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Study Finds Cary Voters Prefer Instant Runoff Voting (IRV).

Cary voters prefer ranking candidates rather than voting for only one candidate. That's the result of a survey on voter preferences taken after the Oct. 9 Cary town council elections in which instant runoff voting (IRV) was utilized. IRV allows voters to rank the candidates for an office in order of preference, eliminating the need for a run-off election.

North Carolina State University's Dr. Michael Cobb, assistant professor of political science, designed an exit poll to evaluate how voters felt about IRV. The exit poll, managed by Bob Hall, director of Democracy North Carolina, contained interviews with more than 1,600 voters from Cary Town Council Districts B and D.

Instant runoff voting affected the election in Council District B by generating a winner, thereby avoiding the need to hold a run-off election next month between the top two vote getters.

Key findings of the survey include:

- Of those with a preference, 72 percent of Cary voters said they preferred IRV while just 28 percent said they preferred voting for a single candidate.
- Almost everyone (96 percent) reported it was at least "somewhat easy to understand" the IRV ballot, with 82 percent agreeing that it was "very easy" to understand.
- Most voters (69 percent) actually utilized the option of ranking at least two of the candidates for city council.
- Among the minority of voters who did not rank more than one candidate and gave a reason why (480), only 29 percent said the reason for not indicating a second choice was that they were confused about how the rankings would be used.
- 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 more likely to prefer IRV.
- The study found no significant differences between 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, and those who reported knowing about IRV in advance were more likely to rank more than one candidate and to prefer ranking candidates over voting for only one candidate.