

## CharterReview - Public Contact

---

**From:** <tim.t.lindsey@gmail.com>  
**To:** <CharterReview@cityofsacramento.org>  
**Date:** 12/9/2009 1:40 PM  
**Subject:** Public Contact

---

### Public Contact

Date	<b>December 9, 2009</b>
Contact Name	
Phone Number	
Constituent E-mail	<a href="mailto:tim.t.lindsey@gmail.com">tim.t.lindsey@gmail.com</a>
Message	<p> <b>A response to teh recent guest editorial in the paper: &gt;Sacramento currently uses a &gt;two-round runoff system to elect its mayor and City Council, with the &gt;first election in June and a runoff election in November, if no &gt;candidate wins a majority of votes in June. The clincher here is that &gt;City Council races almost never go to a runoff candidates &gt;routinely sew up their victories during the first election in June. &gt;&gt;Voter turnout for the June &gt;election, however, is roughly half of what it is in November. This means &gt;that very few Sacramentans are actually participating in the decisive &gt;elections that determine who will represent them. The claim is often made that IRV will increase turnout. Apparently not. Few people turn out for those elections in June because few people are sufficiently exercised about them. Exactly what that means is not clear, but when voters care, they turn out. Two-round runoff has better results than IRV, that's pretty clear; IRV looks good in theory, it would seem that it would just come up with the same result as two-round runoff, but in actual practice, IRV produces, in nonpartisan elections, the same results as Plurality, almost always. (The IRV promoters want us to think in terms of partisan elections, where there is clear labelling of candidates, such that if you prefer one who is eliminated, it can be predicted to whom your vote would then be transferred. That doesn't happen, apparently, in nonpartisan elections, to enough of a degree to matter.) But top-two runoff results in a "comeback election," where the top vote-getter in the first round loses to the top vote-getter in the second. What happened? Well, there are several factors at work. Different voters turned out in the second election, possibly voters who didn't think their favorite could win in the primary. Results are not necessarily improved by higher turnout. Holding a local election with the major election in November will increase turnout, but of people who have only weak preferences -- or practically none -- in the local elections. That causes what's called "donkey voting" in Australia, where actual ballot position seriously matters. Adding in a lot of votes that represent no particular preference does not improve satisfaction with the results! And if people are seriously dissatisfied with those June results, why don't they turn out then? I'll</b> </p>

