

Instant Runoff Voting Analysis

Hon. Paul D López

Denver Clerk and Recorder

Denver Clerk and Recorder/Denver Elections Division





What is Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)?

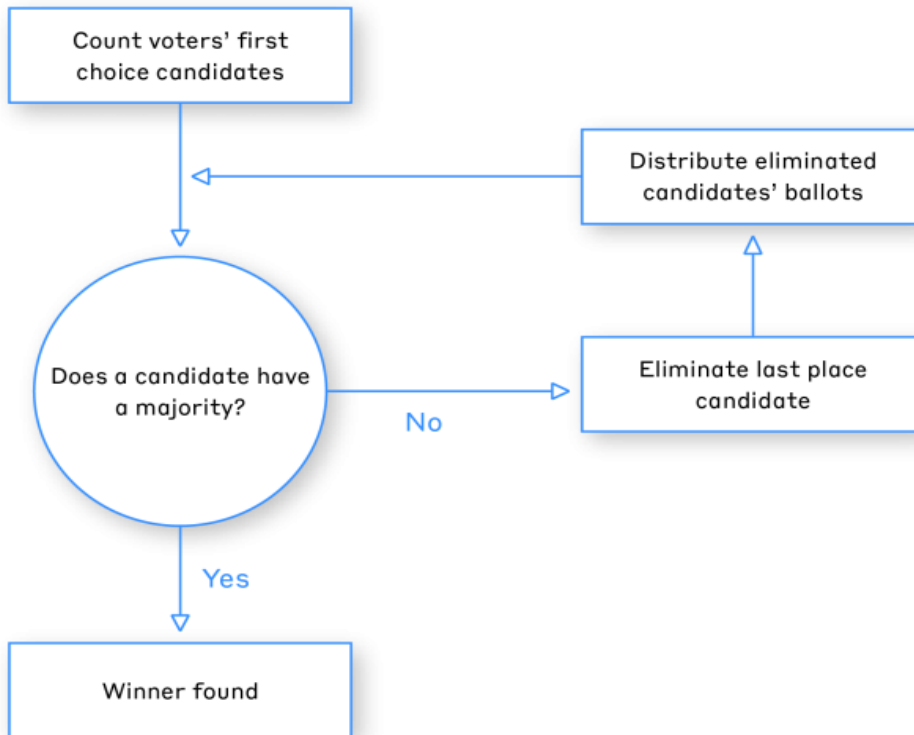
IRV is a voting method in single-winner elections where voters rank candidates and one winner is chosen

- IRV is a type of Ranked-Choice Voting (RCV)
- IRV eliminates the need for a separate runoff election
- Single-winner elections in Denver: Mayor, Auditor, Clerk & Recorder, District Councilmembers
- A similar, but slightly different process for At Large

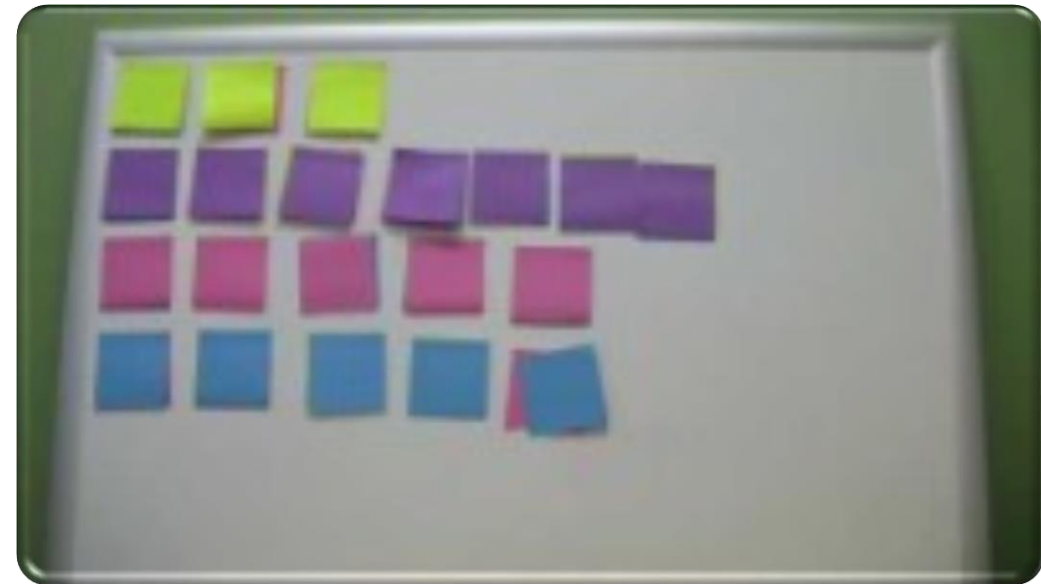


How it works

How votes are counted in an IRV system



IRV explained by Minnesota Public Radio



Note: multi-winner races are counted using Single Transferrable Vote Method, which has minor differences



