Rocking the Vote

by Chris Aylott

Sometimes winning a political conflict is more about building alliances and influence than mashing your opponent into a bloody pulp. *Dynasties and Demagogues* – the forthcoming 160-page toolkit from Atlas Games detailing political D20 System campaigns – features rules for rocking the vote of small governance bodies like juries, ruling councils, and guilds. Even when a single powerful figure such as a monarch or general makes the final decision, that authority often takes into account the results of votes made by an advisory body or a few powerful individuals. Win the vote, and you win the Caesar's approval as well.

Individual voting is handled by a mixture of roleplaying and strategy. The first order of business is to define the issue. What do the PCs hope to accomplish, and how many minds do they have to change to do it? There's no reason to play through any voting situation in which the PCs are certain to win. That doesn't mean the characters shouldn't have the occasional easy victory, but the details of those votes aren't very interesting. If the PCs are going to have no trouble enacting trade sanctions against the elves, ask for a quick skill check and declare the matter dealt with.

This voting system exists for those situations where the PCs are behind and need to build a winning position. They may not have started out behind in the vote – perhaps a charismatic rival has undermined a once-commanding majority – but the action shouldn't start until the characters are in a position where they will be defeated if they don't act. Skip the preliminaries; play the main event.

SETTING UP THE SITUATION

With this in mind, decide what the issue is, how many voters are involved, and what constitutes a winning majority. This system works best with a dozen

or fewer voters – the number of members on a typical city council – though it can be stretched to two dozen. Most winning majorities are more than half the votes or (for grave matters) more than two-thirds the vote. On rare occasions, an issue is so important that it requires a unanimous vote. The exact percent that indicates a majority is mostly flavor text, however – what's important is the number of votes the PCs need to get, not the number of votes they have.

To randomly determine how many votes the PCs have to get, roll 1d6. The result is how many voters they have to convince to gain a winning majority, whatever that percent is. If there are 4 to 6 voters, roll 1d3. If there are 2 to 3 voters, quit fooling around with the individual vote rules and use Political Debates rules given in *Dynasties and Demagogues*.

The next step is to determine the specifics about the individuals involved in the vote. Each voter needs a name, an attitude, a Shift Resistance, and a leverage point. Important voters can be given character sheets and developed in as much detail as you like – an easy task if they're already regular characters in the campaign. Other voters need little more than a name like "Third Councilor on the Left."

As always, any player character participating in the vote has full control over his opinions and actions. Do not develop attitudes, Shift Resistances, leverage points for player characters, and don't count the PC as a vote the other characters have to win.

VOTERS AND THEIR ATTITUDES

To determine an attitude for each voter NPC, roll a d8 or choose an attitude from the ones listed on the Voter

Attitudes table. When dealing with well-established and familiar NPCs, you should choose the attitude based on the NPC's previous interactions with the player characters.

After determining the attitude of each voter, rank them in order from Reactionary to Revolutionary and chooses which voters oppose the player characters. If the player characters' position involves changing the status quo, then the voters opposed to the PCs are the ones on the Reactionary end of the scale. If the player characters' goal involves preventing change to the status quo, then the voters opposed to the PCs are on the Revolutionary end of the scale.

If you want a Revolutionary or Progressive to oppose the PCs' attempt to change the status quo – perhaps because that voter is a personal enemy or rival of a PC – go right ahead. As long as the number of voters opposed to the PCs remains the same, it doesn't matter which voters are chosen to oppose the PCs. Note that it's much easier for the PCs to win over like-minded voters than voters on the other end of the political scale.

VOTER SHIFT RESISTANCES

Attitude is only the first important factor in a voter's decision. The next important factor is Shift Resistance, or how hard that voter is to influence politically.

If the voter has a character sheet, that voter's Shift Resistance equals her Will saving throw total + 10 + the Shift Resistance modifier from the Voter Attitudes table above. If the voter does not have a character sheet, determine the voter's Shift Resistance with the

VOTER ATTITUDES TABLE

Roll d8	Attitude	Shift Resistance Modifier
1	Reactionary	+6 if the PCs advocate change, +0 if the PCs advocate the status quo
2-3	Conservative	+4 if the PCs advocate change, –2 if the PCs advocate the status quo
4-5	Moderate	+0
6-7	Progressive	–2 if the PCs advocate change, +4 if the PCs advocate the status quo
8	Revolutionary	+0 if the PCs advocate change, +6 if the PCs advocate the status quo

Shift Resistance table below. To use this table, choose an experience level for the voter. Then roll the indicated dice and add the Shift Resistance bonus from the Voter Attitudes table above to calculate that voter's Shift Resistance.

Pay attention to the average level of the PCs while setting the experience levels of the voters. Low-level voters will little challenge to high-level PCs, and high-level voters are hard for low-level PCs to sway. Either result can be fun and appropriate for the game, but neither situation should be entered into lightly.

