



THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES RUNOFF ELECTIONS: EXPENSIVE, WASTEFUL AND LOW VOTER PARTICIPATION

OVERVIEW

The City of Los Angeles currently uses a two-round runoff system to elect its mayor, city attorney, city council and controller. One election is held in early March, and if no candidate wins a majority of the vote, a second election between the top two finishers is held in May. Voter participation is usually low, with only 10 percent of registered voters participating in the March 6, 2007 election. In addition, LA taxpayers pay millions of dollars for administering the second election. Candidates also must raise funds for a second election, undermining campaign finance reform.

Instant runoff voting, which allows voters to rank a first, second and third choice, would elect majority winners in a single election, saving Los Angeles the cost and difficulty of a second election.

THE PROBLEM

Holding two elections instead of one is expensive, inconvenient and is burning out voters with too many elections. It leads to:

Expensive, Low Turnout Elections. At a time of budget deficits, the City, along with the LA Unified School District and the LA Community College District, is spending a whopping \$14 million to administer a March primary and May runoff election. Since 1993, Los Angeles, LAUSD and LACCD have spent \$30.9 million administering runoff elections. From 2001 to 2005, the City of Los Angeles alone spent \$9.2 million; \$4.7 million in 2005, as costs have escalated in recent years (see Table 1).

Despite these high costs, hardly anyone bothers to vote. The March 6 election had a voter turnout of barely 10% overall, with single digit turnout for School Board and Community College District. Since 1997, voter turnout has declined in more than half the runoff elections (see Table 2). Even when there's no May runoff (because winners are decided in March), election officials still must spend money preparing for the May election, in case it's necessary. This is a waste of taxpayers' money.

Voter Fatigue. In the March 6 election, five of the eight city council races featured incumbents who ran unopposed. In 2005, three incumbents ran unopposed; meaning over half of the current city councilors ran unopposed. Most of the other races are won by landslides. People are unlikely to interrupt their busy workday to vote when the result is predictable.

Adding insult to injury, voters will be asked to vote a second time on May 15, when the only races on the ballot will be one district-wide seat for the Community College District and two district seats for the School District. Turnout will be in the single digits, yet taxpayers will pay millions to hold this second election.

Undermines Campaign Finance Reform. Candidates need to raise and spend vast amounts of money for their runoff campaigns. Since 1993, \$27.8 million have been donated to local candidates for their runoff campaigns, over six million dollars in 2005 alone as fundraising has escalated in recent years. Runoff elections also lead to huge increases in independent expenditures. Since 1993, \$7.5 million have been spent by shadowy independent expenditure

committees in runoff elections. In the 2005 mayoral race, independent expenditures ballooned from \$602,009 in the primary to \$3.1 million in the runoff – *a five-fold increase*. (See Table 3)

Mudslinging campaigns. The current system encourages negative, hack attack campaigning, where the winning strategy becomes driving voters away from your opponent rather than debating ideas and policy. In recent LA elections, voters have been bombarded with campaign attacks telling them the worst about their political leaders. Runoff elections have been notorious for mano-a-mano, head-to-head contests that have alienated voters, lowered public trust and damaged the eventual officeholder.

Environmental costs. Runoff elections waste more than just time and money – at least 20.7 million pieces of paper were needlessly wasted in the 2005 runoff on voter info pamphlets mailed to 1.5 million voters and sample ballots available at 1,599 polling sites. A blizzard of multiple campaign mailers sent out by candidates or organizations wasted an untold amount more.

THE SOLUTION: Instant Runoff Voting

The best remedy to expensive, low turnout, mudslinging runoff elections is an electoral method called instant runoff voting. Instant runoff voting (IRV) allows voters to rank their candidates, 1, 2, 3, and the rankings are used to elect a majority winner in a single election. This saves the cost and hassle of running a second election. With IRV, Los Angeles could combine the primary and runoff into one effective election.

THE BENEFITS: “One election, not two”

Increased voter participation. Voters, candidates and voter mobilization organizations in Los Angeles could focus on a single election and maximize voter participation. San Francisco has been using IRV for the past four years in a November election, and voter participation in many minority neighborhoods has increased by 300 to 400 percent.

Eliminate costly runoffs. By combining the primary and runoff into a single election, tens of millions of tax dollars will be saved that currently are wasted on an unnecessary second election where few voters bother to participate. Those tax dollars could be better spent on other pressing needs in Los Angeles.

