Welcome to the Instant Runoff Voting for Urbana website!

It's Time For Positive Election Change In Urbana!

Did you know that Urbana uses one of the oldest and least democratic voting methods available to voters? It is called the plurality single winner election system. This voting system discourages many citizens from running for office, unfairly handicaps third party candidates, and allows winners to hold office with less than a majority of the votes cast!

There Is A Better Way!

Although several countries around the world and cities in the U.S. have implemented IRV, not one city in Illinois to our knowledge has instituted this election change. Why not? That is a good question. Maybe it is as simple as because the voters have never asked for a change. That is why a local group of Urbana residents named, "Citizens for Instant Runoff Voting", has organized a grassroots campaign to put this question before the voters of the city of Urbana in the form of a binding referendum during next spring's Illinois presidential primary.

The Time Is Now!

If passed in the spring of 2008, IRV would replace Urbana's plurality single winner election system with a new more dynamic and democratic voting system for the 2009 municipal elections. Imagine, Urbana city elections could serve as an example of a more democratic, participatory and positive voting system for all of Illinois!

What You Can Do?

It is often only through grassroots involvement that significant social and political changes are made possible. This is one of those rare opportunities! We need a minimum of 786 signatures to get the referendum on the ballot. As a concerned citizen of Urbana you can help to improve your local election system. Sign the petition to get the IRV referendum on the ballot, tell others about the advantages of Instant Runoff Voting, and be sure to vote in the next election in support of the IRV referendum. Your interest and involvement in this community effort is much appreciated.

For more information visit our links page.

If you have a question, wish to make a donation, or just want to help, simply call or email:

voteIRV@insightbb.com
Phone: (217) 328-2789
General Information

Instant runoff voting (IRV):

Is a voting system used for single winner elections in which voters rank candidates in order of preference. In an IRV election, if no candidate receives an overall majority of first preferences the candidates with fewest votes are eliminated one by one, and their votes transferred according to their second and third preferences (and so on) and all votes recounted, until one candidate achieves a majority. The term 'instant runoff voting' is used because this process resembles a series of run-off elections.

Terminology

Instant runoff voting has been called a number of other names. In the United States it is called instant runoff voting primarily because of its resemblance to runoff voting, which is also used in that country and many presidential elections around the world. In the United Kingdom it is known as the Alternative Vote (AV). In Australia the generic term preferential voting is used (IRV is only one of a number of preferential voting systems). When used in Canada in the past it was known as the preferential ballot. It is also sometimes known, in the U.S., as ranked choice voting.

Voting

In IRV the voter ranks the list of candidates in order of preference. Under the most common ballot layout, the voter places a '1' beside their most preferred candidate, a '2' beside their second most preferred, and so forth. Each voter casts only one vote but, during the process of counting votes, his vote may be transferred from one candidate to another.

Counting the votes

In an IRV election ballots are initially sorted according to their expressed first preferences. If no candidate achieves an overall majority of first preferences (more than half of the total votes) then the candidates with the fewest first preferences is eliminated. Her votes are recounted and distributed to the remaining candidates according to the second preferences expressed by each ballot paper. If there is still no candidate with an overall majority of votes then the candidate with the fewest votes is again eliminated and his votes transferred in the same way, according to the second or third preferences expressed by each ballot paper. This process of counting and eliminating continues until a candidate has obtained an overall majority.

Once candidates are eliminated or 'excluded', no votes can be transferred to them. Therefore if a ballot paper being recounted expresses a preference for a candidate who has already been excluded, the next 'live' preference on the ballot is used instead.

History and current use

Instant runoff voting was invented around 1870 by American architect William Robert Ware. He evidently based IRV on the single-winner outcome of the Single Transferable Vote, originally developed by C. L. Dodgson and Thomas Hare. The first known use of IRV in a governmental election was in 1893 in an election for the colonial government of Queensland, in Australia. This system used for this election was a special form known as the contingent vote. IRV in its true form was first used in 1908 in a State election in Western Australia.