LEVERAGE POINTS

The leverage point indicates the idea or promise that is most likely to change a particular voter's opinion in the favor of the player characters. This is secret at first, but if the characters can figure out the leverage point (or guess it correctly) they may gain a substantial edge in gaining that character's vote.

Determine a leverage point for each voter NPC by rolling a d12 or choosing an attitude from the ones listed on the Leverage Points table. When dealing with well-established and familiar NPCs, choose the attitude based on the NPC's previous interactions with the player characters.

WINNING VOTES AND INFLUENCING PEOPLE

After the voters have been detailed, the player characters may try to gain their votes with a series of influence attempts. Depending on the situation, each attempt may take minutes, hours, days, or weeks. No

SHIFT RESISTANCE TABLE

Voter Experience	Typical Levels	Roll
Novice or Villager	1st – 5th Level	1d4+13
Average or Townsman	5th –10th Level	1d6+16
Expert or City Leader	11th – 15th Level	1d6+22
Master or National Leader	16th – 20th Level	1d8+28

LEVERAGE POINTS TABLE

Roll d12	Leverage Point	Game Effect
1-3	Ambition	+2 bonus to influence attempts that promise political gain to the voter
4-6	Constituency	+2 bonus to influence attempts to promise benefits for the people the voter represents or takes care of
7-9	None	no bonus
10	Greed	+4 bonus to influence attempts that promise monetary gain to the voter
11	Hate	+4 bonus to influence attempts that promise harm to the specific thing (GM chooses) the voter hates
12	Idealism	+2 bonus to influence attempts that show how supporting the player's position promotes the common good

matter how long each individual attempt is, the characters have only a few opportunities to swing the vote their way. To determine the number of attempts the characters may make to influence the voters, the GM rolls 1d4 and adds the number of voters that the characters must influence.

Each attempt to influence a voter can be roleplayed in detail or played as a skill check. A detailed influence attempt can include deal-making, bribes, threats, magic, or any other means of influence the players can imagine. A single influence attempt can easily become a complete adventure.

If the attempt is not played out in detail, one player character must make a skill check. (Each tactic discussed below includes some suggestions for the most appropriate skill to use.) The DC of the skill check is equal to the Shift Resistance of the voter. If the PC succeeds, that voter joins that PC's side and votes according to the character's wishes. If the PC fails, the voter is unaffected.

Other characters may interfere with the PC's attempt to influence the voter. Any character that interferes also makes a skill check. (Appropriate skills are also suggested below.) The PC making the skill check to influence the voter must beat any interfering skill checks as well as the Shift Resistance of the voter.

Example: Tarlan the Elder has a Shift Resistance of 27. Morag Swift-Tongue proposes a lucrative deal to Tarlan and gets a 29 on his Diplomacy check. Tarlan decides to vote for Morag's proposal to outlaw gnomes.

Morag then goes to secure the vote of Delbar Covet-Gold, who also has a Shift Resistance of 27. Morag appeals to Delbar's well-known love of gold – getting a +2 bonus to his skill check in the process from Delbar's leverage point of "greedy" – and gets a 28 on his Diplomacy check. During the negotiations, however, Delbar is cornered by Morag's political rival, Valdor the Easily Angered. Valdor threatens Delbar and gets a 30 on his Intimidation roll.

Morag has beaten Delbar's Shift Resistance but not Valdor's Intimidation check, so Delbar decides the safest course of action is to turn down Morag's offer and vote against the new law.

After the PCs have made all their attempts, count the votes in their favor. If enough voters have changed sides, they win!

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

The GM should reward successful influence attempts with experience points. The experience points for any individual voter who is a full-fledged NPC – in other words, a regular character in the campaign who has a detailed set of game statistics – is figured according to that character's challenge rating.

Individual voters who are not full-fledged non-player characters do not count for a reward. However, the player characters do receive an experience reward if they win the vote. The EL of the reward is equal to the average level of the party. If the PCs had to influence more than four individual voters, including full-fledged NPCs, the reward is doubled.

TACTICS

A variety of tactics that players can use to influence voters are listed below.

NEGOTIATION

The most basic technique for influencing a voter is to talk the issues out and find common ground. The player characters may be able to change a voter's mind by offering political concessions, personal rewards, or a sympathetic ear.

If the voter is a regular character in the campaign, the PCs may already know what that character's goals are. If not, they can find out by researching the voter's attitude and leverage point. Most voters value their power, and do not sell it cheaply, so the PCs must be ready to make major concessions if they follow the route of negotiation. If the characters' offer doesn't make them hesitate, they're probably not offering enough.

