

## Instant Runoff Voting can give us majority rule in a 4-party state

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**R**epublican, Democrat, Green, and Independence – voters are loving the choices available to them this campaign season. But what about majority rule?

You might recall that Jesse Ventura was elected governor with only 37 percent of the vote. The rest of the statewide constitutional officers were elected in 1998 with less than a majority of the vote as well. This year's election, most notably the governor's race, looks like it will yield similar results.

Then there's the so-called 'spoiler' problem – when like-minded voters divide themselves between two or more candidates. They say Ross Perot spoiled the election for the elder George Bush in 1992 and that Ralph Nader did the same for Al Gore in 2000. This year in Minnesota, with Tim Penny coming up the middle in the governor's race, it is hard to tell who might spoil whose chances.

Already, there have been voices

calling for a second runoff election between the top two vote-getters in the event that no candidate received a majority of the vote in the first election. While assuring that the winner would be chosen by a majority of those who turned out to vote in the second election, a runoff would be a costly and logistically difficult undertaking. Of even greater concern, the results would be less than satisfying.

First, in places that use a second runoff election, turnout falls dramatically in the second election, as voters lose interest in coming back to the polls after their preferred candidates are eliminated.

Second, longer campaign seasons mean greater costs for campaigns as well as for the administration of additional elections.

Third, when the field is reduced to two candidates, the potential is present for the mud to start flying.

Fourth, cutting the field immediately to two candidates in a runoff election may be too abrupt. France's

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## It's 'No Contest' once again in legislative elections

**T**he results of over half of state legislative races are a foregone conclusion. That is the finding of FairVote Minnesota's newly released No-Contest Elections™ 2002.

The inaugural No-Contest Elections™ report, published in November 1999, introduced political competitiveness as a criterion for the redistricting process. The administration of Governor Jesse Ventura took up the cause and set up a measure of competitiveness by which various districting plans could be measured. Today, the public can go to state GIS websites and find assessments of the competitiveness of the various districting plans offered by legislators and the Ventura administration. This kind of accountability to the public over the redistricting process was not even imaginable when FairVote Minnesota's original report came out. Much has changed since then.

According to the new analysis, the court panel that issued the final legislative district map appears to have considered competitiveness as a criterion when drawing the new boundaries. That's because the number of competitive seats, districts in which no party clearly dominates, has gone up from one-third of the total to 44 percent in the House and 45 per-

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## Vermont AFL-CIO calls for IRV in state elections

*From the Center for Voting and Democracy*

**I**n September 2002 the AFL-CIO, Vermont State Labor Council convention, adopted a resolution endorsing instant runoff voting for all statewide elections. The resolution was brought to the state convention by the Champlain Valley and Washington & Orange Counties Central Labor Councils, AFL-CIO, which had each adopted the same resolution previously. The AFL-CIO

joined a range of groups in calling for adopting this important election reform, including the Vermont chapters of the League of Women Voters, Common Cause, the State Grange, the Older Women's League, the Vermont Public Interest Research Group, and the National Association of University Women, as well as many elected leaders including Governor Howard Dean, Secretary of State Deborah Markowitz, U.S. Congressman Bernie Sanders and others. ✓

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# Alaska IRV ballot measure defeated

In the first ever statewide ballot measure for Instant Runoff Voting, proponents came up short August 27, as Alaska voters turned their thumbs down on Ballot Measure 1 by a 64 percent to 36 percent margin. Opponents prevailed with arguments that IRV is not easy to grasp and there had not been enough public education and debate on the proposal. The current system is good enough, according to the opponents, who found no compelling need for IRV.

There were also specious claims that by allowing voters to rank candidates, IRV violates the one-person, one-vote principle. Though not true and in fact refuted by courts of law,

the charge counted as a strike against IRV among voters who had little opportunity to become acquainted with the concept.

Perhaps the greatest strike against the ballot measure was that it became tainted by partisanship. Conservatives largely lined up for it, while liberals mostly took up defensive positions against it. What should have been regarded as a good government reform was taken captive by partisan forces, undercutting trust in the central purpose of the reform proposal.

The Alaska result is in some ways an affirmation of the nonpartisan educational mission of FairVote Minnesota, which has urged public

education and use in nongovernmental elections as important preparatory steps for successful adoption for public elections. Implementing alternative voting methods in home rule localities is also an important preliminary to statewide adoption.

One bright spot in the Alaska campaign was the endorsement and support from Senator John McCain, a leading national political figure. Look for more leadership from him on this subject in the future. You can hear his recorded message to Alaska voters and follow other links to information on this story at [www.FairVoteMN.org](http://www.FairVoteMN.org). ✓

## 4-Party State *from page 1*

presidential election earlier this year is a case in point. The voters in the center-left of the political spectrum cumulatively had 40 percent of the vote but were divided among several candidates, including Prime Minister Lionel Jospin. This resulted in an extreme right-wing, anti-immigrant candidate, Jean-Marie le Pen, advancing to the runoff with just 17 percent of the vote. He was defeated in the runoff by the conservative President Jacques Chirac. But voters were denied a choice between Chirac and his true rival, Jospin. Better results would be gained by having a series of runoff elections, each time eliminating the last place candidate until only two candidates remained. Of course, holding a series of elections would be completely impractical.

