

Instant Runoff Voting

THE CARY EXPERIENCE

Cary, North Carolina's October 2007 Elections with instant Runoff Voting

In October 2007, Cary voters made history by becoming the first municipality in North Carolina to use instant runoff voting (IRV) for their municipal elections for mayor and city council. A majority system also known as ranked choice voting, IRV is a system designed for elections where three or more candidates run for office. IRV allows jurisdictions to eliminate traditional runoffs, which are expensive for taxpayers and candidates and often result in low turnout.



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participate in the 2007 IRV pilot. In Districts B and D, more than two candidates ultimately ran for council seats, with IRV also used for an at-large council seat and the mayor.

At the polls, Cary voters ranked their choices: **1, 2, 3**. The Wake Board of Elections counted the voters' first choice rankings and determined that Gale Adcock won the District D with a majority of more than 50% of votes. In District B, however, no candidate received even 40% of first choices. In the past this result would have triggered a runoff that would have cost taxpayers \$28,000. With IRV, the Wake Board eliminated all but the top-two vote getters. In the second round of counting, the voters who cast their ballots for one of the eliminated candidates had their vote count for their next choice – resulting in Don Frantz winning the election with a majority of votes in the runoff round.

Exit polls showed that 68 percent of voters preferred instant runoff voting to their old runoff system (more poll results on pg. 2).

Compare this election with the 2004 runoff election for the Democratic nomination for North Carolina's Superintendent of Public Instruction. That statewide runoff election cost counties \$3.5 million, with turnout of only 3% of voters. IRV would have eliminated the need for a second election and selected a winner based on the choices of voters who participated in one election.

In 2006, North Carolina adopted a law allowing counties and municipalities to try IRV for their local elections. Bill sponsor Rep. Paul Luebke explained: "Holding the runoff election at the same time as the first election just makes sense. Voter turnout is usually higher than if a runoff election were held 4 weeks later. And local governments avoid the cost of holding a second election."

Cary is a rapidly growing city of more than 110,000 residents. In May 2007, its town council voted to

Endorsements for instant runoff voting include:

Winston-Salem Journal
Charlotte Observer
Wilmington Star News
Asheville Citizen-Times
Fayetteville News and Observer
Blue Ridge Now
Democracy North Carolina
North Carolina Fair Share
Common Cause North Carolina
League of Women Voters of NC
John Hood of John Locke Foundation

USA Today
Senator John McCain
Senator Barack Obama
DNC Chair Howard Dean
League of Women Voters in
Minnesota, Washington, Florida,
California & Vermont
Center for Constitutional Rights

Cary Voters React

The following data is from an exit poll designed and analyzed by NC State assistant professor of political science, Dr. Michael Cobb.

For more info, visit:

<http://news.ncsu.edu/news/2007/10/158-irv-voting-survey.php>

- 68 percent of Cary voters said they preferred IRV to the traditional runoff system
 - Only 5 percent reported it was not easy to understand the IRV ballot, with 81 percent agreeing that it was "very easy" to understand
 - Most voters used the option of ranking at least two of the candidates for city council
 - Voters were more likely to rank candidates in District B, which was the most competitive race where all three candidates failed to win an outright majority; voters in District B were most likely to prefer IRV.
 - The study found no significant differences among different types of voters in their understanding or preference for IRV: whites and non-whites, males and females, lower- and higher-income voters all evaluated IRV roughly equally.
 - Outreach efforts to inform voters ahead of time about IRV were largely successful. Seventy-six percent said they knew they would be asked to rank their preferences before coming to vote that day
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Voter Education:

How Cary Voters Were Informed About IRV

THE WAKE COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS SPENT LESS THAN \$10,000 ON VOTER EDUCATION. HERE IS A SUMMARY OF VOTER EDUCATION ACTIVITIES:

- THE BOARD & TOWN OF CARY SENT SAMPLE BALLOTS IN UTILITY BILLS AND ISSUED A MEDIA ADVISORY ABOUT THE PILOT AND BALLOT CHANGE
- THE LOCAL NEWSPAPER RAN ARTICLES ABOUT THE NEW BALLOT DESIGN AND PILOT PROGRAM
- BOARD STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS VISITED CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS TO INFORM THEM OF THE NEW IRV BALLOT (SUCH AS KIWANIS AND AMERICAN LEGION)
- LOCAL RADIO STATIONS RAN 30-SECOND PSAS
- THE NC CENTER FOR VOTER EDUCATION CREATED A VIDEO PSA FOR IRV, WHICH RAN ON THE GOVERNMENT ACCESS STATION
- THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS, FAIRVOTE AND VOLUNTEERS PLACED SAMPLE BALLOTS AT GROCERY STORES, LIBRARIES, AND THE DMV

"IRV is a much fairer, more efficient, and more effective way to hold elections compared to the separate runoffs we have now in North Carolina."

**Bob Hall, Executive Director,
Democracy North Carolina**

"The citizens of Cary have a chance to show the rest of North Carolina how to simplify the electoral process and make democracy work."

**Diana Haskell, President of
Wake County League of
Women Voters**

"I am a believer because it saves taxpayers, candidates and counties money. It insures greater voter participation. The legislation as it stands is looking to see if it works well. If it is effective and if it does all these things, why not do it?"

**Representative Susan Fischer, NC
House of Representatives**

"Cary and Hendersonville are to be commended for being a model for the rest of state. Their success could mean this method becomes an option for other elections, including other types of local elections and partisan primaries in statewide elections. They are making history."

**Gary Bartlett, Chair of the
State Board of Elections**

For more information about instant runoff voting, visit: www.fairvote.org/irv and www.instantrunoff.com or email irv@fairvote.org.