

Carson/Book Meeting

1/3/01

Write up overview of the semantics of a club
list of words incl: - consensus / majority rule / veto /
absence of dissent / of members - v - those present in visitor /
long term visitors

Consider / re-write this as article for AICA Manual.
NP. Membership as an indicator / as a condition of ...
x only decided at ...
dispensation to the ...
meeting (may be further ...)
- number of ...
number ... for acceptance etc.

- Use of acceptance of proxy vote.
- Use of written vote / vote. They ...
- Process of ...
- " " of ...
- right of children. ... off the ...
- inheritance right: if any.
- status of visitor
- size of number of community ...
whether a want of ...
- process of ...
... or special type of ...
- oral - v. written agreement ...
... deciding on decision making!
- dispute resolution ...

- 7/
- agreeing NOT to have a set page of agreements or a specific issues
 - use of "set" same for some, for all previous decision
 - to set or not have set agreements with limited life eg all agreements before 10. x months/yr (from date made) unless extended
 - common "unspoken" agreements eg child abuse, corporal punishment, death, lying etc, possession of firearms, explosives
 - gender issues sexism, phobias etc

①

- agreeing on areas where no agreement required eg body self mutilation eg nose/ear piercing, circumcision, clitoral clamping etc, subincision, body scarification
- blood drinking (spleen) health considerations of blood drinks / pills etc

②

- negotiation of initiation/acceptance as a member: initiation certificate, badge, body mutilation, exchange of rings/gifts, names etc.
- agreeing on demarcation between private to communal endorsement of agreements eg some agreements may be made between 2 people to hold a ceremony & banquet with exchange of gifts etc.

- Level and manner of announcement is agreed to the body responsible.
 - eg. be announced before the mother family
 - the chief of the community
 - the land community
 - the "bonded" communities in the local society.
- Ordering of agreement: elders, selecting friends, appointed at a group meeting, celebrant.
- agreement on the process to change agreements
- agreement on the absence of agreements
- penalties for breaking agreement, if any (may vary from no penalty to eg. banishment, expulsion, "death", prison incarceration.
- punishment accepted by a surrogate. eg. whipping the father of a delinquent son.
- Levels of - penalties, fines, ritual killing, banishment,

of society, related to range of penalties, or desecration of sacred ritual objects.

Further:-

- ① • Self mutilation or for (2) induction "ensign's"
 - toot evulsion, hair cutting, head shaving,
 - flaming of under arms, knees and/or feet
 - etc. for months or years.
- incarceration in cages or in stocks, stocks, stocks, chains, iron bands, of pellets, whips, stars etc.
- duration of agreement - life, specified time

4.

automatic lapsing of on death, after period of
time.

of nuclear couple contract (verbal/written)
with community contract.

• Pervasive, for Beach

recommunication, threat, fires, war,
public administration, of things, "driving
down", recreation.

John Gastil (1993)

*Democracy in Small Groups: Participation,
Decision Making & Communication,*
New Society Publishers

3

MORE THAN ONE WAY TO DECIDE

The Committee for Peace in Guatemala takes pride in its method of decision making. Weekly meetings of volunteers are run by consensus, and the group has never needed to use a formal voting procedure. Each Tuesday night a different facilitator is named, and this member plays a very active role, guiding discussion and discerning when a consensus is emerging. Every meeting also has a watchdog, a member who makes certain that the facilitator does not rush the meeting or intimidate individuals. All group members are also responsible for noting any early signs of discord, but meetings are usually harmonious.

Across town, the Guatemalan Relief Society holds a different kind of meeting. They pride themselves on their highly skilled, almost ritualistic use of Robert's Rules of Order. A chair is elected each year, and this individual oversees each monthly meeting-of-the-whole, as well as the two biweekly committee meetings. Meetings are fast paced, even though all critical votes are taken by secret ballot. The authority of the chair is rarely questioned, but members say this is because of the group's clear understanding of Robert's Rules rather than any sheepishness on the part of the membership.

THESE TWO HYPOTHETICAL groups are similar to different groups I have joined or observed. If they existed in the same town and had overlapping goals, it is quite possible that each group would dislike the other's method of decision making and claim that only its own group procedures are fully democratic. Such a claim is unwarranted, because equally democratic groups can and do use different procedures. There is room for variation within the boundaries of small group democracy.

Three methods of decision making used in small democratic groups are consensus, majority rule, and "proportional outcomes."¹ Consensus tries

to reach an agreement acceptable to all group members, whereas majority rule allows the passage of proposals supported by only a majority of the membership. In the proportional outcomes method, decisions are segmented and distributed in proportion to the prominence of different views. This is analogous to proportionally representative electoral systems, whereby parties receive a share of parliamentary seats in proportion to their percentage of the vote. Each of these methods fits within a democratic framework, and what follows is a discussion of their general features, their advantages, and their liabilities.

