



# Improving Elections with Instant Runoff Voting

**Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)** - Used for both government and private elections around the United States and the world, *instant runoff voting* is a simple election process used to avoid the expense, difficulties and shortcomings of runoff elections. Compared to the traditional "delayed" runoff, IRV saves taxpayers money, cuts the costs of running campaigns, elects public officials with higher voter turnout and encourages candidates to run less negative campaigns.

## How instant runoff voting works:

- **First round of counting:** The **voters rank their preferred candidate first and may also rank additional choices (second, third, etc.)**. In the first round of counting, the voters' #1 choices are tallied. A candidate who receives enough first choices to win outright (typically a majority) is declared the winner. However, other candidates may have enough support to require a runoff – *just as in traditional runoff systems*.
- **Second round:** If no one achieves a clear victory, **the runoff occurs instantly**. The candidate with the fewest votes is removed and the votes made for that candidate are redistributed using voters' second choices. Other voters' top choices remain the same. The redistributed votes are added to the counts of the candidates still in competition. The process is repeated until one candidate has majority support.

## The benefits:

Instant runoff voting (IRV) would do everything the current runoff system does to ensure that the winner has popular support – but it does it in one election rather than two.

- Saves localities, taxpayers and candidates money by holding only one election.
- Ensures higher voter turnout than when voters are asked to return for a second, runoff election.
- Eases the administrative burden on election officials who only have to run one election, not two.
- Discourages negative campaigning because victories may require candidates to be the second or third choices of other candidates' supporters.

## Where instant runoff voting is used:

- California: San Francisco started running IRV with a successful election in November 2004. By using IRV, the City expects to save at least \$15 million over the coming decade.
- Utah: Since 2002, the Utah Republican Party has used IRV at its state conventions for nominating candidates for congressional and statewide offices.
- Vermont: In May 2005 Gov. Douglas (R) signed a bill to allow Burlington to use IRV in mayoral elections in 2006, as approved by city voters by a two-to-one margin in 2005.
- Louisiana: More than 10,000 overseas and out-of-state military voters received IRV ballots in 2004. The system has been a success. Since, Arkansas and South Carolina have passed similar laws.
- Washington State: In April 2005 Gov. Gregoire (D) signed a bill that gained bipartisan support in the legislature to allowing IRV for a pilot program in three major cities.
- Universities: Many colleges and universities use IRV for student elections, including Wake Forest, William and Mary, Princeton, Rice, University of Washington, Duke, UC Berkeley and UC Davis.
- Businesses and Organizations: Many groups and corporations use IRV to elect their board of directors.
- Sports Awards: Even the winners the Heisman Trophy are picked by a ranked voting system.



# Talking Points: Majority Rule, Without a Separate Election

Q: What is instant runoff voting?

*"Instant runoff voting (IRV) means **better elections**."*

- You rank candidates in the order you like them, so if your top choice doesn't win, your vote goes to your next choice, instead of being "wasted."
- If no one has a majority on the first count, the least-popular candidate is knocked off and those voters' next choice counts instead. This repeats until one candidate earns a majority.

Q: What's the problem with the way we do it now?

*"Right now our elections can't guarantee majority rule."*

- The more candidates run, the fewer votes you need to win. This means a small minority of voters can decide the election for everyone else.

*"Runoffs are a waste of time and money."*

- Runoffs are supposed to produce a candidate with a higher level of support. In practice, voter turnout dwindles when second elections are held, actually giving us a candidate elected by fewer people. Given the cost and effort of holding a runoff, we need a better way.

Q: How does it strengthen democracy?

*"It guarantees majority support without runoffs."*

- Every vote counts equally and no vote is "wasted" or "spoiled."

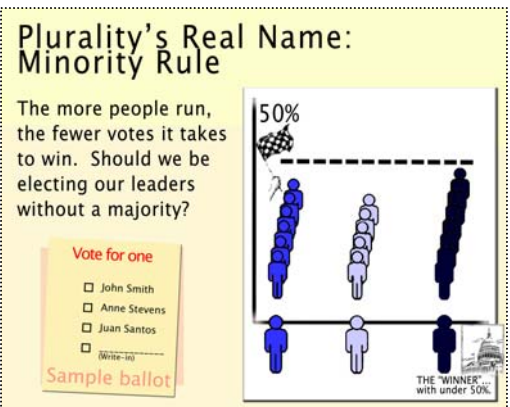
*"Everyone wins with instant runoff voting."*

- **Voters win.** You can vote for the candidate you really believe in, without worrying about throwing your vote away.
- **Taxpayers win.** IRV stops us from wasting money on expensive, ineffective runoffs.
- **Candidates win.** We will have less negative campaigning, since candidates want their opponents' voters to rank them #2.
- **America wins.** IRV restores faith in democracy by accommodating voter choice and inspiring better candidates to run for office.

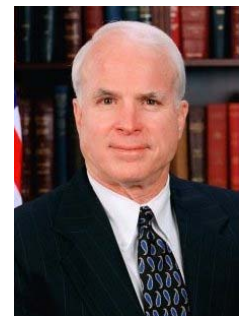
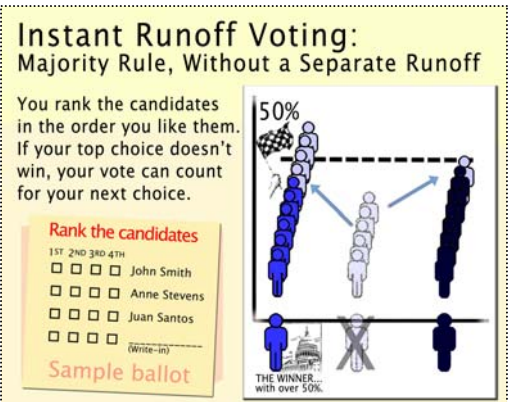
Q: Who supports IRV?

*"Leaders from across the political spectrum support it, from **John McCain** to **Barack Obama**."*

- Also, voters nationwide chose IRV. Cities like San Francisco CA, Burlington VT and Takoma Park, MD. Many countries and U.S. colleges use it as well!



VS.





## Important Election Terminology

A very important aspect of discussing election and voting reform is understanding the concepts used.

