

League of Women Voters of Texas Education Fund *Voting Procedures to Increase Voting Participation*

Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)

Facts and Issues

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Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) is a way of obtaining majority support for a candidate in an election with more than two candidates. It eliminates the need for an additional election. It is also known as Alternative Vote, Majority Preference Vote, Choice Vote, or Ranked Choice. It could be used with any of the voting methods (at the polls, by mail, etc).

The voters are asked to rank candidates in order of preference (1, 2, 3, etc.). They may rank as many or as few as they wish.¹ If no candidate has a majority on the first count, the candidate with the lowest number of votes is eliminated and the ballots cast for the eliminated candidate are transferred to those voters' second choices. The process is repeated until one candidate has a winning majority. This system guarantees a majority winner in a single round of voting.

IRV eliminates the need for low-turnout, high-cost runoffs by simulating a series of runoff elections all in one, saving money and time, and encouraging voter turnout. It enables a broader number of people to have their votes counted by giving them more initial choices. It preserves majority rule but encourages participation and diversity.

The need for voter education would increase with IRV. Voters would need to learn how to cast their votes. With the opportunity to rank more than one candidate, they may need to learn more about candidates beyond their first choice. Education about the vote counting process would be required to give voters confidence in the outcome. There would also be one-time transition costs for upgrading voting equipment.

IRV could assure counting of ballots of military and overseas voters. Mailing them ballots for runoff elections can be difficult if the date for the runoff is too close to the general election. The time for printing, mailing, and returning ballots is short. The problem can be addressed by extending the time between election rounds, but this lengthens the campaign season for voters at home. IRV can solve this problem since only one ballot has to be sent, filled out, and returned.

Voters have approved IRV by significant margins in nearly all municipalities where it has been introduced to voters. IRV legislation is also gaining support in a number of state legislatures. Louisiana, South Carolina, and Arkansas now use IRV for overseas military voters. In addition, it has been used in several city and county elections across the

country. It has been supported by Leagues of Women Voters in nine states, and it has been endorsed by several political organizations.

NOTES

Edited by Diane Sheridan, League of Women Voters of the Bay Area.

¹ FairVote Action, www.instantrunoff.com