

Communication from Public

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Date Submitted: 05/22/2026 01:32 PM
Council File No: 23-1027
Comments for Public Posting: Voting Rights and Wrongs: Issues with LA's City Council District 11 election — and how to fix it (via Ranked Choice Voting and LA Charter Reform) By Michael Feinstein, The Argonaut Contributor
https://www.argonautnews.com/opinion/voting-rights-and-wrongs-issues-with-la-s-city-council-district-11-election-and-how/article_42ed9571-68f1-4cfb-a9da-74d1f76a6124.html

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**Voting Rights and Wrongs in LA's City Council District 11 election - and how to fix it via Charter Reform
By Michael Feinstein. The Argonaut Newspaper. May 21, 2026**

With only two candidates on the ballot, either Faizah Malik or Traci Park will be elected to the Los Angeles City Council on June 2, to represent District 11.

Regardless of who wins, what should be troubling - especially after the U.S Supreme Court just gutted the Federal Voting Rights Act - is that the contest will be decided in a lower turnout, less diverse primary. This is because LA uses an out-dated contingent run-off system, with a mandated spring primary election, and a November runoff only if no candidate wins a majority in the primary.

But it doesn't have to be this way — if LA adopts ranked-choice voting (RCV) for City elections, as part of its 2025-2026 Charter Reform process. RCV was recommended 10-1 to the City Council by the LA Charter Reform Commission on February 26. Now it is up to the full City Council, whether to place it on the November 2026 general election ballot for approval by the voters.

Under RCV, voters are empowered to rank as many candidates as they like. If a voter's top choice doesn't win, their vote transfers to their next preferred candidate and so on, until one candidate receives a majority. In this way, only one election need be held - and it can occur in conjunction with the state's November General Election, where turnout is higher, and the electorate is more diverse and representative.

Why does LA have primaries at all?

LA's election system is not well designed for races featuring more than two strong candidates. If substantial vote-splitting occurs among several candidates — and none wins a majority in the primary as a result — then LA resorts to engineering a false majority winner by limiting voter choice to only two candidates in a run-off. Under this system, it's hard to know whether to vote in the primary for your most favored candidate — or one you think has the best chance to win. By allowing voters to rank candidates, RCV eliminates 'vote-splitting', 'spoiler candidates', and 'lesser of evil' voting. Instead, voters are empowered to express their true preferences — and see that reflected in the results.

How LA's system discriminates against various ethnic communities

Dr. Evan Rosenman and Dr. Sarah Cannon, both of Claremont McKenna College, used a method known as Bayesian Improved Surname Geocoding to estimate LA voters' racial self-identification, as part of the statistical analysis on districting and racial turnout they presented to the 2025-2026 Los Angeles Charter Reform Commission. According to Rosenman:

“Among LA’s four largest ethnic communities — White, Black, Asian, and Hispanic voters — White registered voters consistently participate in elections at the highest rate, while Hispanic registered voters typically participate at the lowest. However, relative turnout rates vary widely across elections. General elections, especially in presidential years, command high turnout across all ethnic groups, and thus produce electorates that most closely resemble LA’s demographics. Primary elections, especially in midterm years, are the least representative...In the June 2022 midterm primary, we estimated that White registered voter turnout rate (46%) was more than twice that of Hispanic registered voters (21%). These primary electorates are thus highly unrepresentative of the population of Angelenos.”

What about in CD11? According to Rosenman and Cannon, while White voters always turn out in higher numbers and are thus always overrepresented in the electorate compared to their share of registered voters - in CD11 in the 2022 mid-term, the White voters' share fell about 2.5% between the primary and general, with about half going to Hispanic voters and the remainder to other minority groups.

While this percentage may seem small, in a close election it can mean the difference between winning and losing, and who gains representation and power, and who not.

What about 'lame ducks' under LA's system, when an incumbent is defeated in the primary?

In LA, newly elected City Council members are seated in December, *regardless* of whether they are elected in March or June primaries, or in a November run-off. *That means a defeated incumbent can stay in office and keep voting on public policy for six to nine months after they have been rejected by voters.*

In 2022 in CD1, challenger Eunisses Hernandez defeated incumbent Gill Cedillo in the June 7 primary — but Hernandez wasn't seated until December 12. The same could happen this year if Park is not re-elected. But even when re-elected, a single RCV election avoids unnecessarily distracting incumbents from their public responsibilities, compared to if they potentially have to run in two elections stretching over most of a calendar year.

Other RCV benefits

By holding only a single RCV election, LA would not have to pay to conduct two elections to fill a seat, saving approximately \$500,000 per eliminated unnecessary run-off. At the same time, its limited public financing matching funds would only have to be allocated for one election instead of two — enhancing that system’s financial sustainability — while candidates would also only have to raise money to run in one election instead of two.

Then there are RCV’s positive effects upon coalition-building and negative campaigning. Under LA’s current system, when multiple candidates represent similar political perspectives and/or constituencies, they are natural competitors because they are ‘dividing’ the vote.

Under RCV, there can be coalition-building *between* candidates and campaigns, where supporters of candidate ‘A’ can rank candidate ‘B’ with their second choice and vice-versa. Similarly, various communities of interest can run their own candidate, then support other candidates with their second and third preferences, amplifying their community’s voice. This then incentivizes positive campaigning from candidates in order to win second or third preferences from first-choice supporters of others.

Next Steps

Will LA voters get to decide this November whether to adopt RCV for municipal elections as part of LA Charter Reform? Only if the City Council places it on the ballot. At this point, no one knows where all the City Council votes are on this yet. Stay tuned, with a Council decision expected in the first half of June.

Michael Feinstein is a former Santa Monica Mayor and City Council member, a co-founder of the Green Party of California and a 2026 candidate for California Secretary of State.