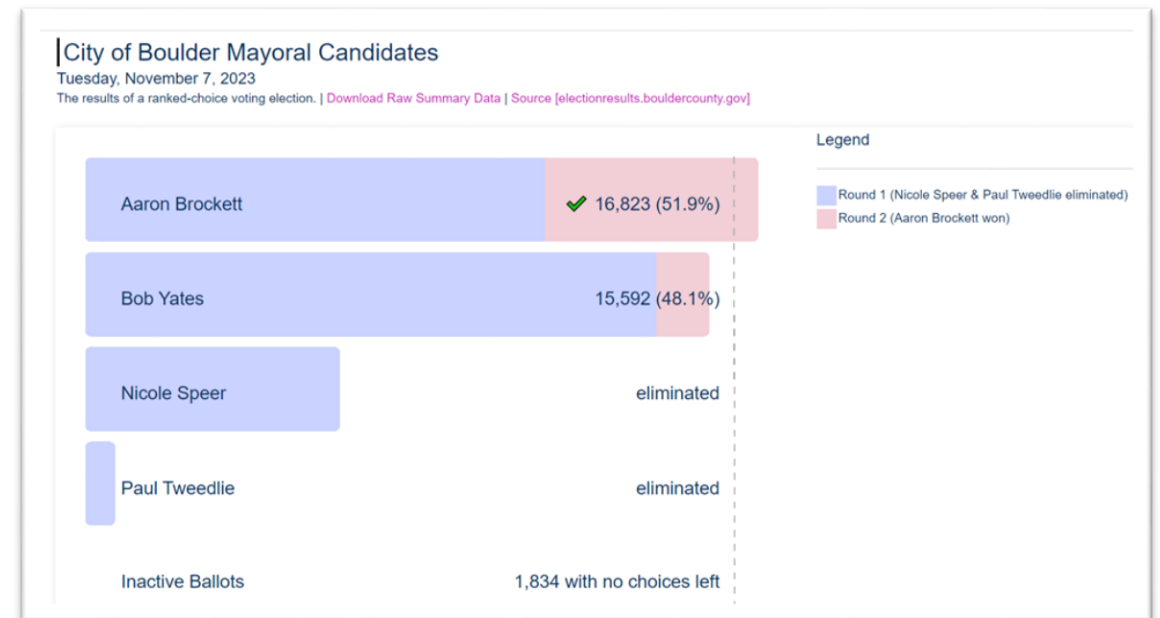
Reporting election results

Election night reporting

- All first-choice votes reported
- In non-competitive races, the winner may be known on election night

Reporting after election night

- Option one: Conduct round-by-round reporting on early results & update as ballots received
- Option two: Wait to receive all ballots before conducting round-by-round counts
 - 10 days after election night all ballots will be received and tabulated





Studies on turnout and participation

A [2021 study](#) demonstrated **higher turnout in youth voters** in cities that used ranked ballots. The researchers attributed the increase to the **decrease negative campaigning** and increased voter contact

When compared to the primary and runoff elections they replace, ranked elections are associated with a **10 point increase in voter turnout**, according to a [2016 study](#) by researchers at the University of Missouri in St. Louis. This study and others have found that IVR **did not create inequities in turnout**

Certain research highlights the benefits of IRV by lauding the system's ability to reduce the spoiler effect, increase electoral representation for racial and gender minorities, and promote more civil campaign strategies. **While there is some evidence to support these claims, most of this research is inconclusive.**

A Harvard/George Washington University study found that on-cycle elections show increases in youth voter turnout and across socio-economic strata

Sources: [FairVote](#), [Harvard University](#), [MIT Election Data & Science Lab](#)

IRV Reviewed

Examples of what proponents like:

- Saves money by eliminating runoff elections
- Discourages negative campaigning & increases touchpoints

Examples of what opponents dislike:

- Requires robust voter education
- Changes the nature of reporting election results





Things to consider

- Legislation & timelines
 - Requires changes to charter and D.R.M.C.
 - Potential state legislation regarding state-level IRV
- Voting system capabilities
 - Denver's voting system can tabulate IRV elections now
 - Risk Limiting Audits will be supported by 2026
- Budget
 - Voter education efforts
- Reporting results

Resources for further research:

