

INSTANT RUNOFF/RANKED CHOICE VOTING

(For purposes of this summary, I am assuming that all candidates are ranked and all votes are allocated, with the candidate with the least votes being dropped, those votes reallocated, then if still no majority winner, then the second lowest candidate's votes are reallocated and so on until a candidate receives a majority. There are variations on this system – e.g. voters votes only for a certain number of candidates (e.g. 3) regardless of the number in the race; or votes are only reallocated once – to the top two candidates to see if there is a majority winner). Maine and Portland are plurality jurisdiction in which the person with the majority of the votes cast is the winner even if that is less than 50% in a multiple candidate field. Portland does NOT have either primary or runoff elections.

PROS

CONS

Produces a majority winner with closer expression of majority viewpoint	Does not reflect actual majority winner as in a runoff election; difference between a candidate winning a majority of the vote as the elector's first choice, than winning with a majority of first, second, and third choices.
Ends “spoiler” candidate(s)	Difficult and confusing ballot and method to of voting
No-one “wastes” their vote by voting for a non-viable candidate only	Unless that's the <u>only</u> candidate they support
Encourages turnout	Empirical evidence?
Encourages less negative campaigns	Empirical evidence?
Weakens two party system	Strengthens two party system (this argument has been made both ways – not clear yet what its impact may be)
Ends need for primary elections since several candidates from same party can be on the ballot	May reduce citizen participation in overall political process by eliminating primaries which may energize party “faithful”
Ends need for run-off election, saving costs	Only in jurisdiction which uses run-off elections
Reduces influence of money in politics by reducing number of elections	Empirical evidence? More money may be needed if trying to be heard over multiple candidates
Allows military/overseas voters to “participate” in virtual runoff election when there would not otherwise be that opportunity (Louisiana, South Carolina and Arkansas all use IRV for overseas military voters).	Relevant only if runoffs are used; not relevant in plurality elections
Ends “gaming” of political races	In elections with more than two candidates, voters may not know whether they are helping or hurting the cause of their favored candidate in their rankings

	May increase reliance on name recognition in field of multiple candidates
	Cost – New machines, new software, additional poll workers to help explain method (at least initially); voter education campaign needed. No offsetting savings if not using primary or runoff elections.
True now in cases needing recounts	Results not “instant” if must hand count or in case of a hand recount
Needs more research, but Minnesota Supreme Court rejected this argument in regard to IRV in June 2009	Unconstitutional – violates one person/one vote rule

WHO USES IRV?

Q: Where is IRV used?

A: Many places. Ireland uses IRV to elect its president, Australia to elect its House of Representatives, and London to elect its mayor. In the U.S., San Francisco, CA, Burlington, VT, and Cary NC are examples of communities that use IRV to elect their major city offices such as mayor. Many major universities use IRV for their student government elections and the American Political Science Association to elect its president. Literally hundreds of jurisdictions, organizations and corporations use IRV to elect leaders.

In use in the United States:

U.S. governments currently using IRV:

- Arkansas (adopted 2005, first used 2006; overseas voters in runoffs)
- Aspen, CO (adopted 2007, first used 2009; mayor and multi-seat variation for city council)
- Burlington, VT (adopted 2005, first used 2006; mayoral elections)
- Hendersonville, North Carolina (adopted 2007 and 2009 as pilot; multi-seat variations for city council)
- Louisiana (adopted and first used 1990s; overseas and military voters in federal and state runoffs)
- Pierce County, WA (adopted 2006, first used 2008; county executive, county council and most other county offices)
- San Francisco, CA (adopted 2002, first used 2004; mayor, Board of Supervisors and most city offices)
- South Carolina (adopted and first used 2006; overseas voters in federal and state runoffs)
- Takoma Park, MD (adopted 2006, first used 2007; mayor and city council)

Upcoming (as of March 2009) implementations:

- Berkeley, CA (adopted 2004; scheduled for November 2010 for mayor and city council)

- Memphis, TN (adopted 2008; scheduled for 2011 for mayor and several other city offices)
- Minneapolis, MN (adopted 2006; scheduled for November 2009 for mayor and city council)
- Oakland, CA (adopted 2006; scheduled for November 2010 for mayor and city council)
- Springfield, IL (adopted 2007; scheduled for November 2011 for overseas voters)
- Telluride, CO (adopted 2008; scheduled for November 2011 for mayoral elections)

Advisory, Option or Contingent Measure in the United States:

- Ferndale, MI (adopted 2004)
- Santa Clara County, CA (adopted 1998)
- San Leandro, CA (adopted 2000)
- Santa Fe, NM (adopted 2008)
- Sarasota, FL (adopted 2007)
- Vancouver, WA (adopted 1999)

*Ann Arbor (MI), New York (NY), Yonkers (NY) and Cary (NC) have used IRV in the past.

**Cambridge (MA) uses a similar ranked voting system for its city council elections, but it is the choice voting method of proportional voting where each of the nine winners needs a little more than 10% of the vote. Davis (CA) passed an advisory measure in 2006 in favor of this system.

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