### Useful terms to understand:

- **Plurality:** Simply put, the most votes. Many officials are elected by receiving a plurality, as long as they have more votes than anyone else. These elections are also called **"winner-take-all."**
- **Minority Rule:** In winner-take-all elections, candidates often have less than 50% support. Thus, a majority of voters would have actually preferred other candidates. In crowded elections winners may only represent a sliver of the electorate. Plurality elections allow a political minority to have a monopoly on power.
- **Runoff:** A round of elections, typically between two candidates that seeks to ensure majority support for one of the candidates. Usually the candidates are the two individuals who received the most votes during the first round of voting, but neither reached 50%.
- **The "Spoiler" Effect:** When two like-minded candidates split their base of support, allowing a less desired candidate to win the race. This can often take place in winner-take-all elections. A contemporary case would be the 2000 Florida race, when Ralph Nader drew enough votes from the political left to give Bush the margin of victory over Gore. IRV would use 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and subsequent choices to alleviate the problems caused by "vote-splitting" and "spoilers."
- **Ranked voting:** A system in which voters indicate their choices using ranks for candidates (i.e. first, second, third, etc.) There are a number of types of ranked voting, which includes IRV.
- **Instant Runoff Voting (IRV):** Refers specifically to the voting process for electing a single individual to a position, such as an executive office or single legislative seat. Voters rank their candidates and runoffs are simulated until one candidate has majority support.
- **Rounds:** Refers to the stages of vote-counting in IRV. When a last-place candidate is eliminated and these votes **redistributed** a majority is sought. If there is no majority, a new round occurs.
- **Exhausted ballot:** In some IRV elections voters only rank 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, while there may be more than three candidates. A ballot is "exhausted" when all candidates on it have been eliminated.
- **IRV-ready:** Voting equipment that is capable of running an IRV election without needing retrofitting or reprogramming. Versatile equipment is the ideal for new voting equipment today.
- **Charter:** The primary document that outlines how cities and counties work. Importantly, they include the procedure for elections within that jurisdiction. In order to implement IRV there must be a **charter amendment** or **charter reform**. Some cities have charter review commissions or panels that investigate possible additions or changes.
- **Ballot initiative:** a legal amendment to a state or city's law that is initiated by citizens' signatures. Not all states or cities allow citizens sponsored amendments. Those that do also have varying numbers of signatures needed to qualify the initiative.
- **Single-member district:** An elected office that corresponds to a single person. Single-member districts are, for example, a mayor, governor or legislator who is the only person that represents their district. These are offices which would use IRV.
- **Multi-member district:** An elected office that has more than one person filling seats and representing constituents. Common examples would be school boards or city councils, where they do not have specific districts they represent. Multi-member districts often use plurality voting.
- **Open primary:** A primary election in which voters can choose which party's primary they wish to vote in.
- **Closed primary:** A primary election in which voters may only vote in the primary that corresponds to their registered party. (Only registered Republicans vote in the Republican primary, etc.)

# WARD 8

## TEST BALLOT - ANNUAL CITY MEETING

### BURLINGTON, VERMONT

### MARCH 7, 2006

- A. To vote, fill in the OVAL ☐ to the right of the candidate of your choice like this ☒.
- B. To vote for a person whose name is not printed on the ballot, write-in the name in the space provided and fill in the oval.
- C. Follow the special instructions for the mayoral election.
- D. If you wrongly mark, tear or spoil the ballot, return it and get another.

### For MAYOR

Three-Year Term

*Special instructions: Rank candidates for mayor in order of choice.*

- Fill in the number 1 oval ☐ to the right of your 1st choice candidate.
- You may rank as many or as few candidates as you wish.
- Fill in the number 2 oval ☐ to the right of your 2nd choice candidate.
- Fill in the number 3 oval ☐ to the right of your 3rd choice, and so on.
- Fill in no more than one oval per column.
- Fill in no more than one oval per candidate.

(Rank candidates in order of choice)

	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice	4th Choice	5th Choice	6th Choice
<b>Hugh Barrows</b> 123 Main Street      REPUBLICAN	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Paula Cooper</b> 123 Main Street      INDEPENDENT	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Michelle Ferengetti-Smith</b> 123 Main Street      DEMOCRATIC	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Jeff Lopez</b> 123 Main Street      PROGRESSIVE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>David L. Morrison</b> 123 Main Street      GREEN	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Faye Wong</b> 123 Main Street      LIBERTARIAN	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Write-in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

No more than one oval per column    No more than one oval per candidate

### For SCHOOL COMMISSIONER

Two-Year Term

(Vote for Not More Than ONE)

<b>ROBERT LAMSON</b> 123 Main Street	<input type="radio"/>
<b>SHEILA PORTER</b> 123 Main Street	<input type="radio"/>
Write-in	<input type="radio"/>

### For WARD CLERK

Two-Year Term

(Vote for Not More Than ONE)

<b>CYNTHIA KELLY</b> 123 Main Street      REPUBLICAN	<input type="radio"/>
<b>JASON M. RICHARDSON</b> 123 Main Street      PROGRESSIVE	<input type="radio"/>
Write-in	<input type="radio"/>

### For INSPECTOR OF ELECTION

Three-Year Term

(Vote for Not More Than ONE)

<b>JOSE MARTINEZ</b> 123 Main Street      INDEPENDENT	<input type="radio"/>
<b>NIKOLAI CHERTOFF</b> 123 Main Street      DEMOCRATIC	<input type="radio"/>
Write-in	<input type="radio"/>

### For CITY COUNCILOR

Two-Year Term

(Vote for Not More Than ONE)

<b>CYNTHIA KELLY</b> 123 Main Street      DEMOCRATIC	<input type="radio"/>
<b>JASON M. RICHARDSON</b> 123 Main Street      REPUBLICAN	<input type="radio"/>
Write-in	<input type="radio"/>

### For INSPECTOR OF ELECTION

One-Year Term

(Vote for Not More Than ONE)

<b>LAURIE LENTZ</b> 123 Main Street      INDEPENDENT	<input type="radio"/>
Write-in	<input type="radio"/>

**Ballot Continued on Back**  
**Vote BOTH Sides**



# Eight Steps to IR *Victory*

## Steps 1–4

Welcome to the movement for free and fair elections! We're excited to have you. IRVictory can be yours...just take these basic steps. Here's what we've learned:

### **Step 1: The Foundation of an IR*Victory***

To lead a successful reform campaign, you must organize yourself and your thoughts; gather basic information; build the argument for reform; prepare to overcome legal and logistical obstacles; and design your campaign strategy. Find relevant data from your local elections website or by contacting a city or county clerk or relevant administrator. Studying the problems will help you to sell the benefits of reform. Understanding how your solution would work and be implemented will help you pre-empt skeptics' criticisms. Developing a campaign strategy, finally, will give you the ultimate roadmap to victory.