Consensus

Consensus ... stresses the cooperative development of a decision with group members working together rather than competing against each other. The goal of consensus is a decision that is consented to by all group members.... Full consent does not mean that everyone must be completely satisfied with the final outcome—in fact, total satisfaction is rare. The decision must be acceptable enough, however, that all will agree to support the group in choosing it.²

— Center for Conflict Resolution

The business meetings of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) are commonly cited as an example of small group consensus. Consensus logically follows from the Quaker view of spiritual knowledge. Believing that all persons have "that of God" within them, Quakers use consensus to draw out and integrate the insights of each individual, arriving at the best possible approximation of the truth. Quakers have found this method effective for addressing issues such as the opposition to war, the abolition of slavery, and the marrying of same-sex couples. For centuries, Quakers have used consensus in face-to-face groups ranging in size from five to two hundred members.³

The biweekly meetings of Friends Co-op, a housing cooperative I lived in for two years, provide an example of a semiformal style of consensus. The meeting facilitator began by reading a proposal from the agenda and opening the floor for discussion. After members had spoken their minds, the facilitator or another member tried to find a consensus. Members registered their agreement by nodding, verbally assenting, or silently wiggling their fingers (sometimes referred to as "Quaker applause"). In the event of continuing disagreement, the group tried to find alternative solutions or a temporary resolution.⁴

Consensus relies upon information, articulation, and persuasion to clarify and change the minds of group members, and it often utilizes compromise to reach an agreement.⁵ Each group member provides different perspectives, puts forward information, ideas, feelings, and

Friendly Advices on the Conduct of Quaker Meetings for Business

These guidelines, purportedly written by William Bacon Evans, are adapted from the Powell House Newsletter 1 (August 1964). I thank Christopher Densmore for bringing them to my attention.

1. Suitably prepare thyself for business session by previous group or individual waiting upon the Lord [prayer or meditation].
2. Seek not for information in open business session which thou shouldst have discovered by reading reports and minutes.
3. Let not certain Friends be known for their much speaking. Brevity is desirable in meetings for business as in meetings for worship.
4. If thou art tempted to speak much and often, exercise restraint lest thy speaking be not "in the Spirit."
5. Having spoken on a matter of business, it is well for thee to refrain from speaking again till after others have had full opportunity to voice their concerns.
6. Thou shouldst exercise care lest thy presumed convictions be only "points" or even prejudices.
7. Beware lest thou confuse thy own desire with the leading of the Spirit.
8. Should thy concern not meet with the general approval of the meeting, in common courtesy and in true humility withdraw thy concern that the meeting may act in some measure of unity.
9. Temper thy speech with tenderness and forbearance, that Friends may "feel" the promptings of the heart.

arguments, and listens carefully to what the others have to say. When there are conflicts of interest or desire, members try to reconcile divergent views, often agreeing on a reformulated version of a popular proposal that failed to reach consensus.

In the event of protracted disagreement, consensus groups continue to look for unanimity, but group members also accept the possibility of a deadlock. If agreement cannot be found or time pressure forces an immediate decision, dissenters can register their views without blocking consensus. There is a wide spectrum of dissent, ranging from disagreement without "standing in the way" to blocking consensus by vetoing a proposal.⁶

However, consensus must be distinguished from a simple "veto power" decision rule. Consensus is based on the desire to find common

ground, whereas the veto power model works with a mutual distrust and an unwillingness to compromise. The United Nations Security Council exemplifies the veto system, since its members are unwilling to accept any decision that goes against their national interests. The impetus for negotiation is to prevent intolerable gridlock, rather than to create a sense of shared goals and mutual respect.⁷

There are many advantages to using consensus as a means of reaching decisions in small democratic groups.⁸ Consensus is the surest safeguard against an unequal distribution of power. In theory, all group members have full power. In practice, members who abuse the blocking privilege often find themselves constrained by informal social pressures, so a balance is kept between a member's autonomy and the need for compromise.

Consensus can also bolster members' commitment to democracy. It radically empowers group members, often making them aware of both their autonomy and their responsibility to the group. Through consensus, group members can come to cherish their democratic rights and duties. At the very least the feeling of satisfaction that comes from consensus decision making can enhance members' appreciation of the democratic aspects of the process.⁹

Member relationships in consensus groups may be nurtured, because the relational aspects of small group democracy are the foundation of consensus. Individuality, competence, mutuality, and congeniality are historically associated with the use of consensus decision making, so it is more likely that consensus groups will direct energy toward maintaining a healthy relational atmosphere.¹⁰

Consensus also safeguards equal and adequate opportunities to speak. Consensus assumes that the minority viewpoint is crucial, so members may go out of their way to draw out quieter group members. Listening may also be enhanced, since consensus relies upon members understanding and considering what each other says. Without such listening it becomes far more difficult to arrive at a decision acceptable to all group members.¹¹

In addition, consensus is designed to increase members' commitment to the group's decisions. A group member may enthusiastically implement a decision, because the group made a favorable compromise to ensure consensus. Or the member may willingly implement a decision after recognizing that it was the best decision upon which the group could agree. Since no decision is reached until all members can accept it, everyone is directly responsible for the group's decision.¹²

Despite these potential advantages, consensus has its pitfalls. Like any method of decision making, consensus works better in theory than in practice. Its drawbacks are its vulnerabilities—ways the process can fail if

members do not have adequate experience, knowledge, or discipline. Over a period of months, groups using consensus can mature substantially, reaching increasingly sound decisions by incorporating member information and perspectives.¹³ Initially, however, problems are more likely.

