



# Chaotic Elections! A Mathematician Looks at Voting

*Donald G. Saari*

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What does the 2000 U.S. presidential election have in common with selecting a textbook for a calculus course in your department? Was Ralph Nader's influence on the election of George W. Bush greater than the now-famous chads? In *Chaotic Elections!*, Don Saari analyzes these questions, placing them in the larger context of voting systems in general. His analysis shows that the fundamental problems with the 2000 presidential election are not with the courts, recounts, or defective ballots, but are caused by the very way Americans vote for president.

This expository book shows how mathematics can help to identify and characterize a disturbingly large number of paradoxical situations that result from the choice of a voting procedure. Moreover, rather than being able to dismiss them as anomalies, the likelihood of a dubious election result is surprisingly large. These consequences indicate that election outcomes--whether for president, the site of the next Olympics, the chair of a university department, or a prize winner--can differ from what the voters really wanted. They show that by using an inadequate voting procedure, we can, inadvertently, choose badly. To add to the difficulties, it turns out that the mathematical structures of voting admit several strategic opportunities, which are described.

Finally, mathematics also helps identify positive results: By using mathematical symmetries, we can identify what the phrase "what the voters really want" might mean and obtain a unique voting method that satisfies these conditions.

Saari's book should be required reading for anyone who wants to understand not only what happened in the presidential election of 2000, but also how we can avoid similar problems from appearing anytime any group is making a choice using a voting procedure. Reading this book requires little more than high school mathematics and an interest in how the apparently simple situation of voting can lead to surprising paradoxes.

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