Ranked Ballots and the Math of Voting

Ranked ballots are a tried and tested method of voting that have been used for more than 100 years. Mathematicians have studied the theoretical and real-world effects of using every conceivable form of voting. The conclusion is that by allowing voters to select their most preferred candidates, ranked ballots can eliminate strategic voting.

Ranked ballots are as easy as 1-2-3

- Ranked ballots eliminate the strategic voting we've come to expect under first-past-the-post, thereby solving one of the biggest drawbacks of our current voting system – it is simply impossible to vote strategically in a ranked ballot election, even with the best polling information

- With ranked ballots, the concept of voting for the lesser of two evils goes out the window – voting your true preferences is the only tactic that makes sense mathematically

- Opponents of election reform frequently use talk of complex mathematics to scare voters and elected officials, but their complaints lack evidence and have been disproven time and again – both on the chalkboard and in real life

Fact Check: How do ranked ballots compare to our current system?

Some claim that ranked ballots suffer from what mathematicians call ***intransitivity*** (meaning that voters will tend to vote strategically instead of for who they really want) and ***non-monotonicity*** (meaning that voters can actually hurt their preferred candidate by ranking them higher rather than lower on the ballot). In reality, ranked ballots have been shown to vastly reduce intransitivity compared to the current system, which is good because it allows citizens to express their true preference at the ballot box instead of voting for the lesser-of-two-evils. The claim that ranked ballots suffer from non-monotonicity is also misleading. Voters can never harm a candidate's chances by giving them a higher ranking on the ballot. While it is true that tabulating the winner is more complex with ranked ballots, as losing candidates are eliminated until one candidate reaches a majority, modern voting practices around the world rely on computers capable of pronouncing the winner in less than a second – which is why ranked ballots are often called 'instant runoff voting'.
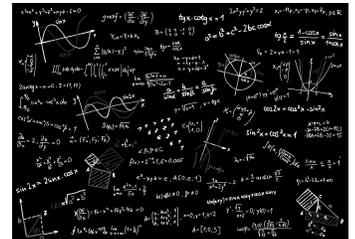
Fact Check: Do ranked ballots lead to unforeseen voting paradoxes?

Critic Anthony Gierzynski falsely claims that ranked ballots are susceptible to numerous voting paradoxes, citing the 2009 Burlington, VT mayoral election as an example. Interestingly, he does not mention his bias as a failed mayoral candidate against Bob Kiss, who won re-election in 2009. Although ranked ballots were later replaced in Burlington, it was not in favour of first-past-the-post – they still use a form of runoff voting. According to Richard DeLeon of San Francisco State University, "Gierzynski's assessment of IRV [i.e. ranked ballots] is shoddy, biased, and borders on ridiculous. It uses tortured logic, cherry-picked 'evidence', and dubious arguments to slam IRV and lamely defend two-party rule and the status quo ante. Worst, it distorts and misrepresents San Francisco's experience using IRV, which has been used in six elections now with very good results."

We're proposing a small, simple change that would make Toronto's elections more fair, diverse, inclusive and friendly. **www.rabit.ca**

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Ranked Ballot Initiative of Toronto