The most adept members of a group can manipulate the shades of disagreement used in consensus to alter a group decision. People may tend to approach consensus with a bias against disagreement and conflict, so members can induce agreement with their view by threatening a conflict if challenged.¹⁴

Consensus can also take a long time.¹⁵ A group might have a two-thirds majority from the outset, yet many meetings could pass before the majority or minority change their views and reach an agreement. Possible side effects of such a time-consuming process include frustration, missed opportunities, and a weakened commitment to group procedures. The extra time taken to reach one decision also takes time away from deliberations on other issues.¹⁶ Even if most group members are ready for change, existing policies remain intact if no decision is reached. As Jane Mansbridge points out, "*Not making a decision ... is making a decision to leave the status quo (which may be oppressive, or just inefficient) unchanged.*"¹⁷

Majority Rule

Whereas consensus is often identified with groups such as the Quakers, people typically associate majority rule with representative bodies such as the U.S. Senate, which has some general features. Discussion is framed by a set of written procedures—often based upon *Robert's Rules of Order*—and monitored by a chair and/or parliamentarian. Members have the power to extend or set limits on discussion by requiring simple or two-thirds majorities to call for votes, table proposals, etc.; decisions are reached through formal voice votes or written ballots.

This parliamentary stereotype overlooks the variety of ways democratic groups can use majority rule. Even *Robert's Rules of Order* emphasizes the need for the group to tailor procedures to the skills and styles of its membership. Groups governed by majority rule can choose to proceed more informally by speaking without specified turns and changing proposals without a lengthy amendment process. Also, there are different kinds of majorities. A simple majority (i.e., more than 50 percent of the votes) is most commonly thought of as majority rule, but majoritarian decisions can be based on three-fifths, two-thirds, three-fourths, and any other fraction greater than one half and less than

unanimity. Groups can use these different majority rules to give minority opinion more power on certain issues and procedures.¹⁸

Just as consensus has its strengths, so does majority rule. This form of decision making is a means of ensuring equal power without giving group members absolute vetos. When group members disagree even after deliberation, majority rule provides a way to resolve the dispute fairly without favoring the status quo.¹⁹

Speaking opportunities are also likely to be equal when governed by majority rule (e.g., requiring a two-thirds majority vote to close debate); discussion continues until most group members have had their say. Differing views are also likely to be aired if speaking turns are alternated between those favoring and opposing the proposal under discussion. Even if one's chances to speak are not adequate or equal in a given instance, they may become so over time.

The same procedures that ensure speaking opportunities also allow quick decisions when a clear majority is known to exist. In addition, the ability to close debate and take a decisive vote when there is not full agreement eliminates the bias toward the status quo. Majoritarian groups sometimes use a two-thirds vote to revoke an existing policy, but often a simple majority can revise policy. In either case the group's policies are likely to reflect the views of current majorities. As with consensus, these strengths are most prominent when members are experienced with the group's method of decision making.

Just as the limitations of consensus are exacerbated by inexperience, the hazards of majority rule are most prominent when members are unfamiliar with group procedures. Members of a group using majority rule sometimes find themselves in a permanent minority, and this situation can become intolerable if exploited or ignored. The group membership may be divided into two or more blocs, with one being a dominant majority and voting as a majority on a wide range of group proposals. Although the majority may be only seven of the ten group members, it will prevail ten out of ten times because of the nature of the system. If members find themselves stuck in a permanent minority, their commitment to making decisions democratically may wane. Their participation may begin to feel like voluntary servitude more than an opportunity to work with a group of equals.²⁰

Even with a changing majority, this method of decision making can lead to tense relationships among group members. Majority rule often works as a zero-sum game: one subgroup's victory is another's defeat. If the process becomes highly competitive, adversaries may begin to question one another's mutuality and competence, and group discussions can turn into hostile debates.²¹

Just as it can splinter a group, majority rule—when combined with elaborate parliamentary procedures—has a tendency to fragment issues by requiring “a series of often confusing motions, seconds, points of order, and reconsiderations.” Such a procedure “has severe limitations in helping a group get a sense of the whole of an issue and in setting some common direction for dealing with it.”²²

Finally, the ability of majorities to close debate by vote can be abused to silence a minority viewpoint. Once a clear majority is identified, those holding the prevailing view may not listen patiently to the minority. Considering others' arguments presumes the need to work together, but majorities have no short-term need to hear minority opinions.²³

Proportional Outcomes

In the proportional outcomes method decisions are designed to reflect the proportions of the group membership that hold different views. Whereas compromise commonly occurs within both consensus and majority rule methods, the proportional outcome method institutionalizes the spirit of compromise.

This method has intuitive appeal, because it embodies basic principles many people learn at an early age. Studies of children in Western countries have found that as they grow older, children gradually develop the ability to distinguish between permanent and shifting group majorities. When a few group members are always in the minority, older children more routinely give the minority a proportional share of influence.²⁴

This is easiest to do when decisions lend themselves to simple division. Imagine a group of five children at a summer camp deciding what to do for ten hours. If each of the proposed activities, such as board games, can be accomplished in two hours, each child may decide how the group will spend two of its ten hours.

In other cases groups can make compromises and concessions so that those in the minority are given compensation in proportion to their share of the membership. In the previous example, two children in the minority may agree to do an activity that takes the full ten hours, but only if they get double desserts at lunch or the chance to make the next decision for the group.