The good news is there is a way to get majority rule without the problems associated with runoff elections. In fact, a series of runoffs can be counted, and the wishes of a real majority can be discovered, on just one ballot. It's called Instant Runoff Voting and it's gaining support around the country. Here's how it works.

With Instant Runoff Voting, a voter casts a single vote for his or her

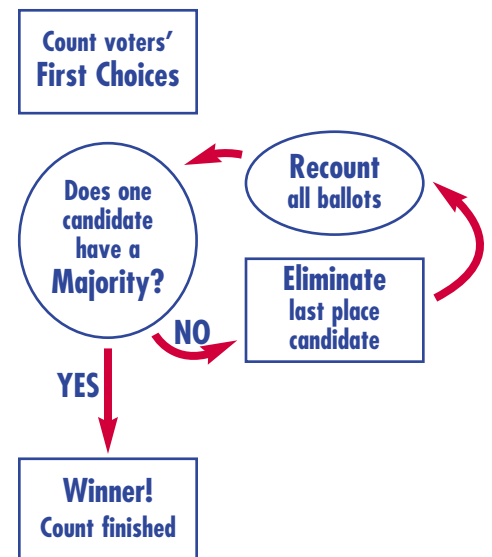
**Rank candidates in order of preference—your first choice and your runoff choices**

	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice
Pat Buchanan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
George Bush	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Al Gore	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ralph Nader	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

In each round, your ballot counts for your favorite candidate who is still in the race.

*From the Center for Voting and Democracy*

preferred candidate. On the same ballot, the voter also indicates which of the other candidates would be preferred in the event of a runoff. In other words, the voter ranks the candidates in order of preference. When the votes are counted and no candidate has received a majority of the votes, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated. Votes cast for that candidate are then given to the next runoff candidate listed on each ballot. The process is repeated until one candidate has received a majority of the votes.



Already used for decades in Australia and Ireland, Instant Runoff Voting was chosen by the voters of San Francisco this past March for that city's elections. There's also been strong interest in Instant Runoff Voting in other multi-party states such as Vermont and New Mexico.

Minnesotans have shown that they like meaningful choices. Instant Runoff Voting can preserve those choices while making sure the majority chooses the winners of our elections. It's time to give Instant Runoff Voting a closer look. ✓

## Organizational endorsers sought for policy resolutions

FairVote Minnesota is inviting organizations in the state to endorse three public policy resolutions. This is part of the ongoing effort to build a base of support for adoption of better voting systems by state and local governments. If you are associated with an organization that may be interested in promoting better democracy, please bring these resolutions to the attention of the leadership of that organization and ask for the organization's endorsement. Contact FairVote Minnesota if you know of an organization that endorses any of the resolutions. They are as follows:

### Instant Runoff Voting

Instant Runoff Voting solves the 'spoiler' problem, assures majority rule, and maximizes voter participation in choosing the winner in multi-candidate elections and should be adopted for electing single-winner offices such as mayor, governor, and president to replace the familiar-but-flawed First Past The Post voting system.

### Proportional Representation

Proportional representation voting systems assure that to the greatest extent possible every voter helps elect a representative, promoting accountability, more substantive discourse, and higher voter turnout, and should be adopted for multi-winner elections (e.g. city councils, state legislatures, Congress) to replace the familiar-but-flawed First Past The Post voting system.

### Voting Equipment Flexibility

To be used with better voting methods (e.g. Instant Runoff Voting, various forms of proportional representation), voting equipment must have the flexibility to process a variety of ballot types, including vote-for-one, vote-for-up-to-x, ranked choice, and cumulative ballot types. All new voting equipment purchased or certified for purchase in the state should have the flexibility to process each of these ballot types. ✓

## Alliances formed to promote accountability, participation

FairVote Minnesota has joined two coalitions whose purposes are to achieve greater accountability from elected officials and increased voter turnout, particularly among young adults.

### Minnesotans for Fair And Clean Elections

Minnesotans for Fair And Clean Elections (FACE) is a coalition of over 60 organizations, led by League of Women Voters of Minnesota, Common Cause Minnesota, and Minnesota Alliance for Progressive Action. The coalition calls for campaign finance reform by 1) creating a system of public financing for campaigns, 2) limiting soft money contributions to political parties, and 3) providing campaigns with funds to respond to independent expenditures. The intent is to curb undue influence of special interests and put a lid on the growth of campaign expenditures. The Minnesota effort was inspired by similar initiatives which succeeded in Maine and Arizona.