### **Step 2: Sell the Solution**

Once you have the base of research and knowledge needed to discuss electoral reform, you must develop a plan to sell the solution, and then carry that plan out. You must target your audience, develop your message, and choose your tactics. Targeting your audience helps to reveal who most needs to hear your message. Developing a message is about determining what to say, and how best to say it. Choosing your tactics involves deciding how you can most effectively speak to your target audiences. Tactics include presenting to local organizations, canvassing door-to-door or in public events, conducting sample elections, coordinating letters-to-the-editor and launching a website.

### **Step 3: Build Models**

Your target community needs to understand that a new voting system is not untested or radical. A number of cities and nations use "alternative" voting methods; still, it is always helpful to have local examples to breed familiarity and acceptance of reform. One way to do this is to convince local organizations – such as a church board, union committee, school group, PTA, neighborhood association, local party committee, or a non-profit – to adopt your system for their board or leadership elections. Around the country, additionally, over forty student government elections have moved to ranked and/or proportional voting. These reforms help build trusted models for you to point to in a local campaign.

### **Step 4: Get Endorsed**

Another key step toward building momentum and legitimacy for improved voting systems is to gain an official recommendation for their use in your community. If your city, county, college or target reform unit forms a committee to investigate reform, attempt to join it. If you cannot, take advantage of their investigation by highlighting the problems within the current system. Ask to make a presentation or provide educational materials to the commission. Be persistent. If your government does not use these types of commissions, you may still be able to persuade the governing body to create a committee to study and issue recommendations for improving elections.





## Eight Steps to IR *Victory*

### Steps 5–8

#### **Step 5: Build Political Support**

Local leaders and elected officials serve as either the gatekeepers to electoral reforms, or as influential allies. As a result, it is usually critical to try and build support amongst this key group of people, and to keep consistent constituent pressure on them. At this stage, all of the prior work comes in handy. A core group of supporters, armed with extensive research and examples from the community, along with the recommendation of an official body can go a long way towards persuading political leaders to support improved voting systems. Part of this process, however, should involve doing active outreach to the local media through Op-Eds and letters to the editor.

#### **Step 6: Pass Legislation**

If the above steps have been taken, it may be time to seek legislative action. The best way to achieve this is to find governing body members who are willing to sponsor legislation to have the government adopt it as its method of election. Your sponsors can help you identify how best to persuade the other policy-makers, as well as to identify potential obstacles to reform and counter-arguments that are likely to be presented. Should the group decline to pass the reform, ask your sponsors to take the matter directly to the voters by putting the reform on the ballot. Public perception is aided greatly when these elected officials themselves support the reforms in question. Citizen-initiated ballot initiatives are also a possibility, but should be conducted only after seeking a measure backed by the governing body. Citizen-initiated drives are time and labor-intensive, but signature gathering is a good way to educate voters while moving the initiative forward.

#### **Step 7: Put It On the Ballot**

If your efforts paid off and reform will be put before the voters, the hard work is about to begin! It is time to assemble a team of canvassing volunteers who will distribute easy-to-understand literature to educate voters. You should also re-double efforts to gain the endorsements of key political leaders and organizations for your initiative. Literature and ads cost money though, so having a financial base will be key to your success. Plan on inviting likely supporters to attend fundraisers. Also, aggressively seek support from local editorial boards.

#### **Step 8: Implement**

If your campaign for reform is successful, congratulations! ... But the work is not over yet! Stay in touch with officials to develop a timetable for implementation. The best way for this to be done is to have a defined date for implementation written into the legislation so that IRV can speedily be put into place. Most importantly, make sure steps are taken immediately to bring voting equipment into compliance with the new voting method. Lastly, make sure adequate voter education is conducted on the new system and that the ballot design is sufficiently clear.



# Prepare Yourself

In order to launch a successful IRV campaign, one of the most important things is to start off by knowing where you are going in the campaign. This means understanding the problem, the solution, what your goals are and how you plan to get there.

## 1. Organize Yourself and Your Thoughts

- **Budget your time and find some help (ask FairVote)!** If you can, build a core of enthusiastic advocates. Even one or two will help you divide this initial labor, and will later on lead to a wider sense of ownership over the campaign.
- **Record everything.** Develop a way to keep track of contacts, supporters, notes from meetings and conversations, campaign strategy, etc. Also use FairVote and the Yahoo! IRV Group for resources and helpful information.

## 2. Gather Basic Information

What elected body or positions are the target for reform?

- Executive or legislative? \_\_\_\_\_
- How are the elections and districts currently configured? (Multi-member, single-member, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_
- Do the targeted seats use a primary, a plurality requirement or a runoff?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Find out about voting equipment. See the **Voting Equipment** page for what you need to know and how to go about gathering a little information.

## 3. Build the Argument for Reform

- **Studying the problems** before you begin your campaign will help you understand how to sell the benefits of reform.
- **When thinking about elections, here are some things to consider:**
  - Negative campaigning – do campaigns focus less on issues and more on personal attacks?
  - Minority rule and the “spoiler effect” – do the winners end up representing less than 50% of the voters?
  - Low voter turnout – are voters not engaged in elections?
  - Vacancies – are they filled by appointment instead of special election? Do many people run, thus making a weak plurality winner likely?
  - Primaries – do they exist? If so, do candidates win with less than a majority, thus creating weaker party picks (if it is partisan)?
  - Runoffs – do they exist? If so, how much do they cost taxpayers? How much do they cost candidates? How is the voter turnout on the runoff election?
  - Underrepresentation – are some voting groups shut out? By geography? By party or interest group? By race? By resources?



# Prepare Yourself

## 4. Understand Legal Aspects

- The law as it stands: What legal restrictions are there at the local level? Does your community have the authority to decide how its elections take place?
- Gate-keepers of reform: Who can make the decision to change the law? Are there multiple layers of decision-makers; for instance, must a legislative body decide to put reform on the ballot, and let the voters decide from there? Or, if local law is superceded by law higher up, how would this higher up law be changed?
- What power do I have?: Many communities allow voters to place questions directly on the ballot through the initiative process. Is this an option? Is it the best option? Is it something to fall back on?