When a minority faction of a group is extremely small relative to the majority, a proportional outcomes approach can go even further. The group might give the minority limited veto power, a disproportionate amount of representation, or even equal representation (just as each state, regardless of its population, receives two seats in the Senate).²⁵

In a way, proportional outcome schemes are a cross between majority rule and consensus. As in majority rule, unanimity is not required. Just as

majorities get their power by virtue of their size, the relative size of voting blocs determines their influence. Like consensus, the proportional outcomes method is based on the premise that all members, including those in the minority, ought to play a role in shaping the final group policy.²⁶

These similarities correspond to some of the strengths of proportional outcomes. The method can have many of the advantages associated with consensus—encouraging positive relationships and careful deliberation. It can also reap the benefits of majority rule, since it is egalitarian, allows quick decisions, and reduces the bias toward the status quo.

The unique advantage of this method is that decisions can often be divided proportionally, or compromises can be made across issues rather than within a single issue. While this is possible with other methods, it is built into the basic principles of the proportional system.²⁷

Just as the proportional outcome scheme combines the potential strengths of consensus and majority rule, so does it share their weaknesses. To the extent that the system emphasizes unanimity, it can invite manipulation and excessive delays. If it leans toward quick decisions, it can result in fewer speaking opportunities and inattentiveness.²⁸

Using proportional outcomes also has a tendency to factionalize groups, even more so than majority rule. In majority rule, minority blocs have a clear incentive to build coalitions; otherwise, they can become isolated and powerless. In the proportional outcome system, subgroups are never powerless, since they receive a degree of influence commensurate with their size. This makes it easier for a group to split into separate and permanent group factions, a condition that limits the group's mutuality, deliberative capacity, and ability to implement truly collective decisions.

Beyond Head Counting

Whether groups rely upon consensus, majority rule, or proportional outcomes, they will all have to devise ways of polling or registering the views of the membership. Head counting is perhaps the simplest means of polling. Other forms include secret or open ballots and preliminary techniques, such as the straw poll. When a chair in a parliamentary group asks for yeas and nays, she is collecting verbal ballots for and against a proposition. When a facilitator in a consensus group says he senses that the group favors a proposal, he is implicitly asking for group members to cast their ballots, either expressing their assent with silent nods or presenting their veto with a verbal objection. All democratic groups use polling techniques, and it is useful to explore the methods groups use to get beyond mere head counting.²⁹

Polls or ballots on two or more alternatives can be structured in many ways. Consider a school board deciding between two proposed budgets (A and B). In its final vote the board might allow votes for A, B, or abstention. Alternatively, it might require that a member propose one of the two budgets and vote with a yes/no/abstention format. These systems may seem identical, but in some situations they can have different results. If on the first ballot, budget A is rejected, the bylaws of the group may make it impossible (or difficult) to reconsider A. This puts pressure on the board to pass B to avoid the possibility of having no budget for the coming year. If the budgets were considered simultaneously, the vote might have shown a majority favoring A.

Notice that in the above structure, abstentions are counted as absent votes. In a forced-choice structure, by contrast, anything but a yes is counted as a *de facto* no vote. This may seem a minor difference, but it is not. While serving on the Wisconsin Student Association Senate I witnessed occasions on which the vast majority of the senators cast abstentions (or failed to vote at all) because they were uninformed, undecided, and/or uninterested. Under such conditions a proposal would occasionally pass on something like a three-to-one vote in a senate with twenty-five members present. Had the forced-choice structure been in effect, all votes with fewer than thirteen yeas would fail with twenty-five senators present. To its credit, the same senate used the forced-choice structure only for critical issues, such as constitutional amendments and calls for impeachment.

A democratic group can also make polls more sensitive to the full diversity of views. Preferences and judgments, like attitudes in general, are quite complex, and subtle polls can allow members to express shades of agreement and disagreement. When confronted with two choices, a person might be 40 percent in favor of one, 20 percent in favor of the other, and 40 percent undecided.³⁰ If given ten votes to distribute, a member could vote in accordance with these conflicting feelings. Alternatively, a ballot might have five or seven choices, ranging from "strong yes" to "strong no," analogous to the seven-point scales used in survey research.

Polls can even distinguish among identical preferences that are based on different reasons. A majority may favor budget A but not for the same reason. When polls allow members to choose among different rationales as well as different items (e.g., "Yes because of x" versus "Yes because of y," or simply "Yes because of—"), groups can receive valuable information. After such a poll a group might decide to reverse or postpone a decision because there are contradictory reasons behind supporting it. If half of a political action group wants to hold a demonstration involving civil disobedience to recruit new members and half wants to hold it to test

the mettle of the membership, going ahead with the demonstration might prove disastrous, as members would be working at cross-purposes.

Groups can also restructure their polls to take multiple alternatives into account. Some decisions require choosing among multiple proposals, and group members might favor two or three out of ten possible decisions. Groups choose among multiple alternatives when they need more than one of something (e.g., electing four representatives), but this can also be done when only one proposal or candidate will be selected.³¹

To choose among multiple alternatives, members might rank all available choices or give them each ratings ranging from one to three.

Earlham '85 Polling Method

Instructions

- 1) Mark the ballot to indicate which, if any, of the candidates is your first choice.
- 2) For each of the other candidates, mark the ballot to indicate whether you find the candidates acceptable or unacceptable (or, if you prefer, mark neither).

Ballot

	1st Choice	Acceptable	Unacceptable
Candidate A	_____	_____	_____
Candidate B	_____	_____	_____
Candidate C	_____	_____	_____
Candidate D	_____	_____	_____

Tallying Method

To win, a candidate must obtain both (1) a majority of the first choice votes and (2) first choice or acceptable votes on a majority of ballots. (If no candidate meets these two conditions, the two candidates with the most first choice votes participate in a runoff election. If a runoff produces no winner, new candidates might be nominated.)

