

INSTANT RUNOFF VOTING (IRV) OR RANKED CHOICE VOTING (RCV)

Support for legislation that assures that the candidate preferred by a majority of voters wins the election

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) has determined that the following criteria are important to them in an election system:

- The system encourages majority rule and ensures majority support for the winner.
- The election system is easy to understand, use and administer.
- The system minimizes the cost to the candidates and the city, county or state. It encourages minority (racial, gender, economic) participation.
- The system raises the level of political campaigns/ focus on the issues

The LWVOK found that the plurality system was easiest to understand and administer. However, they did not want a system where officials were not elected by a majority. They preferred some sort of a runoff system even if it were more expensive.

The two-round runoff was also easy to understand. However, it costs the candidates and the election administrators extra money. Because the runoff usually has a much lower turnout than the first primary, sometimes the winner of the runoff cannot be said to have won by a majority. Comparing the votes by county, some counties with runoffs for legislative seats had a greater than 50% decrease in turnout in the August primary runoff compared to the July primary.

Using IRV a candidate must receive a majority to win. Since the runoff election is held at the same time as the first election, the candidates and the election administrators save the cost of a second election. Voters appreciate that they can vote their first choice candidate in a multi-candidate election and not worry about “spoiling” the chances of their second choice, since that vote will be counted in the second round if no candidate gets a majority in the first round.

The first thing most critics say of IRV is that the ballot is harder to mark than that for plurality voting, in which the voter just makes one ‘X’ or some equivalent one step process. (IRV offers voters the option of ‘ranking’ the candidates, but does not require it.) Any ballot that asks more of the voter than the one step can be problematic. The IRV is also more administratively complex. On the other hand, San Francisco State University -- which has done research with San Francisco’s IRV elections -- found that minorities and those whose first language was not English did not have more trouble than non- minority populations. All groups benefited from ballot education. San Francisco has used IRV since 2004 and election administrators and most voters support the system. The system was successful enough in San Francisco that neighboring cities of Oakland and Berkeley have also starting using IRV for their city elections.

IRV would require changes in state statutes and city charters. League members reviewed state election statutes and found nothing that prohibited instant runoff elections. Their review concludes that while there is nothing in current law that prohibits the use of instant runoff voting (or rank voting) from being used, it is not likely to be used unless the law (O.S. 26 Sections 1-102.2 and 1-102.3) is amended to include instant runoff/ranked voting as an option.

After looking at plurality, two round runoffs and IRV local Leagues agreed that IRV should be used in Oklahoma for the November state-wide elections, state-wide partisan primary elections and local elections for city officials and school boards.

Concurrence approved 2012

BACKGROUND

In 2009-2012 a study was carried out to determine if instant runoff voting (IRV), also called ranked choice voting (RCV), would be a good system for Oklahoma's partisan primaries and state-wide general elections, as well as for local city and school board elections.

The study looked at instant runoff voting systems both as proposed and as actually used in other states and cities. A comparison of IRV was made to Oklahoma's current systems for both local and statewide races. Topics covered were the effects of IRV on cost, voter turnout, and fairness. The possibility of voter confusion and need for education for a new system were also considered. The effects on third parties and independent candidates were also discussed.

The study also looked at what would be required to change the system and how difficult that would be —city code or charter changes, ordinance changes, constitution changes, state law changes.

At the time of the study Oklahoma used a combination of a plurality system and a two-round runoff system for elections. In a plurality system the candidate with the most votes wins whether or not he/ she receives a majority of the votes cast. With a two-round runoff if no candidate receives over 50% of the vote a run-off is held between the two candidates who received the most votes in the earlier primary. Many local school board and city elections use this two-round system to elect officials. Some cities use a plurality system to elect city officials.

With IRV, sometimes called ranked choice voting (RCV), voters rank the candidates on the ballot, marking their first, second, and third choices, depending on how many candidates are in the race. In round one, the first-choice votes are counted. If a candidate gets over 50% of the votes (a majority), he or she is declared the winner. If no one has a majority, the counting goes to the instant runoff. The candidate with the lowest number of first-choice votes is eliminated. The second-place votes on the ballots of the eliminated candidate are added to the first-place votes of the remaining candidates. If one of the remaining candidates gets a majority the election is over. If no

one gets a majority, again the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated and third choice votes of the eliminated candidate are transferred to the remaining candidates. This continues until a candidate has a majority.

In 2017, a LWVOK member was asked to write a description of Ranked Choice Voting for the Oklahoma Academy study materials. The LWVOK was represented at the annual meeting of the Oklahoma Academy that year by seven members. The topic was "Oklahoma Votes" and this compelled an unusually large number of LWVOK members to attend this gathering of state leaders. In the fall of 2019, the LWVUS announced a position on voting that includes Ranked Choice Voting as the preferred method of voting. This position will be discussed and possibly adopted at the 2020 LWVUS Convention.

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