## 5. Design your Campaign Strategy

The purpose of any strategy is to allow you to achieve your objectives in the most efficient way possible. Here is a sample campaign strategy skeleton, to give you an idea.

### Goals

- Short-term / partial victories: Recommendation by a charter commission, passage of a non-binding resolution or referendum, etc.
- Short-term goal: Have the City Council place a referendum on the ballot.
- Intermediate goal: Pass a binding referendum to adopt IRV.
- Intermediate goal: Ensure logistical feasibility of implementation.
- Long-term goal: Adopt instant runoff voting (IRV) in your city or county.

### Organizational Considerations

- Resources: \$500; three core leaders; six occasional volunteers...
- Group-strengthening goals: Raise \$3,000; build leadership group to six leaders and identify many more of supporters

### Constituents, Allies, and Opponents

- Who cares enough to help / whose problem is it? Ethnic and political minority groups with historically poor representation; idealistic college students with free time; challenger candidates looking for an issue to champion...
  - What do they gain / what risks do they take? Groups gain representation; college students gain campaign experience; challenger candidates gain political traction
  - Into what groups are they organized? Neighborhood / civic groups
- Who are your opponents? One "old guard" City Councilor; one columnist; a skeptical school organization
  - What will my victory cost them? The traditional way of voting; potentially, less influence on politics.
  - What will they do to oppose you? Spend money, negative ads and columns

### Targets

- Primary target(s): Registrar of Voters for implementation; registered voters; City/County policymakers; a relevant committee or commission
- Secondary target(s): Local academics and elections administrators; City Councilors' neighbors, friends and loved ones; League of Women Voters, business / civic leaders.

### Tactics

- Highlight testimony from academics and an official Commission; publicize support from political candidates, officials, business / civic leaders; educate voters, collect petitions; hold public hearings and voting demonstrations; canvass your neighborhood; get positive op-eds and letters-to-the-editor published.





# Selling the Solution:

## Share Your IRValues

### Strategic Thinking

- *Finding your key supporters*

If you could convince a dozen people to embrace your message today, who would they be? What things do they need to believe in your campaign?

- *How will you reach them?*

Where does your target audience get information and what groups or individuals have influence on them? Who can help deliver your message? By starting small and building circles of influence through media, community groups, activists, donors, personal connections, unions and business groups you can create an IRV America.

### Sharing Your Message

Realize that **the facts do not sell themselves**. You have to think about what to say and the most effective way to say it.

Your message should answer the questions: Why? Why care? Why act? You must explain what's valued and what's at risk. Your message will align you with others who share your values and concerns.

### General Principles

- **Do not assume that everyone understands.**

Most Americans are not familiar with electoral systems design.

- **Build on what your audience knows and believes.**

"One person-one vote," "majority rule," and "representation for all" are concepts that most Americans have learned by middle school. Explain how in our system some votes count more than others, how the majority does not always rule, and how a group of voters can win all the representation while others are shut out.

- **Remain constant while tailoring your message for specific audiences**

Frame the facts by appealing to values (justice, fairness), more than rationality (it's mathematically superior!). Think about how you can best inspire your listeners.

- **Avoid jargon, technical mumbo-jumbo.**

- **Don't Say...**

"Change the voting system"  
"Threshold"  
"Eliminates strategic voting"  
"Votes are transferred"

**Do Say...**

"We want to improve the voting system"  
"Enough votes to win"  
"You can just vote for who you believe in"  
"If your top choices doesn't win, your vote  
vote can go to your next choice."



### Small Victories

Establishing IRV is also about winning the little battles that get people familiar with different voting methods. It's also **great practice**. By writing a letter to the editor, canvassing your neighborhood, asking opinion-makers if they support IRV, holding a demonstration election with a few friends or convincing your community group to use IRV, you're **building bridges** toward an IRV America where instant runoff voting is the norm, not the exception.



## Selling Points

### Runoffs: A Waste of Time and Money

Runoffs are supposed to ensure majority rule, but they cause added **inconvenience and lower voter turnout**. They elect candidates with only a majority of the minority -- making it hard to say what the *actual majority* really wants. All this, in spite of the extra money spent to hold another election.

#### Runoffs cause lower voter turnout

- In Georgia's 2004 runoff for a Court of Appeals seat, taxpayers spent \$2 million for an election where only 5% of voters went to the polls.<sup>1</sup>



#### Runoffs waste taxpayer money

- For example, New York City taxpayers picked up a **\$10 million** tab for the 2001 Democratic mayoral primary runoff...<sup>2</sup> **nearly \$7 for every runoff voter**.<sup>3</sup>

#### Runoffs disenfranchise our troops

- The men and women in our armed forces are shut out of the democratic process because there is often not enough time to receive and return a runoff ballot from overseas. By consolidating elections, our troops can better participate in the democracy they defend.



#### Runoffs inconvenience voters and election officials

- Authorities must print ballots, recruit & train poll workers, locate precincts, and prepare equipment. Voters then go to the polls. After, elections officials must process the ballots and results. – **All this has to happen not once, but twice.**

#### Runoffs lead to longer, more expensive campaigns

- The cost of a successful campaign for San Francisco Board of Supervisors **doubled** from 1977-1979 – \$30,772 to \$61,614 – when a runoff had to be held. Most agree we need less campaign spending, not more.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Parsons, Barbara L. "High cost of run-off elections." The Post Searchlight. December 7, 2004. [http://www.zwire.com/site/news.cfm?BRD=2068&dept\\_id=387472&newsid=13509188&PAG=461&rfi=9](http://www.zwire.com/site/news.cfm?BRD=2068&dept_id=387472&newsid=13509188&PAG=461&rfi=9).

<sup>2</sup> Citizens for Instant Runoff Voting in New York State. "Replaces Costly Runoff Elections." 2003. <http://www.nysirv.org/overview.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Figures from Board of Elections in the City of New York. <http://vote.nyc.ny.us/pdf/results/2001/primaryelection/2001runoff.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Hill, Steven. FairVote. "December Runoffs in San Francisco: a Historical Perspective. 2002. <http://www.sfrcv.com/runoffs.htm>.



