

Instant Runoff Voting and the City of Los Angeles

Presentation to the Los Angeles Ethics Commission

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BACKGROUND

The City of Los Angeles currently uses a two-round runoff system in single seat districts to elect its city officials. This system is used to ensure that successful candidates win a majority of the vote either in the first round or in a delayed runoff months later where only the top-two vote getters in the primary advance. This system results in some officials being elected in March and others in May. Voter turnout between those two cycles can vary drastically and the additional cost of administering a second election can be as high as the \$4.7 million spent in 2005.

WHAT IS IRV?

Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) is a ranked choice voting system, in which voters rank candidates in order of their preference rather than selecting a single candidate on the ballot. It works in much the same way as the two-round runoff system currently in use in Los Angeles – no candidate can win without gaining a majority of voter support – but IRV eliminates the need for a second election by using the rankings voters have already provided on the initial ballot to perform an “instant” runoff. IRV can be used at the city, state or national level, and for partisan or non-partisan races.

THE BALLOT

For the voters, IRV is a very easy system to use. They simply rank the candidates in order of their preference: first choice, second choice, third choice. The ranking system allows the voters to say which candidate or candidates they would like if a more preferred choice is eliminated.

Sample Ballot: *Mark your choices by filling in the ovals. Only one choice per candidate. Only one choice per column.*

Candidate	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice
Luke Skywalker	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Princess Leia	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Darth Vader	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Chewbacca	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Write in:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Write in:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

POTENTIAL FISCAL IMPACTS OF INSTANT RUNOFF VOTING

Cost Savings: Election Administration

IRV combines the primary and runoff into one election, cutting the large costs of a second election. Since 1993, Los Angeles has spent almost \$18 million administering runoff elections. In just five years, from 2001 to 2005, the City spent \$9,228,908.09. IRV could eliminate these costs and would provide the same majority-winner benefit as a two-round runoff system.



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The chart below shows how much money the City of Los Angeles (does not include LAUSD and LACCD) has spent on general elections - the runoffs - over the last twelve years.

Date	Election	Cost to City
5/17/2005	General	\$ 4,703,721.37
5/20/2003	General	\$ 1,589,606.94
6/5/2001	General	\$ 2,935,579.78
6/8/1999	General	\$ 3,789,056.56
1/1/1997	General	\$ 1,036,905.47
1/1/1995	General	\$ 1,922,453.36
1/1/1993	General	\$ 1,969,719.49
Total		\$17,947,042.97

What could the City have done with the money it spent on runoffs? Every year, the City spends approximately \$4.1 million on LA’s BEST, a program that provides after school programs to more than 23,000 children in 147 schools in LAUSD. The money the City spent in the 2005 general election would have been more than enough to fund its contribution for the year.

Independent Expenditures

Two-round runoff elections lend themselves to the kind of either/or campaign tactics that can increase the impact of independent expenditures. Since 1993, \$7,490,934.34 has been spent by Independent Expenditure Committees in runoff elections out of a total of \$10,795,557 in non-candidate spending.

Date	Non-candidate spending
1993	\$323,203
1995	\$13,599
1997	\$64,572
1999	\$247,179
2001	\$3,179,752
2001/2 sp	\$405,475
2003	\$1,622,584
2005	\$4,921,193
Total	\$10,795,557

In the 2005 mayoral race alone, independent expenditures ballooned from \$602,009 in the primary to \$3,092,403 in the runoff – *an almost five-fold increase*.

Partial Public Financing

The City’s current partial public financing program disperses public funds in both the primary and runoff elections. Since 1993, \$8,696,001.16 has been dispersed in public funds to candidates engaged in runoffs – in addition to money given to candidates in the primary round.

Reducing Campaign Contributions

Beyond the costs for the City, candidates raise and spend vast amounts of money on their runoff campaigns. Since 1993, \$27,769,546.86 has been donated to local candidates for their second round, runoff campaigns. While it is admirable that Los Angeles residents participate in elections by donating money to campaigns, if runoffs were eliminated this money might have been donated to other causes.

In 2005, donors gave \$6,430,402.86 to runoff campaigns. If they had instead donated this money to the Library Foundation of Los Angeles, it would have been nearly one-and-a-half times as much money as the Foundation needed to pay for *all* of its programs, including adult literacy programs, teen and children’s



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programs, cultural programs, and library improvements.

Potential Campaign Finance Issues

As previously mentioned, the current partial public financing program used by the City of Los Angeles disperses funds in both the primary and runoff elections, at different funding levels for the primary and the general. The dollar amounts allocated for a single round IRV election may need to be reviewed.

OTHER BENEFITS TO INSTANT RUNOFF VOTING

Positive Campaigning

In an IRV election, candidates may want to attract not only voters who will rank them as their first choice, but also voters who may rank them as a second choice. If candidates insult other candidates, they alienate those candidates' supporters and lose the chance to be ranked second. Thus, candidates have an incentive to run civil, issues-based campaigns and find common ground between themselves and other candidates rather than mud-slinging.

