

## Knowledge Synthesis Methods

### 8. Vote-counting<sup>1</sup>

#### Summary of method

A simple tool used to synthesise findings from multiple studies, by counting the numbers of studies finding positive and negative results. This method is based only on the direction and sometimes significance of the result, and does not critically appraise or differentially weight the studies. Vote counting is limited to answering the question “is there any evidence of an effect?”

There are no formal reporting requirements.

*Vote-counting should be avoided whenever possible.* It makes it impossible to examine non-significant trends that are only seen to be significant when assessed at a sufficient level of replication across multiple studies. It also treats all studies as having the same level of reliability. It might be considered as a last resort in situations when standard meta-analytical methods cannot be applied (such as when there is no consistent outcome measure).

#### Key references

Higgins JPT, Green S (editors). *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions Version 5.1.0 [updated March 2011]*. The Cochrane Collaboration, 2011. Available from [www.handbook.cochrane.org](http://www.handbook.cochrane.org). Vote counting is described in section 9.4.11.

#### Examples of application

As this is not a recommended knowledge synthesis method, we do not highlight examples of use in policy.

#### Vote counting

Cost	Less than a week FTE
Time required	A few days, if data available
Repeatability	Low
Transparency	Low

<sup>1</sup> A guidance note from Dicks LV, Haddaway N, Hernández-Morcillo M, Mattsson B, Randall N, Failler P, Ferretti J, Livoreil B, Saarikoski H, Santamaria L, Rodela R, Velizarova E, and Wittmer H. (2017). *Knowledge synthesis for environmental decisions: an evaluation of existing methods, and guidance for their selection, use and development – a report from the EKLIPSE project.*

Risk of bias	High
Scale (or level of detail)	Independent of scale (any)
Capacity for participation	None
Data demand	High
Types of knowledge	Scientific/technical, explicit
Types of output	Often visualised as charts with relative numbers of studies showing positive and negative effects
Specific expertise required	Basic scientific understanding

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### Strengths

Quick, but will depend on what comes before (see meta-analysis)

### Weaknesses

Very high risk of bias

Very low scientific rigour: ignores magnitude of effect, ignores trends in non-significant studies, doesn't critically appraise or weight studies

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