## Voting Equipment and IRV Compatibility

Voting equipment that is not compatible with ranked ballots can pose an almost insurmountable obstacle to reform. Whenever new voting equipment needs to be purchased, the goal is to acquire equipment that is fully compatible with all ballot types currently used in the United States, which includes ranked voting. **It is critical to understand the current state of voting equipment in your area and, if possible, participate in the process of purchasing new equipment.**

### Here are some important things to know:

- The *Help America Vote Act* (2002) gave federal grants to local and state governments to buy new voting equipment. As of today, many election officials have purchased new voting equipment *but many places have not* or are considering buying even more new equipment.
- Many systems in place today are IRV "compatible." Unfortunately, compatibility only means that more work can be done to make IRV work on the systems. They would require new software or need to be retrofitted, often at taxpayer expense.
- Voting equipment can be IRV-incompatible (like old lever machines), IRV-compatible (like optical scan and touch-screen machines) or **IRV-ready** (fully capable of a ranked election when purchased).
- Some equipment companies publicize their products as "IRV-compatible," but will charge local governments huge sums to **make them IRV-ready**. This occurred in San Francisco. However, the city *still* saved much more money by using IRV and paying the comparatively low cost for changes.
- Voting equipment only needs to be able to store individuals' votes, not necessarily perform the simulated runoffs.
- Small communities may hand-tabulate votes or use a combination of automated counting and hand counting. Burlington, VT and Takoma Park, MD perform their IRV elections this way.

### First, contact a representative of your local election authority

- Agency Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number \_\_\_\_\_.
- Contact Name \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_.

### Issues to ask them about

- What model of voting system is being used? \_\_\_\_\_.
- Is the voting equipment used compatible with ranking? \_\_\_\_\_.
- Are there current plans to purchase new equipment? \_\_\_\_\_.

### Advocating for better voting equipment

- Educate election officials about compatibility for IRV and the advantages to having IRV-ready systems. Mention the likelihood that there will be a winning campaign for IRV in the future.
- Ensure that requests for new equipment include compatibility and IRV-readiness. An important point is that winning campaigns for IRV are taking place not only within jurisdictions, but might be used by parties for primary elections. **It is cheaper to ensure compatibility when companies are competing for a contract than once a contract has been locked in.**

Please let us know how your discussions with election officials go. If someone asks you a question about equipment that you can not answer, say, "I am not sure about that, but I'll get back to you," and contact us at [IRV@FairVote.org](mailto:IRV@FairVote.org) or 301-270-4616.



## Services and Resources for IRV Advocates

FairVote - *The Center for Voting and Democracy* assists national and international advocates for instant runoff voting. We encourage you to take advantage of the following FairVote services and resources:

### Website

FairVote strives to make all of resources available online. This includes an extensive library of [articles](#), as well as [educational materials](#), [original research](#), [election data and analysis](#), and [organizing materials](#). Our website is [www.fairvote.org](http://www.fairvote.org).

### Speakers, training, and conferences

Drawing upon our nationwide network of staff, board members, allies and FairVote members; we provide speakers, conduct trainings and hold regional and national conferences for citizens, elected official and election administrators.

### Brochures

The IRV brochures produced by FairVote can be downloaded and printed for free using our website or, for larger amounts, may be purchased by contacting FairVote directly.

### Legal and technical assistance

FairVote provides [expert testimony and amicus briefs](#) on voting rights and redistricting cases, as well as advice and [assistance for jurisdictions considering purchasing new voting equipment](#).

### Drafting legislation

FairVote has [drafted legislation](#) at local, state and federal levels to adopt instant runoff voting, to allow instant runoff voting and to create commissions that review election laws.

### Election consulting and administration

FairVote provides consulting services to both public sector and private sector clients on all aspects of elections. FairVote does not, however, do political consulting. We assist groups wishing to conduct elections, and we provide both consulting on electoral system design as well as one-stop election services from the distribution of ballots to the certification and reporting of results. We have assisted both for-profit and non-profit organizations. We will help any organization that needs this assistance.

Please contact us for assistance:

FairVote - The Center for Voting and Democracy  
6930 Carroll Ave., Suite 610  
Takoma Park, MD 20912

(301)-270-4616

[www.fairvote.org](http://www.fairvote.org)

[info@fairvote.org](mailto:info@fairvote.org)



## Writing a Letter to the Editor or Op-ed

### Writing a letter to the editor (LTE):

- Make it short (100 words is good; 150 words maximum)
- Go for a near-conversational tone – there is no need to use fancy words
- Format your LTE as a column (see below)
- LTE's are generally meant to be reactions to something previously written on the Editorial/Op-Ed page of that newspaper.
- Make it interesting! If it bores you, it will bore the paper.
- SAMPLE LTE:

To the Editor:

Our recent election for \_\_\_\_\_ should not be considered a success! Rather, it is a good example of our flawed election system. Candidate A was elected with less than 50% - he/she only represents a minority of voters. Candidates B and C have similar positions and split the vote. This is the "spoiler" problem in action, and happens often.

How can we continue using a system that leaves the majority out in the cold?

Instant runoff voting (IRV), which is used in a number of cities across the US, would allow voters to rank candidates. If your first choice doesn't have the support to win, your second choice is used and so on until we have a winner who best represents the majority of voters. We could use a change like that in our elections. IRV is simple, fair and just plain good for democracy.

John Smith  
Libertyville, IA

### Writing an opinion editorial (Op-ed):

- Opinion editorials (op-eds) are longer than letters to the editor and are not necessarily responses to other articles/commentary
- Op-eds should be well-crafted pieces of analysis and opinion written with a professional tone
- Use a relevant example of unfair elections to frame the argument for IRV
  1. Assess the example, highlighting problems of current plurality or runoff systems (minority rule, a "spoiler," low turnout, etc.)
  2. Next, lay out what IRV is, how it works and why adopting it improves elections
  3. Throughout the text, try to incorporate ideas that appeal to popular notions such as majority rule, fairness, less negative campaigning, better choices, etc.
  4. Remember, IRV is better and there are lots of reasons why (see "Talking Points" and "Selling the Solution" sheets)
- Be sure to read some of the op-eds included in this packet

IF YOU GET AN OP-ED OR LTE PUBLISHED, BE SURE TO LET US KNOW!  
e-mail: [IRV@fairvote.org](mailto:IRV@fairvote.org)  
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# Sample Legislative Testimony

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a local member of FairVote, the Center for Voting and Democracy, a national non-partisan, non-profit organization. I am a resident of \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ is a bill on instant runoff voting and is more timely than ever, with \_\_\_\_\_ facing several multi-candidate congressional races in the coming year.