Rationale

The first of these requirements ensures that the winning candidate is the first choice of a majority of voters who have strong preferences. The second requirement ensures that the candidate is also acceptable to a majority of those voting. In a divisive and competitive race, it is entirely possible that a candidate could win a majority of first choice votes yet prove unacceptable to a majority of voters.

Members could also have the chance to vote yes or no for each choice, with the final tally adding yes votes and subtracting no votes. In 1985 the Earlham College student government elections used yet another alternative, asking voters to identify the candidates they preferred as well as those they found "acceptable."³²

Polling procedures can also require that the group take more than one vote. This allows members to respond to the information they receive on the first poll. If members are stating both positions and rationales on the first poll, the group might discover that it needs to address some factual or moral question before taking the final poll. In the earlier school board example, a preliminary vote can be taken on the two budgets to make certain that one will pass in the final poll, avoiding the possibility of a deadlock. Preliminary polling techniques such as these assume that a relatively formal method of articulation can help move deliberation forward. An early poll forces members to probe their own views or opinions, and it makes them aware of the views of others.

With any of these polling strategies, it is possible to vote by speaking, raising hands, or writing on ballots. The latter two techniques allow simultaneous voting, and (unless group members close their eyes) only written ballots allow secrecy. Research on sequential straw polls, in which, one by one, members state their positions, shows how the order in which members vote can affect the outcome. If the fifth person in a nine-person group happens to vote after four "yea" votes, she becomes a little bit more likely to go along with the yeas than she would be otherwise. To avoid this problem, members can vote secretly or simultaneously, possibly in a round-robin to elaborate their views after stating their general positions.³³

Unfortunately, all of these polling techniques are subject to error and abuse. The more complex the poll, the more chance there is for confusion, which results in inadequate opportunities to express final preferences. More elaborate polls are also easier to distort, since group members can exaggerate the extremity of their views. Members can vote for their preferred candidate or proposal and vote against all the others—even if they know the others are also fine choices. In multiple polling schemes, members can manipulate the final poll through deceptive votes in preliminary tallies. For instance, a member may want to block a proposal with a veto without having to listen to the counterarguments of other group members. This member can support the proposal during the straw poll, then veto it during the final vote taken at the end of the group's scheduled meeting time.³⁴

The extra time and thought that the more complex polls require make them appropriate for groups able to present their views honestly and situations where time permits reflection. Perhaps experimenting with the

full variety of polling techniques is the best way to determine which ones best suit a group under different circumstances.

Mixing Methods

A spirit of experimentation is also a good approach to integrating various polling techniques with the different methods of decision making. Ideally, groups can find ways to draw upon the strengths of each polling strategy and decision-making method, adapting their procedures to changing memberships, issues, and situations.

For example, the board of directors for Madison Community Co-ops allows board members to vote as favoring, opposing, objecting, or abstaining. An objection blocks consensus, and the proposal is either tabled or discussed further. Eventually the objection can be overridden through majority rule. If there is no objection, yeas and nays are counted and the majority decides the verdict. One exception to this process is that any procedural motion, such as a call for recess, is voted on through simple majority rule.

A precursor to the board's procedure is Martha's Rules of Order, developed at a residential housing cooperative. A group using Martha's Rules tries to work toward a full consensus among group members, but if necessary the group can override one or two objections to a proposal with a simple majority vote. If three or more group members object, the override requires a two-thirds majority, and the issue is tabled until the next meeting to allow time for reformulation and compromise on the proposal.

Martha's Rules also formalize the group's ability to measure the degree to which an individual supports a proposal. One can say, "I am comfortable with the proposal," or merely, "I can live with the proposal." If there are competing proposals, the distinction between these two degrees of support can be decisive, but usually the distinction merely gauges how enthusiastically the group supports a proposal. This particular method is just one more example of how groups can adjust and combine different methods of decision making and polling to meet their current needs.³⁵

Notes

1. It is important to stress that small group democracy encompasses different decision rules, including consensus and proportional outcomes, because "tyranny of the majority" is so closely associated with the democratic process. On the historical association of democracy with simple majority rule see Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 171-73.

2. Quote from Center for Conflict Resolution, *Building United Judgment* (Madison, Wis.: Center for Conflict Resolution, 1981), 1. For an academic history of consensus, see W. K. Rawlins, "Consensus in Decision-Making Groups: A Conceptual History," in Gerald M. Phillips and Julia T. Wood, eds., *Emergent Issues in Human Decision Making* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 19-39. For the history of consensus in political theory and a critical evaluation of it, see Douglas W. Rae, "The Limits of Consensual Decision," *American Political Science Review* 69 (1975): 1270-94. For a more positive view see Kirkpatrick Sale, *Human Scale* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1980), 501-4.

3. On Quaker decision making see Michael J. Sheeran, *Beyond Majority Rule* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1983); Francis E. Pollard, Beatrice E. Pollard, and Robert S. W. Pollard, *Democracy and the Quaker Method* (London: Ballinsdale, 1949). On the usefulness of the Quaker method for other groups, see Pollard et al., *ibid.*, chap. 5. On other quasidemocratic decision-making procedures with a heavy spiritual influence, see Corinne McLaughlin and Gordon Davidson's *Builders of the Dawn: Community Lifestyles in a Changing World* (Shutesbury, Mass.: Sirius Publishing, 1986). It should be noted that many Quakers do not view their decision-making process as an example of consensus or democracy. For these Friends the religious element makes the Quaker process distinct; for example, see the letters under "Not Just Consensus" in *Friends Journal* (February 1993), 5.