Sometimes getting access to the voter is more difficult than winning an agreement. To get an opportunity to talk, the PCs may have to crash parties and meetings, bribe secretaries, sneak past guards, or even kidnap the voter. Overcoming obstacles like

these can inspire many adventures.

Most negotiations use the Diplomacy skill. Each major concession the PCs make to the voter gives them a +2 bonus on the skill check. The leverage point is a particular example of this kind of concession.

DECEPTION

Not all negotiations are in good faith. Political figures sometimes make promises they never intend to keep, but it's a dangerous practice. Most people in positions of power have long memories. They don't forgive trickery lightly, and they tell their allies about it.

A more effective tactic is to spread disinformation that indirectly influences a voter. An ambitious councilman who thinks he's the mayor's handpicked successor might be quick to support a policy he thinks the mayor supports. The mayor may hate the councilman, the policy, or both, but supporters of the policy can profit from helping the councilman fool himself.

Deception attempts use the Bluff skill, but deceiving an experienced political character is difficult. The target voter's Shift Resistance is increased by +4 if the PCs use false promises or insincere negotiations.

THREATS

Threats can influence a voter spectacularly well or lead to disaster. You can get a political figure to do almost anything if you find out what she cares about and prove that you can destroy it or take it away from her. Slip up once, though, and you've got an angry and powerful opponent who will stop at nothing to protect herself and exact revenge.

To make a credible threat against a voter, the PCs must first find out what that voter values most. This is usually family, wealth, position, or a prized possession. The player characters must then prove to the voter that this valued possession is vulnerable, without exposing their plans to other voters or the law. Any failure can lead to vicious reprisals.

Threat attempts use the Intimidation skill. The player characters must have a plan that accounts for all four of the criteria listed above – identifying the valuable, proving it's vulnerable, avoiding other voters, and

avoiding the law. The target voter's Shift Resistance is increased by +2 for each item the characters fail to address. If the PCs fail at the skill check, they suffer a –4 penalty to all future attempts to influence this voter.

GATHERING INFORMATION

Sometimes the PCs know a lot about the voters they're trying to influence. When they don't, however, they need to do research.

There are a many ways for player characters to learn more about the political landscape. Mentors and retired political figures can provide valuable insight and introductions. Secretaries and other underlings usually pay close attention to what their betters are doing, and even the man on the street can sometimes supply useful insight.

Gathering information counts as an influence attempt. Learning basic facts like which voters support a particular issue does not require a skill check, though. Learning the attitude and leverage point of a particular voter requires a Gather Information skill check (DC 15). The PCs can gain information on more than one voter at once; each additional voter raises the DC of the skill check by +3. The PCs can also gain specialized information about a voter, such as the ally most likely to influence her. This also raises the DC of the skill check by +3.

ENLISTING ALLIES

Sometimes the best thing you can do for your case is to ask somebody else to make it. This can be a powerful ally of the PCs or a trusted friend of the voter. Senior advisors, sympathetic nobles, religious leaders, and idealistic clerks are all possibilities. Whoever the ally is, he is presumably easier to convince of the rightness of the case than the voter herself is.

The characters must have a specific ally in mind to attempt this tactic. The GM must decide if the ally has enough of a connection with the voter to influence her; if not, the PCs may want to use the gather information tactic to find a more suitable ally.

If the characters enlist an ally with a reasonable chance of influencing the targeted voter, they receive

a +4 bonus to their skill check. However, enlisting an ally uses up two influence attempts instead of one.

ENLISTING PUBLIC SUPPORT

The masses can be a powerful ally. Even dictators must pay attention to public opinion, and many politicians depend on the support of the people. If the PCs can get the masses on their side, winning support among the decision-makers becomes much easier.

Winning over public opinion takes time and planning. It usually takes days or weeks to build support through speeches and meetings, so there are many votes where this tactic is useless. This tactic is often played out as a complete adventure or a political debate.

Enlisting public support counts as an influence attempt. Each player character may make a Perform (oratory) check (DC 12). The PCs receive a +1 bonus on their next two influence attempts for each character that succeeds.

COMING SOON ...

Look for *Dynasties and Demagogues*, coming in March from Atlas Games, for additional rules on faction voting for governance bodies like a Roman senate or Viking thing, elections involving thousands of voters, and conducting in-depth political debates. *Dynasties and Demagogues* also includes new spells like *scryjack*, which lets you take control of a scrying spell, magic items like the tiny surveillance device called the *fly on the wall*, feats like Inspire Frenzy, and prestige classes that allow characters to become professional bodyguards, conspiracy leaders, information mages, and even rise to a position of power equal to that of the true demagogue. With *Dynasties and Demagogues*, players can make history of their own by manipulating the hidden rules of political intrigue and power brokering.

The Sourcebook of Political Intrigue
− by Chris Aylott −