

Ranked Choice Ballots for Military and Overseas Voters

2014 POLICY GUIDE



State and Local Policy

August 2014

Ranked choice voting absentee ballots ensure that military and overseas voters are not disenfranchised in the case of federal, state or local runoff elections.

The Problem: Overseas voters such as military personnel face difficulties voting in runoff elections when they do not receive their ballots in time to return them by the election. The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act of 1986 (UOCAVA) and the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act of 2009 (MOVE) mandate that states send timely absentee ballots to UOCAVA voters at least 45 days before any federal election. Sending new ballots before a runoff elections requires a runoff period of at least seven weeks, if not longer.

As a result of MOVE, some states lengthen the time between rounds of a runoff election. But this delay tends to produce lower turnout in runoff elections because the media and voters lose interest even as turnout among overseas voters also usually declines from the first round.

Solution: Ranked choice voting absentee ballots provide a legal and practical solution to the

disenfranchisement of military and overseas voters in runoff elections. These voters receive two ballots – a standard ballot for the first election and a ranked choice ballot for the second election. The ranked ballot contains all the candidates from the first election, allowing voters to rank them in order of choice. Both ballots are returned at the same time. The first ballot is counted as usual. In the event of a runoff, the ranked ballot is counted by hand for its highest ranked candidate in the runoff.

While UOCAVA and the MOVE Act only apply to federal elections, states and cities should adopt ranked choice absentee ballots to extend these statutes' protections to their elections.

Success Story: The use of ranked choice absentee ballots is efficient and reliable. In South Carolina, 99 percent of runoff ballots returned in 2006 by UOCAVA voters were counted. State election officials describe as "an unqualified success."

Where RCV Ballots Are Used for Military Voters

- **Arkansas** (federal, state and local primary and general elections with runoffs)
- **Louisiana** (federal and state elections with runoffs)
- **South Carolina** (federal and state primary elections)
- **Springfield, Illinois** (municipal and township primary elections)
- [2014 only] Congressional & Senate primary runoffs in **Alabama** and **Mississippi**

Fiscal Impact

Small savings, as second overseas mailing becomes unnecessary. Templates for ranked choice ballots and voter education for overseas voters already exist. There are no new costs relating to software, equipment or personnel.

Related Reforms

- Ranked Choice Voting
- Ranked Choice Ballots for Military and Overseas Voters: Presidential Nominations

Part Two Resources

- Model statute
- FAQ
- Sample letter of support