



Ranked Choice Voting for Special Elections

Recommendation: Allow Ranked Choice Voting in all Special Elections held to fill federal, state, and municipal governing body vacancies.

Background

- Currently, when a vacancy occurs there is no party primary. All individuals running for the position appear on a single ballot in a Special Election.
- If there are many candidates, as often occurs, frequently no candidate receives a majority of the votes. A runoff election must be held at a future date between the top two candidates.
- Historically, voter turnout for runoff elections is low. Therefore, the two candidates that are in the runoff, and the ultimate winner, **may be elected with marginal voter support.**
- Runoff elections are **paid for by taxpayers.**
- The open position **remains vacant until after the runoff election occurs.**

One recent example

- Texas 6th Congressional District Special Election in Dallas/Fort Worth – May 1, 2021
 - 23 candidates (no political party primary held)
 - Top two candidates: Wright - 19.2% of 78,374 votes cast; Ellzey - 13.8%
- July 27, 2021 Runoff election
 - Results: Ellzey 53% of 38,994 votes cast; Wright 47%
 - Ellzey won with 20,762 votes -- 26% of initial election voters
 - Cost of initial election: \$166k; cost of runoff election: \$272k – **total cost: \$438k**
 - Savings if Ranked Choice Voting had been used: 62% of total cost
 - Additional 2-month delay to fill the vacancy

What is Ranked Choice Voting

Ranked Choice Voting is a nonpartisan change in voting logistics that sometimes helps Republicans, sometimes helps Democrats, and always helps elect candidates with broad voter support. It allows voters to vote their true preference by giving them the option of ranking candidates in order of their choice.

If a candidate gets more than half of the first-choice votes, they win just as in any other election. If no candidate gets a majority of the first-choice votes, an instant runoff takes place. The candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated and voters who picked that candidate as their first choice will have their votes count towards their second choice. This process is repeated until one candidate has more than half of the votes, thus serving as a runoff while eliminating the additional costs and time associated with separate runoff elections.

Benefits of using Ranked Choice Voting in Special Elections

- Vacancies can be filled more rapidly so the district can once again be represented.
- Taxpayers save the cost of an additional expensive election
- Special elections runoffs are often the only election scheduled that day so the full cost of the election is borne by the jurisdiction that runs the Special Election.
- While the winner of a **2-person runoff election** will receive a majority of the votes cast, that number may be far smaller than the number of voters in the initial Special Election (as was the case in the example described above).

Ranked Choice Voting for Special Elections can be implemented by a legislative change to the Texas Election Code.