

Claims favoring Instant Runoff Voting don't hold up to scrutiny

Matt Marchetti

John Hudson's editorial ("Don't be misled; N.C. has one of the best election systems in the country," AC-T, Aug. 14) in favor of Instant Runoff Voting (or IRV) was a failed attempt to rebut Joyce McCloy's earlier editorial ("Instant runoff voting will only complicate things," AC-T, July 2) which was critical of the system. Hudson's piece reveals the ignorance of the self-proclaimed experts who seek to impose IRV on the people of North Carolina.

He attacks McCloy's expertise regarding voting machines then falsely claims that voting machines handled IRV in certain North Carolina elections. He says the procedure is understandable, and that complications with multiple ballots can be easily overcome, but these arguments completely miss the point.

The problem is not whether voters can understand the procedure of ranking choices, but rather how IRV affects the nature and value of a vote, and how election outcomes are arrived at. It's not just about logistics; it's about the severe problems that arise because of the complex mathematics inherent in preferential voting.

According to elections expert Steven J. Brams, Ph.D. New York University, with IRV "ranking your favorite candidate first could cause him to lose, whereas ranking him last could cause him to win—just the opposite of what you want the system to do." This is utterly unacceptable. Voters shouldn't need to bring a calculator to the voting booth!

The only way anyone who values democracy could support such a dubious and undemocratic system is if they are ignorant of the serious flaws of IRV, or if they see it as a way to consolidate power among the elites who run the system.

IRV is billed as a "new" idea, which will empower voters, provide more choices and make elections fair. This "new" system, which was devised over a century ago, is touted as eliminating the "Nader effect," and as guaranteeing a majority winner. However, this "spoiler effect" is a legitimate form of political speech which should not be frivolously eliminated. Moreover, IRV doesn't guarantee a majority winner anyway!

A plurality should be acceptable in a representative system, but if some people insist on having majority winners, IRV won't help. A runoff is used only when no candidate wins a majority on the first ballot.

Whatever happens after that doesn't change the fact that the eventual winner never got a majority of "first choices." Thus, IRV merely creates the illusion of a majority.

The real issue is simply that preferential voting disenfranchises voters. Our organization, the Minnesota Voters Alliance, is fighting against the implementation of IRV in Minnesota. We recently filed a lawsuit in Hennepin County District Court, challenging the implementation of IRV in Minneapolis on constitutional grounds.

IRV has several constitutional flaws. These include the fact that IRV allows voters more than one vote, that the ballots are not counted or transferred equally and that voters have no way of knowing whether they are helping their favored candidate by the way they rank their choices. IRV puts blindfolds on the voters.

In the 1915 *Brown v. Smallwood* case the Minnesota Supreme Court concluded that voters have a right "to cast a vote for the candidate of his choice unimpaired by the second and additional choice votes cast by others." Although the method at issue in the 1915 case was slightly different, this principle still applies. IRV makes it possible for one voter's choices to affect how another voter's choices might influence the election. This problem cannot be avoided under any preferential system.

This is a violation of freedom of association, which is a fundamental right guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. A person's vote is an expression of association with a particular candidate seeking office. Each voter is entitled to have his or her vote counted as a numeric "one" as applied to the candidate of his or her choice. IRV violates these constitutional rights; making preferential voting an issue of national concern.

IRV proponents like Mr. Hudson claim that it's easy as 1-2-3; even if true, does that make it good? IRV is impractical, costly and confusing, but more importantly, it disenfranchises voters! As the Minnesota court said in the *Brown v. Smallwood* case "the preferential system directly diminishes the right of an elector to give an effective vote for the candidate of his choice."

Much more detail on this vital issue can be found at: www.mnvoters.org