One unique feature of the Quaker method, different from other versions of consensus in use, is the powerful role of the clerk of the Meeting. Sheeran (*Beyond Majority Rule*) writes at length about the clerk's responsibility for "discerning" the "sense of the meeting"—and the potential for abusing this responsibility. Some Quaker meetings have procedural safeguards against a clerk's ability to distort decisions, such as a one-fifth vote to overrule the clerk's decision; see, for example, Pollard et al., *Democracy and the Quaker Method*, 144.

4. Consensus can be used with a set of highly structured procedures or a more anarchistic approach. For examples of each, see McLaughlin and Davidson's descriptions of Philadelphia's Movement for a New Society and the Auroville Community in South India; *Builders of the Dawn*, 162-68, 173-78. Bruno Lasker (*Democracy through Discussion* [New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1949], p. III) describes at length a methodical discussion procedure that draws upon consensus principles. As a cautionary note, at least one investigation has found that inexperienced consensus groups using unstructured discussion methods have more difficulty integrating the information held by different group members; Garold Stasser and William Titus, "Pooling of Unshared Information in Group Decision Making: Biased Information Sampling During Discussion," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 48 (1985): 1467-78.

5. Advocates of consensus sometimes give compromise a pejorative meaning, contrasting it with the pursuit of a genuine common ground. It is in this sense that Pollard et al. insist that Quaker business meetings do not have "any special tendency to result in mere compromise between different points of view"; *Democracy and the Quaker Method*, 61.

6. Sheeran, *Beyond Majority Rule*, 65-71. On blocking consensus and the alternatives to blocking, see Center for Conflict Resolution, *Building United Judgment*, chap. 5.

7. On full veto power and the U.N. Security Council, see Jane J. Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), chap. 18. In Julia T. Wood's terminology, the U.N. format is closer to negotiation than consensus, because it involves no attempt to find common ground or create a collective identity; see "Alternative Methods of Group Decision Making," in Robert S. Cathcart and Larry A. Samovar, *Small Group Communication*, 5th ed. (Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown Publishers, 1988), 187-88.

8. RoLayne S. DeStephen and Randy Y. Hirokawa point out that most of the research on consensus and small groups treats consensus as an outcome—a product of group discussion rather than a group process. Thus the majority of studies on small group consensus are not relevant to the question of how the consensus process affects groups and their members. See "Small Group Consensus: Stability of Group Support of the Decision, Task Process, and Group Relationships," *Small Group Behavior* 19 (1988): 227-39.

One variable I do not discuss is the "productivity" of groups using a consensus, majority rule, or proportional outcomes decision method. Productivity is a rather broad variable, and the few studies that have compared majority rule and consensus are far from conclusive on the question. See Randy Y. Hirokawa, "Does Consensus Really Result in Higher Quality Group Decisions?" in Gerald M. Phillips and Julia T. Wood, eds., *Emergent Issues in Human Decision Making* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 40-49. Consensus may be more advantageous in a group negotiation context, since it tends to result in more mutually beneficial decisions. Two recent studies have produced evidence supporting this view: Leigh L. Thompson, Elizabeth Mannix, and Max H. Bazerman, "Group Negotiation: Effects of Decision Rule, Agenda, and Aspiration," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 54 (1988): 86-95; Elizabeth Mannix, Leigh L. Thompson, and Max H. Bazerman, "Negotiation in Small Groups," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 74 (1989): 508-17.

Like these two articles, the vast majority of social scientific studies cited herein have been conducted with groups of college students. In the typical design the group members have little or no experience working with one another. These factors make many studies somewhat artificial, a problem that has plagued research on small groups for decades, as small group communication scholar Ernest G. Bormann has observed on more than one occasion: "The Paradox and Promise of Small Group Research," *Speech Monographs* 37 (1970): 211-16; "The Paradox and Promise of Small Group Research Revisited," *Central States Speech Journal* 31 (1980): 214-20. This conventional methodology also makes it more difficult to generalize the findings to the full variety of group settings—most of which do not consist of three or four unacquainted college students discussing a hypothetical problem for one or more hours.

Nonetheless the careful research design in many of these studies makes their findings suggestive or, at the very least, thought-provoking. I encourage readers to conduct their own inclusive and contextually sensitive research on small group democracy. There is little research on the subject, and careful study of existing groups would greatly improve our understanding of the democratic process in small groups.

9. A wealth of evidence supports the notion that, on average, group members are more satisfied with the consensus method than majority rule. See Charlan Nemeth, "Interactions Between Jurors as a Function of Majority vs. Unanimity Decision Rules," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 7 (1977): 38-56; Martin F. Kaplan and Charles E. Miller, "Group Decision Making and Normative Versus Informational Influence: Effects of Type of Issue and Assigned Decision Rule," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 53 (1987): 306-13. A similar study reports the same findings and also notes that even group members holding the minority viewpoint were more satisfied with the decisions reached in consensus groups than in those using majority rule: Norbert L. Kerr et al., "Guilt Beyond a Reasonable Doubt: Effects of Concept Definition and Assigned Decision Rule on the Judgments of Mock Jurors," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 34 (1976): 282-94.