As the 2000 presidential election and local elections frequently demonstrate, our electoral system is deeply flawed. The idea of "majority rule", a government for the people and by the people seems like a farce when a minority of voters elect our leaders.

Plurality voting, whereby the candidate with the greatest number of votes wins, is the problematic norm in what is known as the "American Experiment".

In any races with three or more candidates, a winner can be elected with less than 50% of the vote. Two like-minded candidates can split their base of support, which can lead to the election of a candidate who is the polar opposite of the majority of voters.

This is not a partisan issue; plurality voting affects Democrats, Republicans and third parties. Another example from 2000: Washington State Republican incumbent Slade Gorton lost because he and the Libertarian Party candidate split the majority vote.

The spoiler effect is a pervasive stain on our democracy that knows no party boundaries, no geographic lines. The fear of vote splitting affects more than the outcome of elections, it affects the way each of you has to carry out a campaign from start to finish. I bet there is not one of you who like the pressure of having to engage in negative campaigning to defeat those who hold similar views to you, but threaten to cut into your base support. We all know that negative campaigning drives down voter turnout and draws attention away from serious policy concerns in a campaign.

So, what is the solution? Well, if you ask Senators John McCain or Barack Obama, the answer is instant runoff voting, a methodology of voting whereby voters rank their choices in order of preference, and in case no candidate garners 50% or more votes; ballots are recounted, with their second choice then counting as their first choice. This continues until a clear majority winner emerges.

Members of the committee, the clock is ticking on our democracy. Despite recent rises, current voter turnout pales in comparison to turnout of the 1950's and in comparison with other democracies. As the country continues to be more divided, the likelihood of close elections increases exponentially. How will \_\_\_\_\_ handle these contentious situations? Not very well if \_\_\_\_\_ (legislation #) is not passed.

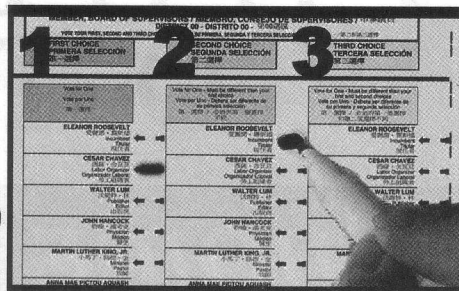
In closing, if a possible alternative to simple passage of \_\_\_\_\_ is needed, I suggest a motion be made before voting that a study of IRV be conducted.

Several states are currently considering IRV and it is used in cities in California, Maryland and Vermont with less voter error reported than in past plurality elections and overwhelming voter support in exit polls.

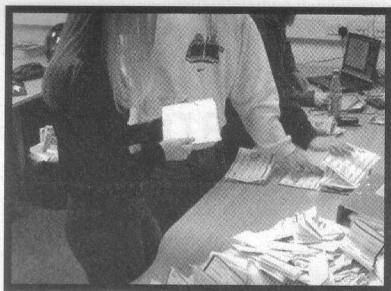
The national media stands poised to put the spotlight on \_\_\_\_\_, and to commend the judgment of each of you for taking leadership on this issue.

# HOW RANKED CHOICE VOTING WORKS

- Rank candidates  
1, 2, 3...
- (It's best to use all  
three of your rankings)



## Voters Rank Candidates



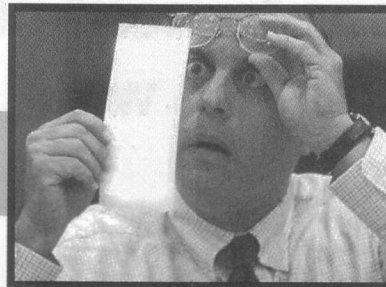
**Eliminate Candidate  
with Fewest  
Number of Votes**

*Redistribute Votes from  
Eliminated Candidate  
to Voters' Next Choices*



## Count the Votes

for each voter's highest  
ranked candidate that hasn't  
been eliminated



**Is There a Majority?**

No

Yes



## Declare a Winner

- No need for  
December Runoff
- \$3 million saved  
(for citywide runoff)

# The Washington Post

*William Raspberry*

## Improve on Red vs. Blue

*Winner-take-all systems leave out too many voters.*

Four years after a dead-heat presidential election came near to producing a constitutional crisis, it's odd what stands out in my memory. Not the butterfly ballots and the hanging chads; those were mechanical failures, and quite fixable. Not Florida's partisan secretary of state, its on-again off-again recount efforts, nor even the U.S. Supreme Court's delivery of the state—and the election—to George W. Bush. Those were human failings of the sort that matter only in very close elections.

What I remember most starkly is the fact that very nearly half of the Floridians who bothered to register and go to the polls (and who managed to survive the challenges of confusing ballots and human roadblocks) might as well have stayed at home. Approximately 3 million Floridians delivered all of their state's 25 electoral votes to Bush. The same number of voters less 537—the size of the official margin—delivered nothing.

How could anyone imagine that to be fair?

Florida sticks in my mind, of course, because by the time it came to Florida, it was known that that state held the election in the balance. The flaw, however, was not Florida's but the winner-take-all electoral system used by 48 of the 50 states in presidential elections. Millions of Texas Democrats and New York Republicans had their votes similarly disregarded. If you didn't vote for the winner, your vote didn't count.

And here we are headed toward what may be another close election. Isn't it time to fix the system?

As a matter of fact, several repair efforts are underway. Maine and Nebraska do not follow the winner-take-all rule. (If their system had been in place in Florida, supporters of George Bush and Al Gore would have been arguing over which candidate should get 13 electoral votes and which one only 12.) Enacting some form of proportionate allocation of electoral votes makes sense to me. Interestingly, it's up to the individual states to do it, though at the moment only Colorado is considering the change.



One of the more interesting electoral reforms is underway in San Francisco, where voters next month will select their top choice for a seat on the city's Board of Supervisors—but also have a chance to mark their second and third choices.