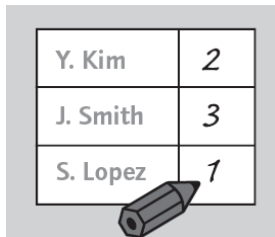
New voices, more choices. With IRV, if your first choice candidate can’t win your vote goes to your second choice. This liberates voters to choose the candidates you really like instead of always voting for the “lesser of two evils,” or “wasting” your vote on spoiler candidates. It brings new candidates and their issues into the debate, leading to a more robust “marketplace of ideas,” and inspiring greater participation

Better debate, less mudslinging. IRV discourages negative campaigns because candidates know they may need the second or third ranking from other candidates’ supporters to win. The result is a major shift in traditional campaign strategy. Instead of mudslinging, candidates have an incentive to run civil, issues-based campaigns and find common ground. In San Francisco’s IRV elections, some of the most contested races have seen candidates endorsing like-minded opponents, sharing slate mailers and co-sponsoring fundraisers. One New York Times headline read: “New Runoff System in San Francisco Has the Rival Candidates Cooperating.” Such coalition-building is certain to benefit the eventual winner when governing. (See Examples, page 7).

Support campaign finance reform and public financing. IRV spares candidates the burden of raising money for two elections instead of one. Since 1993, the City's program to partially fund political campaigns has given \$8.9 million to candidates in runoffs. That public money all could be saved. Combined with the tax savings from eliminating the administration of runoff elections, tens of millions of dollars will be saved over time. That money could be used to help fund an expansion of the current partial public financing program to one of full public financing of campaigns.

HOW IT WORKS

Instant runoff voting (IRV) allows voters to rank the candidates in their order of preference, 1-2-3, instead of just picking one candidate. All the first rankings are counted, and if a candidate wins a majority the election is over, just like now. But if no candidate wins a majority, each voter's second and third rankings are used to determine the winner – *instantly*.



Y. Kim	2
J. Smith	3
S. Lopez	1

The candidate with the fewest first rankings is eliminated and voters who ranked that candidate now have their vote counted for their second choice – that's their runoff choice. All ballots are recounted in the "instant runoff," and if a candidate has a majority, that's the winner. If not, the process repeats until one candidate has majority support (See Ballot Count Flow Chart). To view a Web-based demonstration of how IRV ballots are counted, visit www.newamerica.net/irv_resources.

GROWING MOMENTUM

Instant runoff voting is widely used around the world and is spreading in California. It is used in San Francisco for local elections, where exit polls have shown that voters across all ethnic lines like the system and find it easy to use. Voters in Oakland, Davis and Berkeley, and Santa Clara County recently passed ballot measures to adopt IRV. Student governments at UCLA, Cal Tech, Stanford, UC-Berkeley and others are using such electoral methods. In California IRV has broad support from the state Democratic Party, Green Party, Libertarian Party as well as good government and voting rights groups like Common Cause, League of Women Voters, California PIRG, Latino Congreso, Greenlining Institute, Asian Law Caucus, Chinese for Affirmative Action, and Southwest Voter Registration Education Project.

Table 1: Summary of Runoff Election Expenditures 1993-2005

SUMMARY OF RUNOFF ELECTION EXPENDITURES				
ELECTION	TOTAL	CITY OF LOS ANGELES	LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT	LOS ANGELES COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT
May 2005	\$4,703,721.37	\$4,703,721.37	\$0.00	\$0.00
May 2003	\$5,444,542.15	\$1,065,100.45	\$596,950.48	\$3,782,491.22
June 2001	\$4,527,466.27	\$2,935,579.78	\$680,875.11	\$746,071.71
June 1999	\$5,836,679.30	\$3,789,056.56	\$861,816.99	\$1,185,805.75
June 1997	\$2,948,909.34	\$1,036,905.47	\$329,026.40	\$1,582,977.48
June 1995	\$3,755,660.94	\$1,922,453.36	\$440,522.73	\$1,392,684.85
June 1993	\$3,748,102.86	\$2,172,638.48	\$0.00	\$1,486,305.30
Grand Totals	\$30,965,082.23	\$17,625,455.47	\$2,909,191.71	\$10,176,336.31
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ELECTION	TOTAL	CITY OF LOS ANGELES	LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT	LOS ANGELES COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT
May 2005	\$4,703,721.37	\$4,703,721.37	\$0.00	\$0.00
March 2005	\$6,735,998.63	\$3,535,672.79	\$807,077.82	\$2,393,248.02
May 2003	\$5,444,542.15	\$1,065,100.45	\$596,950.48	\$3,782,491.22
March 2003	\$5,449,462.43	\$1,589,606.94	\$1,245,781.32	\$2,614,074.17
June 2001	\$4,527,466.27	\$2,935,579.78	\$680,875.11	\$746,071.71
April 2001	\$4,362,527.12	\$2,250,380.72	\$652,927.01	\$1,624,158.59
June 1999	\$5,836,679.30	\$3,789,056.56	\$861,816.99	\$1,185,805.75
April 1999	\$4,265,979.57	\$1,937,262.30	\$795,422.19	\$1,533,295.09
June 1997	\$2,948,909.34	\$1,036,905.47	\$329,026.40	\$1,582,977.48
April 1997	\$3,851,139.53	\$2,260,540.83	\$792,661.66	\$797,937.05
June 1995	\$3,755,660.94	\$1,922,453.36	\$440,522.73	\$1,392,684.85
April 1995	\$4,157,100.92	\$2,154,979.90	\$691,253.14	\$1,309,385.06
June 1993	\$3,748,102.86	\$2,172,638.48	\$0.00	\$1,486,305.30
April 1993	\$4,225,987.95	\$2,438,955.36	\$549,985.93	\$1,237,046.66
Grand Totals	\$64,013,278.38	\$33,792,854.31	\$8,444,300.78	\$21,685,480.95

