| Contest | Total votes | Total ballots | Avg. votes/ballot | Avg. "undervote" |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Boulder Council* | 135,257 | 33,772 | 4.0 | 20% |
| *Lafayette Council* | 26,494 | 10,190 | 2.6 | 35% |
| *Longmont at-large* | 47,558 | 28,845 | 1.6 | 18% |

Finally, we would like to thank the Boulder County Clerk's office for improving the reporting of the election results. They provided a detailed spreadsheet of all the results by precinct. That made calculating the tables and graphs presented here much easier than working with the PDF files presented in the past.

The County Clerk also recently added a sort button to the election results graph on their website so that you can reorder the candidates from the ballot order to ascending or descending order by votes or percent of votes received. We display this new sorting feature in the graphs below.

In other voting method news, we were happy to see that Broomfield passed an initiative to have future mayors and council members elected through Instant-Runoff Voting, the same form of Ranked-Choice Voting that the city of Boulder will use to directly elect its mayor beginning in 2023.

# City of Boulder City Council
## (select up to 5)

Votes

| Candidate | % Votes | % Ballots | Votes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mark Wallach | 13.07% | 52.36% | 17,683 |
| Matt Benjamin | 12.20% | 48.86% | 16,501 |
| Nicole Speer | 12.04% | 48.23% | 16,287 |
| Lauren Folkerts | 11.65% | 46.67% | 15,763 |
| Tara Winer | 11.24% | 45.02% | 15,205 |
| Michael Christy | 10.76% | 43.11% | 14,558 |
| Dan Williams | 10.07% | 40.31% | 13,614 |
| Steve Rosenblum | 9.84% | 39.41% | 13,309 |
| David Takahashi | 6.23% | 24.96% | 8,429 |
| Jacques Decalo | 2.89% | 11.57% | 3,908 |

■ % Votes ■ % Ballots

Total Votes: 135,257                                     Total Ballots: 33,772
    Average of 4.001 votes per ballot

# City of Lafayette City Council

## (select up to 4)

Votes

| Candidate | % Votes | % Ballots | Votes |
|-----------|---------|-----------|-------|
| Nicole Samson | 25.04% | 65.11% | 6,635 |
| Brian Wong | 23.65% | 61.49% | 6,266 |
| Tonya Briggs | 20.10% | 52.26% | 5,325 |
| Enihs Medrano | 19.76% | 51.38% | 5,236 |
| Brandon Stites | 11.44% | 29.75% | 3,032 |

■ % Votes  ■ % Ballots

Total Votes: 26,494                                    Total Ballots: 10,190
   Average of 2.6 votes per ballot

# City of Longmont City Council Member at Large
## (select up to 2)

Votes



| Candidate | % Votes | % Ballots | Votes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Shiquita Yarbrough | 23.16% | 38.18% | 11,014 |
| Aren Rodriguez | 21.24% | 35.02% | 10,101 |
| Sean P. McCoy | 18.83% | 31.04% | 8,953 |
| Diane Crist | 15.16% | 25.00% | 7,210 |
| Tallis Salamatian | 11.73% | 19.34% | 5,579 |
| Jeremy Dejuan Johnson | 9.88% | 16.30% | 4,701 |

■ % Votes   ■ % Ballots

Total Votes: 47,558                          Total Ballots: 28,845
   Average of 1.6 votes per ballot