tell you why. Because they don't need to, they are sufficiently satisfied, and if they turned out, the results would be the same. So they don't bother, except when it **\*does\*** matter to them. You want better representation, you don't use a single-winner system anyway. I should see what is done in Sacramento. >Races for mayor are a different story. These races went to runoff >elections in 2008 and 2000. While these runoffs are important to ensure >that the winner is supported by a majority of voters, conducting two >separate elections is an expensive proposition for both taxpayers and >candidates. There is no way to "ensure a majority" with a single ballot. The IRV supporters here will allow us to imagine that IRV does this, but in actual practice, true majorities are rare with IRV elections that go into elimination rounds. It's a pretend majority, it means exactly this: Of the voters who voted for A or B, a majority voted for A. Never mind that only, say, 40% of those who voted in the election, actually voted for A or B. What can be done with a better ballot system is to avoid some runoffs, but there is a much cheaper, simpler, and better system for doing that, Bucklin voting, also called American Preferential Voting, to distinguish it from the English system we now call IRV. Bucklin does find true majorities for winners, where IRV fails, because Bucklin counts all the votes. IRV only counts some of them, and for this reason, is criticized in Robert's Rules of Order, it's due to the elimination of a possible compromise candidate simply because this candidate doesn't get enough votes in the earlier rounds of counting. >The taxpayers wind up footing the bill for two separate elections and >candidates have to raise money for what are essentially two separate >campaigns. The considerable expense of mounting two campaigns and >the attendant fundraising that goes with it might be barriers for >many community-minded individuals who would otherwise be inclined to >serve their city. Democracy costs money. >Although the elections for City Council and mayor present two different >problems low voter turnout for the former and a hefty >price tag for the latter they share a common solution: "instant >runoff voting." An absolutely horrible solution. There are much better ways to approach the situation, but, remember, no voting system can magically manufacture a majority, unless a majority of voters decide to actually vote for a candidate. >If Sacramento switched to instant runoff voting, it could combine two rounds of elections into >one, allowing the City Council to be elected at the high-turnout >November election and eliminating one unnecessary and expensive election >for mayor. It's much easier, and the **\*same outcomes\*** can be gained, by eliminating the majority requirement. This is the bait-and-switch of IRV proponents. They absolutely won't tell you that in nonpartisan elections, IRV **\*is\*** plurality, almost exactly. All that extra vote-counting, and IRV is expensive to count, does **\*nothing\***. You get the same results with plurality. But you **\*can\*** reduce the number of runoff elections by counting all the votes. Simply doing that -- allowing voters to vote for more than one -- is called "Approval voting," and it's much better than IRV, and costs absolutely nothing. Only a few voters will do it, but this is enough to create a majority in some elections that wouldn't be there otherwise. Bucklin is even better: this is Approval voting, but in stages, you vote a ranked ballot (same ballot as normally used here with IRV), and if no candidate gains a majority, votes from the next rank are added in. While some voters, then, have voted for more than one candidate, this doesn't mean that their votes have extra power, these are really alternative votes, because only one of them ultimately counts to determine a winner. The major difference with IRV is that all the votes are counted simultaneously, so that the most-approved candidate wins. >Here's how instant runoff voting works: Instead of voting for just one >candidate,

voters rank candidates on the ballot in order of preference, >marking their first choice, second choice, third choice, and so on. This, then, requires voters be able to intelligently rank more than one candidate. What ends up happening is probably that votes are by name recognition and some vague sense of image, which is why the relative vote for the top two doesn't change as the additional rounds proceed. That's why the result is the same as plurality. In partisan elections, a minority party voter does have a normally fairly consistent view of the top two candidates. So IRV can make a difference there, but it has other, very serious problems. If one insists on giving up the majority requirement, there are much better methods to use. >A candidate who wins a majority of first-choice rankings is elected. If, >however, no candidate receives an initial majority, the candidate with >the fewest first-choice rankings is eliminated. That candidate's >supporters have their votes count for their second choice. The votes are >counted again to see if any candidate has a majority. If not, the >process repeats until a candidate emerges with majority support. See! "Majority support." This is utterly deceptive. It's an artificial majority, one which is not based on the standard meaning of "majority" in elections. Take the counting process of eliminating the lowest-vote candidate at each round one step further. Presto! Unanimous election! When candidates were eliminated, voters who had not ranked any candidates beyond that one were eliminated. IRV finds a majority by eliminating, not only candidates, but voters. Bucklin does not do that. In partisan elections, Bucklin will also see the kind of consistent vote patterns that can shift results, but it doesn't eliminate a compromise candidate, like IRV will. It just proceeds through the ranks, seeking a \*true\* majority. Bucklin, like IRV, was sold as a runoff eliminator. That was an error, and one of the reasons Bucklin was dropped may have been the failure of that expectation. However, Bucklin as a primary and runoff method would be excellent, because it's better than IRV, much better, at finding a majority. The only way to get guaranteed majorities with IRV is to coerce voters. That's how they do it in Australia: you \*must\* vote for all but one candidate, at some rank. Or your ballot is discarded. (In some provinces in Australia, they have gone to Optional Preferential Voting, and they had to rewrite the rules to allow election without an "absolute majority." And, in fact, they find, where there is OPV, majority failure becomes common, lots of voters don't bother to add lower ranks.) >San Francisco has been using >instant runoff voting successfully since 2004 and has saved millions of >dollars by eliminating its low-turnout runoff elections. They say so. Saved millions in runoffs and cost millions in far more complex counting of votes as well as increased voter error, apparently. > Furthermore, in >2008, San Franciscans elected the most diverse Board of Supervisors in the city's history. >Instant runoff voting may well have contributed to that diversity by >encouraging more candidates to seek office, increasing voter turnout >and eliminating the spoiler >dynamic from district elections. Sacramento >enjoys a diversity not unlike >San Francisco's and might >similarly benefit from using instant runoff voting. Generally, minority voters in San Francisco disliked IRV, it seems from the SFSU Report. >A number of jurisdictions using instant runoff voting have found that >this voting method improves the tenor of campaigns and, in some >instances, has actually resulted in candidates cooperating on the >campaign trail. Unlike a head-to-head runoff election, where mudslinging >can be very effective, instant runoff voting presents candidates and >voters with an entirely different situation. San Francisco has been examined from this perspective and there is no sign of reduced election "mudslinging." The fact is that there are generally two major candidates

