Senators:

Please vote NO on SB 791 "RCV 4 OR".

Ranked-choice voting (RCV) a.k.a. Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) should not be established as the default voting method for nonpartisan races in Oregon because it does not deliver much of what it promises --

1) RCV promises an unmistakably clear ballot -- but on the contrary, studies show that voters in disadvantaged precincts tend to spoil more of their RCV ballots than voters in advantaged districts, thus causing under representation in disadvantaged precincts. This typically happens when voters mistakenly give two candidates in a race the same ranking, indicating that they've confused ranking with rating, i.e. scoring. Moreover, this problem gets way worse on ballots with numerous candidates..

2) RCV promises that voters can always vote for their favorite candidate without fear of wasting their vote, i.e., without having to vote for the lesser evil in order to prevent the greater evil from winning -- but on the contrary, studies show that in about 15% or more of RCV elections vote splitting and the spoiler effect do occur, requiring voters to consider voting for the lesser evil whenever such elections even threaten to occur. The most notorious example of this is the Burlington VT mayoral election of 2009, and another is the Aspen CO city council election of 2009. By voting for their favorite some voters in the former caused their least favorite to win, and some voters in the latter caused their own favorite to lose!, all because of the occurrence of vote splitting and the spoiler effect in a significant number of RCV elections.

3) RCV promises majority winners -- but on the contrary, since so many ballots in RCV elections become exhausted -- typically 10% or more of them have had all their preferences eliminated come the final round of the runoffs -- the majority supporting the final "majority winner", excluding voters with spoiled ballots as well as voters with exhausted ballots, is often not a true majority of all the original voters. Moreover, since ranked-choice voting cuts out centrist candidates and favors partisan candidates same as our one-choice plurality voting system does in tandem with the vote splitting and the spoiler effect mentioned above, RCV's "majority winners" are liable not to be the clearly preferred winners who would beat out all the other candidates in head-to-head contests, which is actually what did happen in the Burlington and Aspen elections cited above.

Besides these three delivery failures, RCV has other serious problems including 1) trouble handling elections with numerous candidates; 2) lack of ballot sumability requiring complex and costly software to run the runoffs; and 3) lack of "precinct sumability" requiring the gathering of all the ballots physically in one place or the security riskof gathering them electronically in order to do the runoffs. All three of these problems cause frustrating and costly delays in tallying the vote.

Oregon can do much better than this, and indeed Oregon's own home-grown STAR voting system is proving to overcome all these problems. So, if you agree with this assessment, please vote against SB 791 and vote for HB 3250 (for STAR) instead, and if you feel the need to see more evidence, vote for HB 3241 to establish a task force to look more deeply into all our main voting system alternatives -- ranked-choice, approval, and STAR voting -- and then let the data show the way.

Thanks much,

Michael Brackney, looking to Oregon from San Diego