10. See L. Kelly and C. Begnal, "Group Members' Orientations toward Decision Processes," in Gerald M. Phillips and Julia T. Wood, eds., *Emergent Issues in Human Decision Making* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 63-79.

11. However, critics of consensus maintain that the process suppresses conflict, preventing the airing of minority viewpoints. In this view, majority rule is a better method for ensuring that the minority has its say. Gideon Falk finds evidence supporting this view in "An Empirical Study Measuring Conflict in Problem-Solving Groups Which Are Assigned Different Decision Rules," *Human Relations* 35 (1982): 1123-38. In a similar study Gideon Falk and Shoshana Falk also argue that majority rule is better than a unanimity rule at minimizing the influence of the most powerful group member: "The Impact of Decision Rules on the Distribution of Power in Problem-Solving Teams with Unequal Power," *Group and Organization Studies* 6 (1981): 211-23.

12. Studies finding greater commitment to consensus group decisions include Nemeth, "Interactions Between Jurors"; Dean Tjosvold and Richard H. G. Field, "Effects of Social Context on Consensus and Majority Vote Decision Making," *Academy of Management Journal* 26 (1983): 500-506.

13. Warren Watson, Larry K. Michaelsen, and Walt Sharp, "Member Competence, Group Interaction, and Group Decision Making: A Longitudinal Study," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 76 (1991): 803-9. Some critics hold that consensus is inherently flawed. For a brief, impassioned argument against consensus, see D. G. Clark, "Consensus or Stalemate?" *National Parliamentarian* 53, no. 1 (1992): 7.

14. Anne Gero identifies the existence of an "antidisagreement norm" in her study of business and social work students. "Conflict Avoidance in Consensual Decision Processes," *Small Group Behavior* 16 (1985): 487-99.

15. Quantitative studies of inexperienced groups support this view. For instance, comparisons of majority rule and consensus mock juries have found that consensus groups take more time to reach decisions: Nemeth, "Interactions Between Jurors"; Kerr et al., "Guilt Beyond a Reasonable Doubt"; Charles E. Miller, "Group Decision Making under Majority and Unanimity Decision Rules," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 48 (1985): 51-61. In addition, qualitative studies of experienced consensus groups such as the Clamshell Alliance have found that the

process tends to take more time; see Gary L. Downey, "Ideology and the Clamshell Identity: Organizational Dilemmas in the Anti-Nuclear Power Movement," *Social Problems* 33 (1986): 357-73.

The simplest theoretical explanation for why consensus takes longer than majority rule is that it is usually easier to get a smaller number of people to agree; thus, in groups of equal size, consensus requires more people to agree (or, at least, accept a decision). Benjamin Radcliff, "Majority Rule and Impossibility Theorems," *Social Science Quarterly* 73 (1992): 515.

16. The argument that time spent on one issue takes it away from deliberation on another comes from Thomas Christiano, "Freedom, Consensus, and Equality in Collective Decision Making," *Ethics* 101 (1990): 167.

17. Jane J. Mansbridge, "A Paradox of Size," in C. George Benello, *From the Ground Up* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 166. To counterbalance the tendency to favor the status quo, a group can put expiration dates on its decisions. Caroline Estes explains that Alpha Farm makes "temporary decisions on a number of occasions, usually trying the decision for a year and then either making a final decision or dropping it entirely": "Consensus Ingredients," in Fellowship for Intentional Community and Communities Publications Cooperative, eds., *Intentional Communities: A Guide to Cooperative Living* (Evansville, Ind.: Fellowship for Intentional Community; Stelle, Ill.: Communities Publications Cooperative, 1990), 81. This "favoritism toward the status quo" can also be viewed as caution, which is entirely appropriate in many contexts. For instance, a study using actual jurors found that after watching a videotaped trial, groups using consensus were more likely than groups using majority rule to reach not-guilty or hung verdicts (relatively cautious, compared to guilty verdicts): Robert Buckhout, Steve Weg, and Vincent Reilly, "Jury Verdicts: Comparison of 6- vs. 12-Person Juries and Unanimous vs. Majority Decision Rule in a Murder Trial," *Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society* 10 (1977): 175-78.

18. For this insight I owe thanks to Mary Giovagnoli. The classic on parliamentary procedure is Henry M. Robert, *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1990). A popular, more streamlined alternative is Alice Sturgis, *Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure*, 3d ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988). An even more simplified and concise manual of parliamentary procedure is Hermon W. Farwell, *The Majority Rules*, 2d ed. (Pueblo, Colo.: High Publishers, 1988). For a general critique of the majority rule method of decision making in small groups, see Center for Conflict Resolution, *Building United Judgment*, 4-7.

19. This is a longstanding argument in favor of majority rule. If one presumes that people have different preferences at a given point in time, majority rule, compared to all other decision rules, is the most responsive to individual preferences (presuming the body has an odd number of members and the choice is between only two alternatives): Philip D. Straffin, Jr., "Majority Rule and General Decision Rules," *Theory and Decision* 8 (1977): 351-60. If one ignores the role of deliberation and changing preferences, this can be proven mathematically; see Straffin, "Majority Rule," and Mark Gradstein, "Conditions for the Optimality of Simple Majority Decisions in Pairwise Choice Situations," *Theory and Decision* 21

(1986): 181-87. A more readable presentation of this view is provided by Bruce Ackerman in *Social Justice and the Liberal State* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980), chap. 9. Ackerman uses rather humorous dialogues to make the case for using majority rule when "good-faith" disagreements exist.

20. On the mutually reinforcing relationship between unstable majorities and pluralist politics, see Nicholas R. Miller, "Pluralism and Social Choice," *American Political Science Review* 77 (1983): 734-47. On a large social scale, Northern Ireland provides an example of the fate of a permanent minority; see Anthony Arblaster, *Democracy* (Open University Press: Milton Keynes, 1987): 70-72. When the composition of the majority does not change over time and the views of the opposition are markedly different from those of the majority, a proportional outcome scheme, discussed below, might be a more democratic method of decision making; see Arend Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Governments in Twenty-one Countries* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984), 21-23.

21. See Alfie Kohn, *No Contest* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1986).

22. Robert H. McKenzie, "Learning to Deliberate and Choose," *Public Leadership Education* 4 (1991): 11.

23. In response to a majority court opinion, a dissenting Supreme Court justice expressed this view: "It is said that there is no evidence that majority jurors will refuse to listen to dissenters whose votes are unneeded for conviction. Yet human experience teaches that polite and academic conversation is no substitute for the earnest and robust argument necessary to reach unanimity." (Justice Douglass, with Justices Marshall and Brennan, quoted in Nemeth, "Interactions Between Jurors," 40.) In a study investigating this issue, Nemeth found some support for Justice Douglass's view; consensus groups engaged in more conflict, and participants were more likely to change their minds. Similarly Kerr et al., in "Guilt Beyond a Reasonable Doubt," found that in half of the mock juries using majority rule, deliberation was ended after the first decisive poll, despite the presence of a vocal minority.

More generally, the very nature of majority rule makes it more likely that minority viewpoints will emerge and be dominated by majorities. Thompson et al. ("Group Negotiation") found that majority-rule negotiation groups were more likely to form dominant coalitions and reach decisions that worked against the interests of group minorities.

24. Leon Mann et al., "Developmental Changes in Application of Majority Rule in Group Decisions," *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* 2 (1984): 275-81.

25. On the application of the proportionality principle, see Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1977), 38-41. The proportional outcome approach to decision making has proven effective in the past, even for large-scale social groups, such as Switzerland and the Netherlands, both of which use "consociational" political systems that incorporate proportional outcomes. See Lijphart, *Democracies and Democracy in Plural Societies*; Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy*, 265-68.

26. The proportional outcomes method is probably closer to consensus than majority rule; thus Lijphart's definition of the "consensus model of democracy,"

which includes proportional outcomes, is contrasted with majority rule. *Democracies*, pp. 23–30.

27. Mannix et al. ("Negotiation in Small Groups") conducted a direct test of the benefits of sequential agendas versus package agendas (simultaneously reaching decisions on different issues, making them part of a single agenda item). They found that package agendas resulted in more mutually beneficial decisions for the members of small negotiation groups, whether the groups used majority rule or consensus decision rules.

28. On the disadvantages of proportional outcomes and consociationalism in large-scale systems, see Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, 47–52.

29. For a discussion on multichoice and two-step voting formats, see Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 286–89. For a more detailed discussion of the multichoice format and its use in Switzerland, see Benjamin Barber, *The Death of Communal Liberty* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974).

30. See James Lull and Joseph Cappella, "Slicing the Attitude Pie: A New Approach to Attitude Measurement," *Communication Quarterly* 29 (1981): 67–80; Bernard Manin, "On Legitimacy and Political Deliberation," trans. Elly Stein and Jane Mansbridge, *Political Theory* 15 (1987): 350.

31. In fact the existence of multiple alternatives raises a problem for majority-rule voting. If head-to-head votes show that majorities favor A over B, favor B over C, and favor C over A, which is the preferred policy? For a clear discussion of this problem see Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*, 144–46. This paradox is irresolvable, but as Benjamin Radcliff argues in "Majority Rule and Impossibility Theorems," this should be seen as a limitation upon using majority rule—not as a reason to abandon such a process.

32. I thank George Gastil for providing detailed information on the "Earlham '85" ballots.

33. See James H. Davis et al., "Effects of Straw Polls on Group Decision Making: Sequential Voting Pattern, Timing and Local Majorities," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 55 (1988): 918–26; James H. Davis et al., "Some Social Mechanics of Group Decision Making: The Distribution of Opinion, Polling Sequence, and Implications for Consensus," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 57 (1989): 1000–1012.

34. Social choice theorists rather soberly refer to deceptive voting behavior as "strategic voting." On its unavoidability, see David Miller, "Deliberative Democracy and Social Choice," *Political Studies* 40, Special Issue (1992): 58–59.

35. Some of the details of Martha's Rules of Order have changed over the years. The namesake cooperative, Martha's Co-op, currently uses a different version. I thank Jeff Haines for clarifying the details of Martha's Rules. For brief summaries of Martha's Rules and other alternative procedures, see Center for Conflict Resolution, *Building United Judgment*, 101–6.

Some critics of procedures like Martha's Rules argue that these are an impure form of consensus, because they allow a majority to rule. In response, many ardent advocates of consensus emphasize that consensus does not require unanimity.

Defining it as such underemphasizes the importance of practices such as "standing aside" from a decision. See Virginia Coover et al., *Resource Manual for a Living Revolution* (Philadelphia: New Society Press, 1978), 52–53; Estes, "Consensus Ingredients," 80–81.