Majority Judgment (MJ) versus the Borda Majority Count (BMC)

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Abstract:

Michel Balinski has recently argued convincingly that the proper question to ask a voter is not to give his most preferred alternative nor to give a ranking of the alternatives, but that the question to be asked should be: how do you evaluate each alternative in terms of - for example - the grades `excellent, good, acceptable, poor, reject'. From an answer to the latter question one may deduce the voter's (weak) ranking of the alternatives, but conversely, from a voter's ranking of the alternatives one may not deduce the voter's evaluation of the alternatives. So, an evaluation of the alternatives is (much) more informative than a ranking of the alternatives and even more so than only a first choice from the alternatives. In aggregating the different evaluations by the voters of an alternative, Balinski has good arguments to take the (lower) median value of the evaluations as the aggregated evaluation of the alternative in question. For instance, the median value of the three evaluations `good, acceptable, poor' will be `acceptable', and the (lower) median value of the four evaluations `excellent, good, acceptable, poor' will be `acceptable' too. Of course, with many voters and a relatively small set of grades, many alternatives will have the same median value; in other words, there may be many ties between the alternatives. Balinski proposes two closely related ways to break these ties. In this way both a winner and a ranking of the alternatives may be determined. Balinski calls his procedure Majority Judgment, because there is a majority of voters who think the alternative deserves at least the median value and there is another majority of voters who think that the alternative in question deserves at most the median value. In the literature several examples have been given in which applying Balinski's Majority Judgment at first sight seems to give counter-intuitive results. However, in his book Majority Judgment (2010), chapter 16, Balinski argues that at a closer look these results are not counter-intuitive at all; we should look at these results from a different perspective than the one we are used too. Approval Voting is a special case of Majority Judgment, where one may evaluate the alternatives in terms of approval
or disapproval (0) only. Given the evaluations by the voters of the different parties in a country, how should one deduce a seat distribution in parliament over the different parties? Manzoor Zahid (PhD student) proposed to identify, for instance, the evaluation ‘excellent’ with the number 4, ‘good’ with 3, ‘acceptable’ with 2, ‘poor’ with 1 and ‘reject’ with 0 and simply to add up the different numbers given to a party. Given the number of seats in parliament and given the total number of points given to each party, it is then straightforward to compute a seat distribution. He calls this procedure the Borda Majority Count (BMC), because it reminds us both of the Borda Count and Majority Judgment. This BMC procedure is in its turn a special case of Range Voting, defended by Warren D. Smith, but with a very restrictive range consisting of the natural numbers between 0 and 4 only, while Range Voting typically has a (much) larger range, for instance, the natural numbers between 0 and 99. While Balinski’s Majority Judgment reduces the possibilities for strategic behavior, the point summing method involved in the Borda Majority Count is, of course, easy to manipulate. For that reason we suggest to use Majority Judgment for determining a winner and a ranking of the alternatives, and if one wants to use the evaluations of parties for a seat distribution in parliament only afterwards to identify the grades with natural numbers.

We have applied several procedures - Plurality Rule, the Borda Count, Approval Voting and the Borda Majority Count - to a set of about 7000 data, obtained from the LISS (Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences) panel and compared the different results for the parliament in the Netherlands. In three different waves, about 7000 voters have given their evaluation of eleven different parties in terms of the natural number grades 10 till 0.