If you think this doesn't sound like much, you ought to talk to Rob Richie, executive director of the Center for Voting and Democracy and my frequent guide on voting systems. Three things about the rank-voting system appeal to Richie. First, it increases the likelihood that any particular voter will have helped to elect a candidate to office, a fact that Richie believes might help to reduce voter apathy. Second, it makes it possible for a voter to support a dark-horse candidate—say, a third-party hopeful—without helping his *least* favorite candidate in the process. Say John McCain is on the ballot and he is your first choice. Under the present system, a vote for McCain would be a vote taken away from your second favorite, Bush, and in effect a vote for John Kerry. Under a rank-order system, either your first choice wins or your vote goes to your second choice.

But what really excites Richie about the system is that it tends to drive candidates and campaigns toward coalition-building and civility. "The present system leads candidates to sharpen, even exaggerate, their differences with their challengers," he says. "The result is a sort of polarization that marginalizes moderates of both parties. But the candidate who thinks he may need your second-choice vote to win will tend to reach out to—or at least not antagonize—voters whose first choice is someone else."

The people simply aren't as polarized as the system paints them. Florida wound up being a red state, though virtually half of its voters were blue. The truth is, with a small handful of exceptions, the states are various shades of purple.

Wouldn't it be a good thing for our politics to acknowledge that fact?



12A • MONDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2001 • USA TODAY

"USA TODAY hopes to serve as a forum for better understanding and unity to help make the USA truly one nation."

—Allen H. Neuharth, Founder, Sept. 15, 1982

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## Spoiler-free elections

Life isn't very happy these days for the "spoilers" from November's elections.

As reported by USA TODAY last week, Democrats in Congress are shunning their old consumer-advocate comrade in arms, Ralph Nader, because he siphoned off enough voters to cost Al Gore the election. If just a fraction of Nader backers in Florida and New Hampshire had gone for Gore, he would have won both states, and a majority of the Electoral College.

While not widely reported, GOP renegade Patrick Buchanan played a similar role. Bush lost New Mexico, Iowa, Wisconsin and Oregon by margins so small that Buchanan's votes could have given him victory. If Bush hadn't eked out a court-ordered edge in Florida, Republicans would be denouncing Buchanan just as Democrats do Nader.

Clearly, both parties have a stake in changing the system — ideally without making it harder for third-party and independent candidates to get on the ballot.

Some states, notably in the South, already require runoffs between the top two candidates if no one gets 50% of the vote in a primary or election for state office. Many other countries elect presidents that way. Thus whoever wins can legitimately claim to have majority support. But second campaigns are

expensive and would result in even more special-interest money tainting the process.

Two California cities, Oakland and San Leandro, just adopted a better way for local elections, called "instant runoff voting." Under it, voters rank the candidates 1, 2, 3 in order of preference. Voters thus could support both a Nader and a Gore, both a Buchanan and a Bush, or any other combination.

If a candidate wins a majority of first-preference votes, the count is over and that candidate wins. If not, the last-place finisher is eliminated. Ballots cast for that candidate are counted for voters' next choice, until someone has a clear majority. Australia and Ireland have used the system for decades.

In Alaska, instant runoff is to be on the ballot for voter approval in 2002. Similar efforts are underway in New Mexico, Vermont, Washington and elsewhere in California.

Changing presidential elections on a nationwide basis would require a constitutional amendment, though states could adopt such changes on their own.

Third-party candidates ought to be able to run without being labeled spoilers, and officeholders ought to be able to say they have the support of a clear majority of the public. Getting there, though, will require both major parties' support for change.



*"The Way Democracy Will Be"*  
[www.fairvote.org](http://www.fairvote.org)

## For Voters, Choice Is As Easy As 1, 2, 3 *San Francisco Adopts Ranked Balloting*

By KIMBERLY EDDIS  
Special to The Washington Post

**W**HEN voters here go to the polls in November to select their top choice for a seat on the city's Board of Supervisors, they also get to pick their second choice—and even their third.

Here, a winning candidate has to receive at least 50 percent of the vote for the Board of Supervisors, which is the local city council. In the past, if nobody did, there was a runoff election.

But this year, San Francisco has become the largest city in the nation to adopt a form of voting that proponents say is a little like walking into an ice cream shop to order a chocolate cone only to discover the shop is all out—no problem, just order your next favorite flavor, and if that's out, your third.

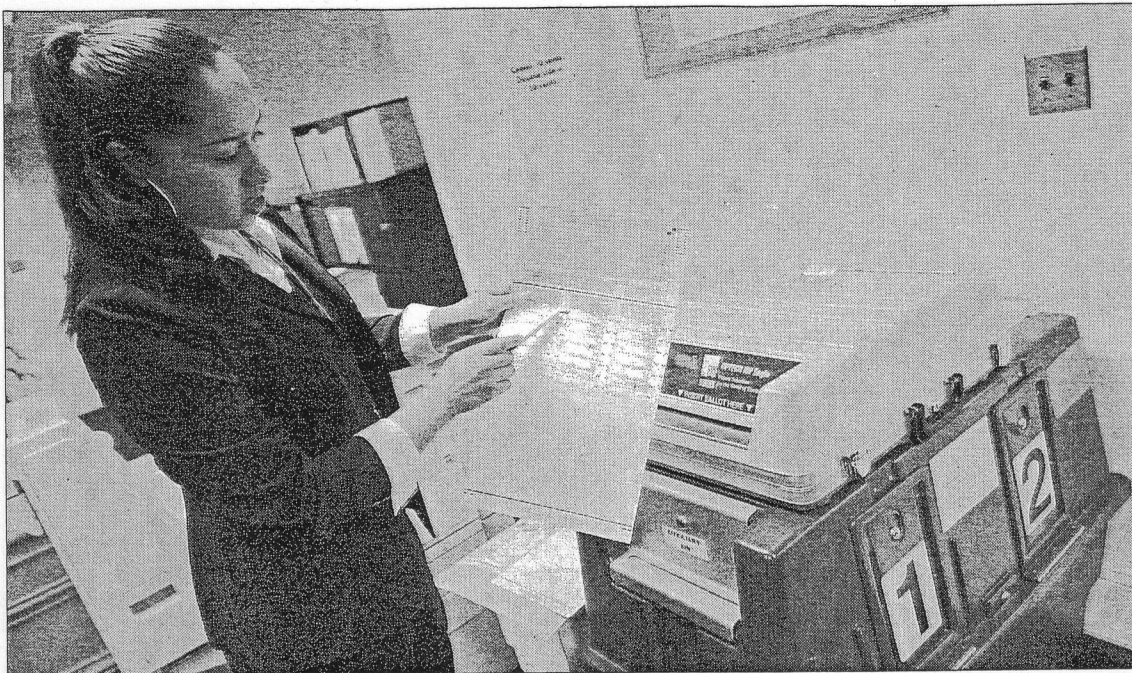
Calvin Lau, 50, an interior designer here, can't wait. He's tired of the heaps of campaign literature cramming his mailbox and dreads the prospect of a runoff.

