

Comparison Table for Ranked Choice Oregon, STAR, and Instant-Runoff Voting

Vote-counting methods are confusing, and comparing them can be difficult. To help out, here’s a “scorecard” for three voting methods currently being considered for use in **Oregon** elections.

	Ranked Choice Including Pairwise Elimination (RCIPE)	Score Then Automatic Runoff (STAR)	Instant-Runoff Voting (IRV)
Method description	Similar to IRV but with early elimination if a candidate loses every remaining one-on-one (pairwise) match	Add numbers marked by voters, find two candidates with highest sums, then pairwise runoff	Successively eliminate candidate who has the fewest ballots marked with that candidate at the highest rank
Overall comparison	Better than STAR, much better than IRV	Better than IRV, not as good as RCIPE	Better than the single-choice (plurality) ballots we use now
Proposed usage	<u>Ranked Choice Oregon ballot initiative</u> for general elections Also, <u>suggested wording changes to SB 791</u> and HB 2678	HB 3250 for primary & nonpartisan elections	SB 791, SB 343, and HB 2678 for primary & nonpartisan elections
Is it “ranked choice voting”? ¹	Yes	No	Yes
Ballot type	Ranked ballot (first choice, second choice, etc.)	Rating ballot (zero to 5, can express strength of preference)	Ranked ballot (first choice, second choice, etc.)
Allows marking multiple candidates at same preference level?	Yes	Yes	No (according to FairVote organization ²)
Allows any pattern of ballot marks?	Yes	Yes	No (according to FairVote organization ²)
Considers preference level of every candidate on every ballot?	Yes	Yes	No
Involves pairwise counting?	Yes (to find “pairwise losing candidates”)	Yes (as automatic top-two runoff)	No

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Would have elected correct winner in Burlington election?	Yes	Probably, if tactical voting was limited, otherwise unknown	No, failed in that election (2009 mayoral)
Resistant to tactical voting?	Yes	Partially (yes in some cases, no in other cases)	No
Low failure rates for “clone independence” and “independence of irrelevant alternatives” (IIA)? ³	Yes	Yes	No (failures in Burlington and elsewhere are well-known)
If used in general election, unlikely to elect candidate from unexpected political party?	Yes	Unknown (because tactical voting is common in general elections)	No (this is what happened in Burlington)
Paper ballots can be hand counted? ⁴	Yes	Yes	Yes
Marking ballots is easy to understand?	Yes	Yes for sincere voting, no for tactical voting	No (if using rules recommended by FairVote organization ²)
Vote counting is easy to understand?	Not as easy as STAR and IRV, but easier to understand than Condorcet methods	Yes	Yes
Usage	None yet	Independent Party of Oregon primary elections, Democratic Party of Oregon delegate elections, Multnomah County Democratic party internal elections	Roberts Rules of Order, Maine, San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, Benton county (OR), etc., Canadian nominating conventions, used and then repealed in Burlington (VT), Aspen (CO), Ann Arbor (MI), and elsewhere
Notable peer-reviewed academic research?	No (too new)	Minimal (too new)	Yes, lots (method is more than a century old)

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Recommended?	Yes by the VoteFair guy (VoteFair.org)	Yes by Equal Vote Coalition (Equal.Vote)	Yes by FairVote organization (FairVote.org) ²

Footnotes

¹ Promoters of STAR voting criticize instant-runoff voting (IRV) using its category name “ranked choice voting.” However, the “ranked choice voting” category includes other vote-counting methods that also use ranked ballots, including Ranked Choice Including Pairwise Elimination (RCIPE). Ranked ballots are also used by Condorcet methods, but typically they are not included in the term “ranked choice voting.” RCIPE is not a Condorcet method because it does not always elect the Condorcet winner.

² The FairVote organization refuses to promote a better version of instant-runoff voting (IRV) because their hidden agenda is to adopt a method known as the single-transferable vote (STV) for use in Congress and state legislatures throughout the United States. This agenda is clear in Canada where the FairVote organization openly promotes STV and dismisses IRV as unworthy for use in electing members of parliament. The single-transferable vote (STV) makes it easier to elect third-party candidates, and it enlarges districts and elects several representatives for each of these fewer, larger districts. The FairVote organization promotes a wording for IRV that will serve as a “stepping stone” on their path to enact STV, and this promoted wording accounts for several of IRV’s serious flaws.

³ Lower failure rates for these fairness criteria (clone independence and the independence of irrelevant alternatives [IIA]) increase resistance to campaign-contribution (money) tactics that exploit strategic nomination. Strategic nomination refers to controlling which candidates enter, and drop out of, an election, which in turn can be done to exploit vote splitting (which is analogous to the military tactic known as “divide and conquer”). The standard tactic in a primary election is for big campaign contributors to privately arrange to concentrate their money on a single candidate, and if the primary also includes a reform-minded candidate then limited funding is arranged for a “clone” candidate (often called a “spoiler”) to split votes away from the reform-minded candidate. In a general election big campaign contributors can give limited funds to a third-party candidate (or independent candidate) who unknowingly serves as an “irrelevant alternative” or “clone” candidate (a “spoiler”) who splits votes away from the unwanted candidate.

⁴ In contrast, hand counting is difficult for the best Condorcet methods. The ability to hand count ranked-choice-voting methods, combined with the simplicity of eliminating one candidate at a time, makes ranked-choice-voting methods easier to understand compared to Condorcet methods, which typically yield fairer results.

Other Methods

Approval voting would work well in *primary* (but not *general*) elections in a state that is not yet ready to adopt ranked ballots. This change only requires changing the instructions to allow a voter to mark more than one candidate in each race.

Open primaries typically make the mistake of allowing single-choice (plurality) ballots to identify which candidates deserve to progress to the general election. This mistake gives an advantage to whichever political party offers only two candidates. The tactic of giving limited campaign contributions to ensure four or more candidates from the other main party further increases the two-candidate advantage. A much better reform is for Republican and Democratic primary elections to nominate two candidates each, and those four candidates (plus third-party and independent candidates) can compete in the general election using ranked ballots. Historically the lack of ranked ballots in what we now call general elections is what led to creating primary elections after it became obvious that the winner was likely to be from whichever main political party offered just one candidate.

Proportional Representation (PR) is a worthwhile goal, but implementing PR correctly requires that the state has already adopted ranked ballots in both primary and general elections. At that point the single-transferable vote (STV) will be recognized as too primitive compared to much better proportional-representation (PR) methods.

Author

This document was written by Richard Fobes who is the subject-matter expert for the **Ranked Choice Oregon** ballot initiative. He is the **VoteFair** guy (not to be confused with the DC-based FairVote organization), and he lives in Oregon. He has been teaching people about better voting methods for three decades. He created the VoteFair.org website and wrote the website's interactive software that has calculated VoteFair Ranking results for thousands of surveys, polls, and elections. He's the author of *Ending The Hidden Unfairness In U.S. Elections*, the highlights of which are summarized in this document. His email address is: electionmethods@votefair.org

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An online copy of this document is at:

https://www.RankedChoiceOregon.org/comparison_table_rco_star_irv.pdf

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