League of Women Voters® of Portland

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Yes on Measure 26-228 - More Votes Needed to Win and More Responsive

Opponents of Measure 26-228 claim that the 25 percent (%)+1 election threshold for each of three winners in each of the four multi-member districts will favor incumbents or make it too easy for fringe candidates to win. But these claims do not hold up when you ask a basic question: 25% of how many votes?

First, though, what is an election threshold and why is it 25%+1 for what is proposed in Measure 26-228? An election threshold is the number of votes needed for a candidate to win. In a multi-member district that will send three people to the city council, the election threshold is 25%+1. This is because once three candidates reach that votes-to-win number, there are not enough other votes for any other candidate to meet that threshold. In a single-member district the election threshold is the more familiar 50%+1, but just because the percentage is higher does not mean that the votes-to-win number is always higher.

Indeed, check out the left side of the table for actual votes-to-win numbers for different size city councils in multi-member versus single-member districts. The 360,000 total votes* cast number in the second column is rounded from 360,683 mayoral votes cast in November 2020. Dividing 360,000 by the number of districts indicates the votes cast per district. In Measure 26-228 there are four districts with 90,000 votes cast and multiplying 90,000 by the election threshold of 25%+1 (third column) results in 22,501 votes-to-win (fourth column). But the total votes cast per district is 30,000 in each of twelve single member districts and when the 50%+1 election threshold calculation is made for such districts, the result is 15,001 votes-to-win. This is 7,500 votes fewer than what would occur under Measure 26-228. It isn't until you get to a council size of eight people that the votes-to-win number matches the 22,501 votes-to-win achieved via four multi-member districts. It is only when the council size is seven members or fewer is the votes-to-win number higher than what would occur under Measure 26-228.

Council Size/Multi-Member vs Single-Member Districts	Votes-to-Win Calculations			Representation Differentials	
	Total votes cast*/district #	Election Threshold	Votes-to-Win Number	Portlanders** per Council Member	Differential from 12 member Council
12 councilors – 3 from 4 districts=M 26-228	360,000/4= 90,000	25%+1	22,501	55,000	
12 councilors from 12 single-member districts	360,000/12= 30,000	50%+1	15,001	55,000	
8 councilors from 8 single-member districts	360,000/8= 45,000	50%+1	22,501	82,500	50% more residents per councilor
7 councilors from 7 single-member districts	360,000/7= 51,429	50%+1	25,715	94,286	71% more residents per councilor

But look at the right side of the table to see how representation is adversely affected for council sizes lower than twelve. Council members must be responsive to all Portlanders and the population figure used is 660,000**. This is rounded from the latest population estimate of 658,773 from Portland State University. The Portlanders-per-council-member number reflects dividing 660,000 residents by the size of the council. There are 55,000 Portlanders-per-council-member when the council size is twelve. But when the council size is smaller, the number of Portlanders-per-council-member increases. The bottom right column shows that a council with seven members would result in 71% more residents per councilor compared to the twelve member council in Measure 26-228.

The bottom line: Measure 26-228's four multi-member districts and a council with twelve members results in a 25%+1 election threshold that is challenging to meet and a more representative council.

See this link for more info on advantages of multi-member districts over single-member districts: https://lwvpdx.org/top-ten-reasons-we-support-charter-reform/