"In this city there are always runoffs. Runoffs for mayor, runoffs for board of supervisor. It's always neck and neck here, and there are always, always runoffs. Let's just get it all over with at once," Lau said. "This is going to save me some time. I already have my three picked out."

Advocates said the new system has made campaigning more civilized—candidates don't want to lose out on the chance to be a voter's second or third choice by appearing too negative. And they say it may increase turnout.

But opponents say the new system is too complicated, will discourage turnout and forces candidates to spread themselves too thin.

Here's how it will work: Voters will select three candidates in order of preference. All of the top-choice votes are tallied. If any candidate receives more than 50 percent of the vote, that candidate wins. If no candidate has a majority, the candidate with the fewest first-place votes is eliminated. Voters who marked the losing candidate as their first choice will have their votes counted for their second-choice can-



PHOTOS BY BEN MARGOT—ASSOCIATED PRESS

In San Francisco, Campaign Services Coordinator Giannina Miranda displays the checks on her sample ranked-choice ballot, shown below, on which voters get a second and third choice for city supervisor. Ballot instructions are in English, Spanish and Chinese.

didate. The process continues until one candidate receives a majority of the vote; tallying could take several days.

"With runoffs, you have two different electorates going to the polls," said Steven Hill, with the Center on Voting and Democracy, which has been pushing ranked-choice voting in municipalities across the country.

"This way you elect the strongest candidate who has the majority of the vote and you're getting it over with in one race. It's just common sense."

Advocates say the best argument for the new system is that it prevents a third-party spoiler. Had the system been in place in Florida during the 2000 presidential election, Ralph Nader—with the fewest first place votes—would have been eliminated. Those ballots would have had their second-choice votes counted—these presumably would have gone to Al Gore. The added votes would have given Gore the majority.

"People really get to vote for the person they want to vote for, not just the person they feel has the better chance of winning," Hill said. "Their vote isn't wasted."

Critics worry that the system could be difficult for voters to navigate and that the added confusion could turn off minority and other groups with already low turnout.

The system is used around the world, but it has yet to catch on in the United

DEMONSTRATION BALLOT / BALOTA DE MUESTRA / 樣板票

CONSOLIDATED GENERAL ELECTION / ELECCIONES GENERALES CONSOLIDADAS / 綜合選舉

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO / CIUDAD Y CONDADO DE SAN FRANCISCO / 舊金山

NOVEMBER 2, 2004 / 2 DE NOVIEMBRE DE 2004 / 2004年11月2日

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 12, SENATE DISTRICT 17, ASSEMBLY DISTRICT 17, DISTRICT 9

INSTRUCTIONS TO VOTERS: Mark your first choice in the first column by completely filling in the bubble. To indicate a second choice, mark a bubble in the second column. To indicate a third choice, mark a bubble in the third column. To indicate a fourth choice, mark a bubble in the fourth column. To indicate a fifth choice, mark a bubble in the fifth column. To indicate a sixth choice, mark a bubble in the sixth column. To indicate a seventh choice, mark a bubble in the seventh column. To indicate an eighth choice, mark a bubble in the eighth column. To indicate a ninth choice, mark a bubble in the ninth column. To indicate a tenth choice, mark a bubble in the tenth column. To indicate an eleventh choice, mark a bubble in the eleventh column. To indicate a twelfth choice, mark a bubble in the twelfth column. To indicate a thirteenth choice, mark a bubble in the thirteenth column. To indicate a fourteenth choice, mark a bubble in the fourteenth column. 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FIRST CHOICE PRIMERA SELECCION 第一選擇	SECOND CHOICE SEGUNDA SELECCION 第二選擇	THIRD CHOICE TERCERA SELECCION 第三選擇
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JOHN HANCOCK JOHN HANCOCK JOHN HANCOCK	JOHN HANCOCK JOHN HANCOCK JOHN HANCOCK	JOHN HANCOCK JOHN HANCOCK JOHN HANCOCK
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States. Ann Arbor, Mich., abandoned the method after just one election in the 1970s. Cambridge, Mass., uses a version to elect its City Council. Dozens of cities and counties across the country, including Los Angeles, are looking into the idea, and everyone is keeping an eye on San Francisco.

Detractors say that despite an extensive public information campaign, many voters don't understand the system. "It's complicated. You're trying to tell people why you're the best candidate while at the same time you're trying to do education

about how to do ranked-choice voting," said Robert Haaland, a candidate for a district that includes Haight-Ashbury who nonetheless supports the new system.

In the district near Golden Gate Park, Supervisor Jake McGoldrick has been battling an "anybody but Jake" campaign against six challengers and a host of outside business interests. One of his campaign advisers said the new system did not make for positive campaigning.

"The proponents' pie-in-the-sky idea was that [the new system] will encourage everyone to be nice to each other. It's quite the opposite in that everyone has the incentive to go negative against the incumbent," said political consultant Jim Stearns, who represents two other incumbent supervisors besides McGoldrick.

But 22 contenders battling to fill the spot of Supervisor Matt Gonzalez, who is leaving office, have embraced the concept wholeheartedly. The district is seen as one of the city's more liberal, and candidates have been meeting regularly to discuss the issues facing the area. Candidates have pledged to work together with the winner.

While Haaland and Michael O'Connor, another candidate seeking the same seat, are concentrating on getting as many number one votes as possible, they are sure to mention each other if voters are looking for a number two suggestion.

They have co-hosted a hip-hop party to raise money for their campaigns. Proceeds were split down the middle.

"It was really cool," Haaland said. "Our supporters got together, drank together and got along really well with each other. It wasn't my supporters on one side and his supporters on another."