

Aspen, Colorado just had its first experiment with an IRV election. There was plenty of warning beforehand that it wasn't a good idea to be playing with matches without some adult supervision and serious thought. However, in the rush to adopt IRV methods just weeks before the May election, the City got careless. We now have singed hair and blistered fingers as the details of the IRV black box are beginning to belatedly spill out. We managed to get through the election, with no big surprises in two races, but created a perverse puzzlement in one Council race. While there is much more to be analyzed, so far 1) three weeks post election, the City restated the official mayor's race totals after the election was certified, as more votes were found for the winner. The missing votes had been delivered to the loser (that's me), by using Cambridge, Massachusetts rules rather than using Aspen's IRV rules, and 2) that "it will never happen in real life" non-monotonicity bugaboo produced a poster child for why IRV can greatly disenfranchise voters and candidates.

Aspen voters have not yet been informed of the second problem through the press or letters to the editor, but will be aware soon, when the worksheet proving the bizarre answer is ready for the public record. In the meantime, I'm sharing with some friends wise to the wily nature of IRV, the result that occurred here.

Michael Behrendt, Council candidate, got defeated by 75 of his own supporters, doing their best to support him by ranking him #1 on their ballot. Turns out that he lost to candidate Torre by just 43 of 2103 votes cast in IRV tabulation terms. However, two independent analysts have calculated that if Behrendt had only had the foresight to ask 75 of his loyal supporters to rank him #2 and change their lower rank for candidate Jack Johnson to #1, AHEAD of Behrendt, Behrendt would have won. Little did those voters know that they were costing their friend Michael the election by voting FOR him as the number #1 candidate.

Whether you were a Michael, Jack or Torre supporter it has to be a bit disconcerting to know that the order in which you voted for your favorite might have been hurting him instead of helping him get elected. Aspen's flavor of IRV contains mysterious anomalies for us non-mathematicians, which, as demonstrated, can happen in real life, in our local elections. This "Michael Behrendt effect," I'll call it, is one of the side effects of "non-monotonicity". Apparently, the larger the field of candidates, the greater the probability of puzzling outcomes from seemingly minor choices in ranking the candidates. Voters can't simply depend on the normal voting logic we've known since kindergarten.

Did the Council and IRV Task Force know of such possibilities when adopting IRV? The risks were well documented, but in their rush to adopt a IRV system, non-monotonicity passed off as "rare", or acceptable as "no system is perfect." The fact that 2 incumbents (also candidates in the May election) appointed themselves to the IRV Task Force and then voted as Council members on the method their taskforce had recommended, might have had a bit to do with why such anomalies were not thoroughly discussed, although the public raised the issues repeatedly. The lack of independence was rather astounding! Were the voters properly informed as to the risk and the complexity? Ask Michael's supporters, who voted for him first instead of second, thinking that they were definitely helping him get elected. In fact, City Hall

assured us in the public hearings to adopt the IRV procedures that it could not happen, despite warnings from mathematicians.

While it is a shame that Michael was defeated in such a perverse way, his situation will bring the hot spotlight to IRV in Aspen. Michael is a well known long time local citizen, a Council member in the 1970's, and a small lodge owner. He is loved by the entire community and quite active in civic affairs. The fact that the puzzling system defied logic and defeated such well-respected candidate will get additional attention. No doubt he will become the poster child for Monotone Violation in IRV!

I will be posting a review of alternative election results, including the "Michael Behrendt effect," showing some what-if scenarios on www.TheRedAnt.com . I have also posted Kathy Dopp's Instant Runoff Voting Flaws paper <http://electionmathematics.org/ucvAnalysis/US/RCV-IRV/InstantRunoffVotingFlaws.pdf>, to offer evidence to the skeptics.

For some less technical background arguments in Aspen against IRV see:

<http://theredant.squarespace.com/red-ant-blog/2009/3/1/caleb-kleppner-and-his-kleptomaniacal-machineissue-30.html>

(who knew?? That The Red Ant would be prophetic about that black box.)

and

<http://theredant.squarespace.com/red-ant-blog/2009/2/16/dont-know-much-about-algebra-issue-29.html>

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