

Instant Runoff Voting in Utah Municipalities

In 2018, the Utah state legislature passed HB 35 that established a pilot in which cities can use instant runoff voting. It passed 22-0 in the senate, 67-3 in House; 11-1 in interim committee; and 7-0 in Senate Gov't Operations. Gov. Herbert signed it into law in March 2018.

What is instant runoff voting? Instant runoff voting (IRV, also known as ranked choice voting) is an efficient and fair means to elect candidates by a majority vote in one election. IRV is used to elect local leaders in 11 U.S. cities and has recently been adopted by several more. IRV is also used statewide in Maine and by major party and government leaders in Canada, United Kingdom, and Australia. IRV has been used by the Utah Republican Party and County Parties in nomination contests. Arkansas, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and South Carolina use IRV ballots for military and overseas voters to permit them to participate in second-round runoff.

Instant runoff voting and majority rule: Utah is having an important conversation about having elections by majority. With new paths to the primary ballot, we face having more candidates on a primary ballot. Under Count My Vote candidates would have been able to win primaries with only 35% of the vote. If not, then a special runoff election would have been held. Special runoffs are costly to taxpayers and often result in very low voter turnout. IRV could solve that problem as a candidate can emerge the winner with far greater participation.

Merits of instant runoff voting:

IRV encourages civility. Candidates conduct more civil campaigns by addressing the issues and working to appeal to a broader spectrum of voters when they actively seeking second and third choice support from backers of other candidates.

More engaged voters: Voters become more informed about the candidates and issues also, since they have reasons to consider candidates beyond their 1st choice.

Fiscal savings for cities: Taxpayers' dollars are saved by allowing the city to hold one election in November rather than two elections.

Shorter, less expensive city campaigns: Candidates can focus on a single election in November, rather than an August primary followed by November election.

Ready for cities to implement: The voting equipment awarded the contract for use in Utah is capable of running instant runoff voting elections.

Eliminates the spoiler effect: Longshot candidates do not draw votes away from a candidate who is preferred by most voters.

A winner by majority vote: The final tally is always between the top two vote getting candidates and the winner gets more than 50% of the vote.

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