in any election and IRV doesn't change that, and these candidates do *\*not\** campaign together, since the election is going to come down to one or the other of them, almost certainly. >Candidates who might need the support and second-preference votes > from their opponents' supporters in order to win have an incentive >to conduct more civil campaigns. In San Francisco > and in Minneapolis, > which just conducted its first >instant runoff election candidates have campaigned together and >have sponsored joint appearances and fundraising events. Sure. No-hope candidates, for the most part, or a no-hope candidate cooperating with a possible winner. In order to decide if better voting systems are needed in San Francisco, one would need to look at actual election results and actual problems. Instead, what I see here is a national agenda being push on a locality, advocating an election system for national purposes, not because it will actually help that locality. There are far simpler reforms to address the legitimate problems, in any case, IRV is a very poor system, in the opinion of most voting systems experts. >By improving and lowering the cost of campaigns, instant runoff voting >has the potential to encourage more citizens to seek public office in >Sacramento. And where has this happened? What has been the lowered cost of campaigning? Any evidence for this? >This, in turn, could generate increased interest in city >governance, enhanced public dialogue about the critical issues facing >the city and better representation for all Sacramentans. Cures dandruff, too. >Instant runoff voting deserves the attention of voters, Charter Review >Committee members and city officials all of whom should be >interested in seeing a City Council that mirrors the population and is >elected using the most sensible and cost-effective method possible. Okay, if this is the criterion, it sure wouldn't be IRV. It would be Count All the Votes (Approval Voting), which would accomplish more than IRV at *\*no\** cost. Just allow multiple approvals of candidates on the ballot. All voting machines can handle that already. And if you want better, there is Bucklin, which is simply phased Approval. Ranked ballot, like IRV. But more fair. They don't tell you about the jurisdictions that have tried IRV and have dropped it. Top Two Runoff has problems, but it's the most advanced reformed voting system in common use, and is much better than IRV, if you care about results. IRV *\*might\** cost less, but only at the price of giving up majority results. And it's clear that IRV does produce the same results as Plurality in nonpartisan elections, but that top-two runoff actually gives an underdog candidate a real chance to get elected. Basically, with IRV, the underdog has to move all the way up from number three to number one in one poll. Very hard to do. With top two runoff, there is an intermediate step, moving up to number two, which gets the candidate into the runoff and which causes the candidacy to be taken seriously. For whatever reasons, one election out of three, nonpartisan, the runner-up in the first round wins the second. Doesn't happen with IRV. That second campaign, which the IRV advocate dismisses as "expensive," was necessary. Further, unless it has specifically outlawed it, the Sacramento runoff can have write-in votes, a very desirable feature, and one which can be truly powerful in cases of a problem result in the first round. Don't allow a phony election reform to damage the best common voting system, one which actually replaced IRV in the past.

This message originated at [www.cityofsacramento.org/charter/contact.html](http://www.cityofsacramento.org/charter/contact.html)