Increased Voter Choice

Often, voters feel compelled to vote not for their favorite candidate but for a candidate who they believe has the potential to win. While this problem is most prevalent in partisan, plurality elections, where less popular candidates are called "spoilers" and are accused of splitting the vote, even in two-round runoff systems many voters worry that by voting for a less popular candidate, they are preventing another candidate they admire from proceeding on to the runoff. IRV eliminates this problem by allowing voters to express exactly how they feel about the candidates.

Because IRV gives voters the freedom to vote for less popular candidates, it brings additional issues and viewpoints to a more central position in the debate.

Faster Representation

When a vacancy opens, a special election may need to take place in order to fill that vacancy. This election, like all elections, may be decided in a single round, but it may need to go on to a runoff, delaying representation for another two months. While electing a candidate who is supported by a majority of voters is important, it is also important to give citizens representation as quickly as possible, which IRV would do more effectively than a two-round runoff system.

Reduced Environmental Costs

A second-round runoff wastes more than just time and money. Huge amounts of paper are used in every election, much of which IRV could eliminate. Using the 2005 runoff as an example, sample ballots were mailed to 1,469,296 voters, 139,295 absentee ballots were submitted and 1,599 precincts were stocked with actual ballots. Additionally, there were the multiple campaign mailers and materials sent out by candidates or organizations in support of one candidate or against another. While these uses of paper are important and necessary educational tools in an election, IRV could drastically reduce the toll Los Angeles elections take on the environment by ensuring majority winners in a single round.



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CASE STUDY: SAN FRANCISCO

San Francisco passed IRV, which the city calls Ranked Choice Voting (RCV), in 2002. It was first used in 2004, and has now been used in two elections. Before using RCV, San Francisco had a two-round runoff system. If no candidate won a majority in the November election, a December runoff would be held.

Voter Understanding

San Francisco State University's Public Research Institute conducted an exit poll in 2004 to determine the success of the new election system. The study looked at both people who voted in the polling place and those who voted with absentee ballots.

The poll found that 86 % of those who voted in the polling place and 89% of absentee voters felt they understood RCV fairly well or perfectly well after using it.

Fifty-nine percent (59%) of polling place voters and 60% of absentee voters used the full potential of the RCV ballot by ranking three choices for the candidates. Forty-six percent (46%) of polling place voters and 42% of absentee voters said they were more likely to vote for their preferred candidate with RCV, while 51% of polling place and 56% of absentee voters stated there was no difference.

Sixty-one (61%) of polling place voters preferred RCV over the old system, and 77% of absentee voters preferred RCV.

The Chinese American Voter Education Committee (CAVEC) polled 2,108 voters after the 2004 election, and their survey showed overwhelming support for RCV across ethnic lines. Of those who expressed an opinion, 83% of Latinos, 70% of whites, 72% of Asians, and 62% of blacks liked RCV.

Increased Voter Participation

A study by Christopher Jerdonek, a representative of FairVote, looks at voter turnout in the 2005 Assessor-Recorder race. While the 2005 election also included races for City Attorney and Treasurer, the Assessor-Recorder race is the only one in which no candidate gained a majority of the vote in the first round and thus would have proceeded to a December runoff under the old system. The report compares voter turnout in the Assessor-Recorder race to a similar race, the 2001 City Attorney race, which was decided with a December runoff.

By using ranked choice voting, participation in the first and final round of the 2005 Assessor-Recorder race nearly tripled city-wide. Interestingly, the most dramatic increases were in some of the most ethnically diverse and socio-economically disadvantaged neighborhoods in the city. **In one such neighborhood participation in the race quadrupled over what it would have been in a December runoff.**

Voter Education and Poll Worker Training

San Francisco developed a comprehensive voter education and outreach strategy, including the use of city-wide mailings, posters and flyers, a website, outreach to ethnic media, voter information pamphlets and a program designed to use community-based organizations to spread information, including targeting organizations which outreach to communities protected under the Voting Rights Act, disabled persons, youth, seniors and areas with historically low voter turnout. San Francisco also developed an educational training for poll workers.

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The History of Ranked Choice Voting in the United States

Ranked choice voting systems are used throughout the world and have a long history of use in the United States.¹ In fact, IRV was invented by an American in 1870. A ranked choice voting system was first used in Ohio in 1915, and by the 1930's ranked choice voting in at-large districts was used in twenty-three cities, including New York, Cincinnati, and Sacramento. Unfortunately, backlash occurred when the system allowed African-American candidates to be elected, and it was discontinued in all these original cities except Cambridge, MA, where it is still used today.

Voters in Ann Arbor, MI used ranked voting for Mayor in 1975. A legal challenge to the system was filed, but the trial court upheld the constitutionality of instant runoff voting, stating that it does not violate one person one vote, and does not give different weight to voters.

Growing Momentum in California and Throughout the United States

The use of IRV is growing in the United States at both the state and local levels. The North Carolina senate voted in July 2006 to create a pilot program in ten cities and ten counties, and to start using IRV in judicial elections throughout the state.