### Youth Vote

Youth Vote is a national coalition with 13 organizations represented on its board and another 80 national organizational members. The coalition aims to 1) increase political and civic participation among young people, 2) build inclusive, accountable, and responsive government, and 3) increase public awareness of the value of participation in democracy through the electoral process. The state level coalition includes organizations representing students, African-Americans, women, and others.

In both cases, the FairVote Minnesota board saw these efforts as consistent with the organization's vision for better democracy. Involvement in these coalitions will expand FairVote Minnesota's outreach and establish or strengthen relationships with organizations that have a common vision for greater accountability and increased participation. Links to both coalitions can be found at [www.FairVoteMN.org](http://www.FairVoteMN.org). ✓

## National Association of Secretaries of State hears pitch for IRV

Vermont Secretary of State Deborah Markowitz made a case for Instant Runoff Voting to her colleagues at a July 28, 2002 meeting in Rhode Island of the National Association of Secretaries of State. FairVote Minnesota board chair Tony Solgård was part of the team from the Center for Voting and Democracy that contributed to the presentation. A PowerPoint slide show that accompanied Secretary Markowitz' remarks can be viewed at <http://vermont-elections.org/elections1/irv/>. Secretary Markowitz reported that election officials from several other states requested copies of the slide show.

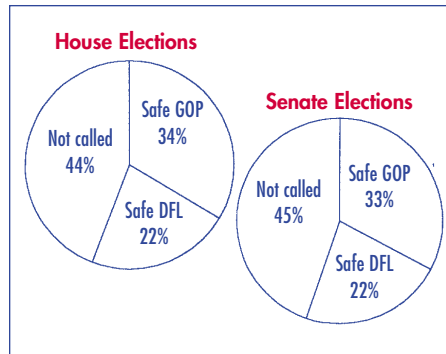
Earlier this year, a past president of the National Association of Secretaries of State, Sharon Priest, the current Secretary of State of Arkansas, called for Instant Runoff Voting for some elections in her state (see <http://www.fairvotemn.org> for a link to the report). In most states, the Secretary of State is the chief election official of the state. This kind of activity at their national association meeting and independently by a past president of the association is a sign of the increasing receptivity to Instant Runoff Voting by the nation's top election officials. ✓

## No Contest Elections *from page 1*

cent in the Senate. As a result, the voters will have more control over the outcome of this November's elections.

But the flip side is that over half the seats—55 percent in the Senate and 56 percent in the House—remain 'safe' for one party or the other. The original report pointed out several problems with noncompetitive elections.

- A principle of democracy is that voters should determine the outcome of elections.
- Officials elected from noncompetitive districts are not structurally accountable to their constituents and can become unresponsive to the interests of the voters.
- Political power is tied to geography, penalizing competitive areas and the state as a whole.
- The state becomes Balkanized into political regions where one party has no motivation to consider the interests of areas dominated by the rival party.
- The real campaign is directed toward swing voters in swing districts,



leaving most voters feel like politics is not about issues that affect them.

- Taken together, these effects of noncompetitive elections reduce voter turnout.

Returning to the 2002 edition are popular features from the inaugural report, including the 'Top Ten Untouchables' (a list of legislators most likely to retain their seats), a list of the most vulnerable legislators, and the districts in which the Independence Party would be most likely to affect the results of the election.

The report is available on the FairVote Minnesota website [www.fairvotemn.org](http://www.fairvotemn.org). ✓

## Analysis lays legal foundation for IRV & STV

A new study of state election law will provide local activists with the legal basis they need to work for Instant Runoff Voting or Single Transferable Vote in their cities. It was written by FairVote Minnesota board chair Tony Solgård and attorney Paul Landskroener in response to legal hurdles placed in front of election reform activists by city charter commissions or their attorneys.

In Minneapolis, the charter commission's attorney brought a 1915 Minnesota Supreme Court decision to the commission's attention. As the commission read the decision, it appeared to find preferential voting systems to be unconstitutional. This reading of the decision stymied reformers' efforts to bring their Single Transferable Vote proposal to the ballot.

A statutory barrier to Instant Runoff Voting was erected in Roseville. The commission's attorney

said it appeared to him that state law prohibited cities from adopting a ranked ballot or any ballot that did not adhere to generic statutory guidelines to 'vote for one.' Reform efforts were blocked once again.

Attorney Paul Landskroener analyzed the constitutional and statutory questions. The highlights of the investigation included the discovery that the Supreme Court decision not only did not apply to Instant Runoff Voting or Single Transferable Vote, but that both statutes and the court's decision are quite favorable for the right of home rule cities to adopt an alternative constitutional voting system.

The findings are reported in an article that appears in the October issue of Bench & Bar of Minnesota, the Minnesota State Bar Association's official publication. A link to the online version of the article can be found at [www.fairvotemn.org](http://www.fairvotemn.org). ✓

## Thank you!

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