Information provided by the Office of the City Clerk of Los Angeles

Table 2: Voter Turnout History by City Council District 1997-2005

Voter Turnout History by City Council District						
Year	1997		1999		2001	
	<i>3-Jun</i>	<i>8-Apr</i>	<i>8-Jun</i>	<i>13-Apr</i>	<i>5-Jun</i>	<i>10-Apr</i>
CD 1	8.99%	33.21%	15.92%	18.26%	42.14%	37.50%
CD 2	7.48%	31.84%	15.77%	18.40%	36.15%	32.52%
CD 3	9.52%	34.90%	16.08%	14.50%	37.88%	34.13%
CD 4	11.41%	30.71%	15.09%	16.81%	32.37%	28.82%
CD 5	8.07%	32.61%	15.33%	13.00%	36.24%	33.15%
CD 6	11.13%	31.70%	16.73%	17.53%	37.27%	33.43%
CD 7	6.77%	27.29%	23.31%	25.99%	38.90%	31.99%
CD 8	6.19%	25.96%	17.71%	17.79%	37.36%	32.18%
CD 9	12.20%	25.81%	14.81%	13.45%	34.70%	30.48%
CD 10	8.09%	29.92%	28.29%	26.93%	40.67%	35.77%
CD 11	20.98%	37.27%	17.75%	14.51%	38.49%	36.09%
CD 12	9.11%	35.26%	18.13%	20.26%	39.35%	35.60%
CD 13	14.09%	32.57%	15.38%	17.54%	40.29%	35.91%
CD 14	14.40%	30.82%	27.58%	28.59%	42.12%	35.89%
CD 15	10.51%	28.36%	12.29%	17.00%	35.88%	30.88%
Citywide Average	10.73%	31.71%	17.66%	18.07%	37.67%	33.53%

Year	2005		2003	
	<i>17-May</i>	<i>8-Mar</i>	<i>20-May</i>	<i>5-Mar</i>
CD 1	40.33%	31.04%	9.55%	10.23%
CD 2	31.26%	27.81%	8.25%	11.12%
CD 3	32.67%	30.21%	9.24%	11.58%
CD 4	29.02%	24.48%	9.12%	13.71%
CD 5	30.25%	27.93%	7.64%	8.03%
CD 6	34.62%	26.11%	7.56%	12.38%
CD 7	35.40%	26.83%	6.75%	7.25%
CD 8	33.89%	29.10%	7.85%	22.37%
CD 9	32.56%	27.63%	6.97%	9.84%
CD 10	35.99%	29.65%	26.27%	25.08%
CD 11	36.13%	29.63%	7.90%	7.00%
CD 12	34.08%	31.04%	20.56%	21.22%
CD 13	33.88%	25.87%	9.28%	9.28%
CD 14	42.13%	32.41%	12.36%	32.87%
CD 15	34.60%	27.27%	6.65%	8.76%
Citywide Average	33.94%	28.53%	10.49%	13.93%

Table 3: Campaign Contributions, Matching Funds and Independent Expenditures -
Municipal Election Totals 2005

2005 Municipal Election Totals			
RACE	CONTRIBUTIONS	MATCHING FUNDS	INDEPENDENT EXPENDITURES
Mayor	\$ 14,663,847.88	\$4,539,025.10	\$ 3,694,412.84
Runoff	\$ 5,853,793.22	\$2,000,000.00	\$ 3,092,403.27
Primary	\$ 8,810,054.66	\$2,539,025.10	\$ 602,009.57
District 11	\$ 1,253,842.27	\$532,704.00	\$ 559,099.43
Runoff	\$ 577,109.64	\$300,000.00	\$ 458,872.67
Primary	\$ 676,732.63	\$232,704.00	\$ 100,226.76
Totals:	\$ 20,030,154.03	\$5,144,711.10	\$ 4,279,313.92
Runoff	\$ 6,430,902.86	\$2,300,000.00	\$ 3,551,275.94
Primary	\$ 13,599,251.17	\$2,844,711.10	\$ 728,037.98

Information compiled from the Los Angeles Ethics Commission website

The New York Times

New Runoff System in San Francisco Has the Rival Candidates Cooperating By DEAN E. MURPHY, September 30, 2004

**Susan
King**

For Supervisor, District 5

Vote November 2nd!

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

Paid for by Susan King for Supervisor, Nancy Williams, Treasurer, FPPC # 1267965

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**District 4 Voters Can Cast
3 Votes for Supervisor**

**Make Sure 2 of Them are
Doug Chan and Ron Dudum**

Instant Runoff Voting Ballot Count Flow Chart