In 2002, San Francisco voters passed IRV, which the city calls Ranked Choice Voting (RCV), and it has now been used in three elections. Burlington, VT used IRV in 2006 to elect its Mayor and Takoma Park, MD used IRV for its special election in Ward 5 in January 2007. Louisiana, Arkansas, and South Carolina use IRV for overseas military voters, because it is impossible for these voters to vote in delayed runoffs. IRV has also passed in Oakland, CA, Ferndale, MI, Pierce County, WA, Berkeley, CA and Minneapolis, MN. An advisory measure on ranked voting was passed in Davis, CA last year.

On College Campuses and Universities

Here in California, it is used at the California Institute of Technology, Cal State Chico, UC Berkeley, UC Davis and Stanford University. Passed by students at UCLA and UCSD, UCLA will be using it for their spring elections this year. Even a private high school in Pasadena uses IRV for their student government elections. Ranked choice voting is used around the country, including institutions such as Dartmouth, Harvard and Princeton.

Ranked Choice Voting Around the World

The Republic of Ireland has used IRV to elect its president since 1922. Australia has used ranked voting to elect its House of Representatives since 1949 and to elect most state and territory lower houses. Malta has used IRV to elect its president since 1921. Ranked voting is also used in London, Scotland and New Zealand.

¹ In addition to instant runoff voting or ranked choice voting, the system can also be referred to as preferential voting or the single transferable vote (STV)



San Francisco Ethics Commission Resolution

Resolution Passed by the San Francisco Ethics Commission Calling for Immediate Implementation of Instant Runoff Voting in Time for the November 2003 Election.

-- Adopted Unanimously on June 23, 2003

WHEREAS, the voters of San Francisco have overwhelmingly supported encouraging candidates to reduce campaign spending, and

WHEREAS, A clear majority of the voters have consistently supported reasonable limitations on contributions both to candidates and independent expenditure committees to reduce the actual and perceived corrupting influence of large contributions on public policy decisions by local elected officials; and

WHEREAS, Public testimony to the Ethics Commission and the campaign finance reports filed with the Commission show that historically, the amount of independent expenditures has been considerably greater in run-off elections, as compared to general elections; and

WHEREAS, the Commission's records indicate that the amount of independent expenditures made to support or oppose candidates for the Board of Supervisors in the November 2002 general election amounted to \$59,357, and that amount increased almost four-fold to \$202,548 in the run-off election; and

WHEREAS, the historical experience is that voter turnout is usually considerably smaller in run-off elections as compared to general elections; and

WHEREAS, the implementation of Instant Run-Off Voting as required by Proposition A passed by the voters in March 2002 would eliminate a run-off election for each of the local City offices to be elected in the fall of 2003: the offices of the Mayor, Sheriff and District Attorney; and

WHEREAS, the Ethics Commission finds that implementation of Instant Run-off Voting would dramatically reduce the amount of large independent expenditures in this fall's election; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Ethics Commission urges the Board of Supervisors to take all steps necessary to implement immediately the Instant Run-Off Voting system as required by the voters by passage of Proposition A for the November 2003 general election.

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Sample "cooperative" campaign literature, San Francisco 2004

**Susan
King**

For Supervisor, District 5

Susan King Is Proudly Endorsed By

San Francisco Green Party, #3
Medea Benjamin, co-founder, CODE
PINK & Global Exchange
David Cobb, Green Party
candidate for President
Terry Baum, Lesbian Playwright,
Candidate for Congress
Renee Saucedo, Immigrants Rights
Attorney, La Raza Centro Legal
Rep. Dan Hamburg, former
US Congressman
Jello Biafra (#2), musician,
spoken word artist
Mario Africa, Anti Violence activist,
Wanda Whittaker, Board member,
Global Exchange
David Tornhiem
Don Paul, Poet
Michael Glandon, Physician's
Organizing Committee
Mesha Monge-Irizarry, Idriss Stelley
Foundation

Karl Kramer, Committee for a Living
Wage
Mitalal Gurung, Green Party of
Nepal
Pinky Kushner, Alliance for Golden
Gate Park, Sierra Club
Mary Thomas, SF School Teacher
Sylvia Alvarez Lynch, former Latino
Democratic Club President
Jim Iwerson Alliance for Golden Gate
Park
Alan Wienerman, Local 535
Dr Paul Quick, Physician, Tom
Waddell Clinic
Emily Drennan, Transportation
Planner, Walk SF Board
Dave Snyder, former Director, SF
Bicycle Coalition (#2)
Dan Johnson Wienberger, Center for
Voting and Democracy
Chin Chi, Animal Rights
Commissioner

Organizations and titles are for identification purposes only

Vote November 2nd!

Vote Susan King #1 Ross Mirkarimi #2 Lisa Feldstein #3

*Paid for by Susan King for Supervisor, Nancy Williams, Treasurer, FPCC # 1267965
www.susankingweb.com / 1347 Divisadero Street San Francisco / Phone: 415 563-3874*

Sample "cooperative" campaign literature, San Francisco 2006

GGRA PAC
120 Montgomery St., Ste. 1280
San Francisco, CA 94104

*****ECRIOT**C006
MS LUCY COLVIN
4315 LINCOLN WAY
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94122-1176

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District 4 Voters Can Cast 3 Votes for Supervisor

Make Sure 2 of Them are Doug Chan and Ron Dudum