

PREFERENCE VOTING (IRV)

Preference Voting, also called Instant Runoff Voting (IRV), offers a viable and more democratic alternative to the two most widely used voting systems in America today, namely “plurality elections” and “two-round runoff elections.”

In plurality voting, candidates can win with less than a majority when there are more than two candidates running for the office. In contrast, Preference Voting (IRV) elects a majority candidate while still allowing voters to support a candidate who is *not* a front runner – their preferred candidate.

Preference Voting (IRV) accommodates multiple candidates in single seat races and assures that a “spoiler” effect will not result in an undemocratic outcome. It allows all voters to vote for their favorite candidate without fear of helping elect their least favorite candidate, and it ensures that the winner enjoys true support from a majority of the voters.

How does it work?

On their ballots, voters rank the various candidates as their first choice, second choice, third choice, etc. The ballots are submitted and all of the first choice candidates counted. If one of the candidates does *not* receive a clear majority of votes on the first counting of the ballots, then a series of “runoff” counts are conducted.

On the first runoff round, the candidate who received the *fewest* first place ballots is eliminated. If a person’s first choice candidate was eliminated, then their second choice becomes their new “top choice.” If your first choice is eliminated in the first round, then your second choice still counts.

All ballots are then re-counted again, with each ballot still counting as just one vote for each voter’s favorite candidate *who is still in contention*. Voters who chose the eliminated candidate are now voting for their second choice candidate, while all other voters continue supporting their top candidate. This process of elimination and recount continues until one candidate receives a clear majority.

The benefits of IRV include ensuring majority rule where the candidate supported by the most people wins the election (in contrast to plurality voting). The winning candidate has maximum popular support. It also tends to decrease negative campaigning and saves money by avoiding costly runoff elections (which have notoriously low voter turnout).

Preference Voting (IRV) also tends to broaden the public dialogue by welcoming more than two opposing points of view, and promotes positive, issue-based campaigns since candidates will be motivated to seek 2nd and 3rd choice votes among the populace. It also increases voter turnout (research has shown) by giving voters more choices. Exit polls show that voters prefer IRV to the old voting system, have no difficulty understanding how it works. And, it’s easy and inexpensive to implement.

An increasing number of government races, universities and organizations are utilizing Preference Voting (IRV) because of these benefits. It has been used for decades in various places in the U.S. and around the world as a simple, commonsense, cost-saving reform that improves the democratic process.

Preference Voting (Instant Runoff Voting) is a forward step in the evolution of democracy.