Today IRV is used in Australia for elections to the Federal House of Representatives, and for the lower houses of all States and Territories except Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory, which use STV. It is also used for the Legislative Council of Tasmania. In the Pacific, IRV is used for the Fijian House of Representatives, and Papua New Guinea has decided to adopt it for all elections from 2007. IRV is also used to elect the President of Ireland and for municipal elections in various places in Australia, the United States, and New Zealand.

United States

North Carolina adopted instant runoff voting for certain judicial vacancies and will encourage municipal pilot programs starting in 2007.


Takoma Park, MD adopted instant runoff voting for city council and mayoral elections in 2008 after an 84% win in a 2005 advisory ballot measure. It held its first IRV election to fill a city council vacancy in January 2007. [5]

Oakland, CA voters passed a measure by 69% to 31% in November 2006 to adopt IRV for its city offices.

Burlington, VT held its first mayoral election using IRV in 2006 after voters approved it in 2005.

San Francisco has used instant runoff voting annually to elect its Board of Supervisors and major citywide offices since 2004.

Ferndale, MI passed instant runoff voting with 68% in 2004 pending necessary implementation.

Berkeley, CA passed instant runoff voting with 72% in 2004 pending necessary implementation.

Cambridge, MA has used the single transferable vote with Droop quota method of proportional voting, which is synonymous with IRV in the case of electing a single official, for more than 60 years. [6]

Dozens of American colleges and universities [7] use IRV, including as of November 2006 more than half of the 30 universities rated most highly by U. S. News and World Report.

Tactical voting and strategic nomination
Instant-runoff voting reduces the potential for tactical voting by eliminating 'wasted' votes. Under the "First Past the Post" (plurality) system voters are encouraged to vote tactically by voting only for one of the two leading candidates, because a vote for any other candidate is unlikely to affect the result. Under IRV this tactic, known as 'compromising', is typically unnecessary because, even if a voter's first choice is unlikely to be elected, his or her vote has the opportunity of being transferred to second or subsequent choices, who may be more successful.

The spoiler effect is less of a problem in IRV than under the plurality system because there are opportunities for 'split votes' to be concentrated on one of the candidates as the rounds progress, whereas under the plurality system votes cast for a losing candidate are simply lost.

Effect on parties and candidates
Like other preferential voting systems, IRV encourages candidates to appeal to a broad cross section of voters in order to garner lower preferences that may be necessary for earning majority support. However, unlike some other preferential voting systems, IRV puts particular value on a voter's first choice; a candidate with weak first choice support is unlikely to win even if ranked relatively well on many voters' ballots.

IRV is an election method designed for single seat elections. Therefore, like other single seat methods, if used to elect a council or legislature it will not produce proportional representation (PR). This means that it is likely to lead to the representation of a small number of larger parties in an assembly, rather than a proliferation of small parties. Under a parliamentary system it is more likely to produce single party governments than are PR systems, which tend to produce coalition governments. While IRV is designed to ensure that each individual candidate elected is supported by a majority of those in his or her constituency, if used to elect an assembly it does not ensure this result on a national level. As in other non-PR systems the party or coalition that wins a majority of seats will often not have the support of an overall majority of voters across the nation. In Australia, the only nation with a long record of using IRV for the election of legislative bodies, IRV produces representation very similar to those produced by the plurality system, with a two party system in parliament similar to those found in many countries that use plurality. If the first preferences of Australian voters were counted on a First Past the Post basis, their elections would produce the same victors about 94% of the time. A negative effect of IRV, similar to Plurality voting, is that it maintains the two-party system.[2]

Majoritarianism and consensus
The intention of IRV is that the winning candidate will have the support of an overall majority of voters. It is often intended as an improvement on the 'First Past the Post' (plurality) voting system. Under 'First Past the Post' the candidate with most votes (a plurality) wins, even if they do not have an overall majority (more than half) of votes. IRV addresses this problem by eliminating candidates one at a time, until one has an overall majority.