



Ranked Choice Voting: A Winning System

What is Ranked Choice Voting?

Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) is an enhanced system of voting that allows voters to rank candidates in order of their most desired to their least desired – #1, #2, #3, etc. The system uses these rankings to select the candidate that has the broadest appeal.

In Ranked Choice Voting:

- Voters can rank as many candidates as they want.
- A candidate that receives a majority of the first-place votes wins the election.
- If no candidate reaches 50%, the candidate who received the least #1 votes is eliminated. Voters who gave that candidate a #1 have their votes transferred to the candidate to whom they gave a #2.
- If this raises one candidate above 50%, that candidate is the winner. If not, the process continues until one candidate gets 50% of the active voters. (If a voter does not select all the possible candidates or if there are more candidates than choices, that voter's choices may not count towards the final outcome.)

Benefits of Ranked Choice Voting

Ranked Choice Voting Eliminates Spoilers:

- A spoiler occurs when a minor candidate, siphons votes from the closest aligned major candidate, allowing the other candidate to win.
 - Many think Ralph Nader was a spoiler because siphoned enough votes that might have gone to Al Gore to allow George W. Bush to win Florida and hence the election.
- Because political leaders are always worried about spoilers, candidates with a slightly different viewpoint or constituency are often discouraged from running. Ranked Choice Voting resolves this problem. With RCV, a candidate representing a major issue or a specific racial or ethnic group, can run without being worried his or her votes push the election to will someone with divergent interests. With RCV, the voter can give the desired candidate a #1 vote and a then give a #2 or a #3 to a candidate more likely to win.
- **2018 Maine District #2 Congressional Election**
An excellent example of eliminating spoilers occurred in 2018 in Maine's 2nd Congressional. There were 4 candidates: Bruce Poliquin, the Republican, Jared Golden, the Democrat, and two independents, Tiffany Bond and Will Hoar.
 - Bond campaigned against money in politics. Hoar focused on healthcare. Both candidates had something they thought was important to say.

- In the first round of voting, the Republican (Poliquin), finished in first place.
- With RCV, the #2 and #3 votes of the eliminated candidates counted in the next rounds.
- The Democrat (Golden) won a majority of these votes and was elected.

Maine #2 Congressional District 2018

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Votes Round 1</u>	<u>Votes Final Round</u>
Bruce Poliquin (Rep.)	134,184	138,931
Jared Golden (Dem.)	132,013	142,440
Tiffany Bond (Ind.)	16,551	
Will Hoar (Ind.)	6,875	

- With Ranked Choice Voting two candidates were able to run and state their positions without having to worry that they would become spoilers, by helping to elect someone whom they opposed.

Ranked Choice Voting Promotes Cooperation Between Candidates and a Willingness to Compromise

The winners of RCV elections are not necessarily those who receive the most votes on the first round, but rather those who can build a broad coalition by attracting #2, #3, and #4 preferences from those who originally favored other candidates. This means less partisanship, more attention to the electorate as a whole, and a greater willingness to compromise.

- In a city council race in Oakland, three candidates formed a “Women’s Leadership Slate,” highlighted each other’s strengths in a You Tube Video, and asked voters to rank them #1, #2, and #3. With this joint campaign, one of the three emerged victorious.

In RCV, it is critical to secure votes from candidates who are eliminated. The table below shows the result of the Mayoral election in Oakland, California in 2010. Don Perata won the first ballot by a substantial margin. During the next 8 rounds of tabulation, Rebecca Kaplan and Jean Quan picked up about 1,900 more votes than Perata from the eliminated candidates. In the final round, Perata picked by 6,407 votes from Kaplan, while Quan picked up 18,864. Quan won the election because she picked up 13,101 more votes from eliminated candidates than did Perata.

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Round 1</u>	<u>Round 2</u>	<u>Round 3</u>	<u>Round 4</u>	<u>Round 5</u>	<u>Round 6</u>	<u>Round 7</u>	<u>Round 8</u>	<u>Round 9</u>	<u>Round 10</u>
Jean Quan	29,266	29,299	29,391	29,514	29,645	30,500	30,884	31,655	35,033	53,897
Don Perata	40,342	40,374	40,455	40,606	40,728	40,814	41,364	42,188	45,465	51,872
Rebecca Kaplan	25,813	25,831	25,890	26,026	26,117	26,496	26,831	27,475	32,719	
Joe Tuman	14,347	14,357	14,471	14,552	14,780	14,949	15,202	15,462		

Marcie Hodge	2,994	2,999	3,033	3,155	3,200	3,250	3,625			
Terence Candell	2,315	2,316	2,386	2,497	2,613	2,680				
Don MacLeay	1,630	1,636	1,677	1,719	1,852					
Greg Harland	966	968	1,059	1,087						
Larry Lionel "LL" Young Jr.	933	939	976							
Arnold Fields	733	738								
Write-in	268									
Continuing votes	119,607	119,457	119,338	119,156	118,935	118,689	117,906	116,780	113,217	105,769

Ranked Choice Voting Discourages Polarizing Candidates and Negative Campaigning

Because it is critical to receive votes from eliminated candidates, Ranked Choice Voting discourages polarizing candidates and negative campaigning.

- Polarizing candidates tend to lose because while they may get strong support from their bases, they get very few votes from other parts of the electorate. Moderates tend to do well, because they attract second, third, and fourth-choice votes from eliminated candidates.
- Negative campaigning is reduced, because candidates do not want to jeopardize their chances of getting votes from eliminated candidates. In a survey of voters in Portland Maine in 2011, 41% responded that there was “less negative campaigning than usual.” Professors at the University of Iowa found that only 5% of voters in 7 cities using RCV thought that candidates criticized each other “a great deal” compared with 25% of voters in cities not using RCV.

Ranked Choice Voting Promotes Higher Voter Turnout

- Because RCV elections have a large number of candidates, who inspire their own constituencies, and because candidates often work together, these elections tend to have very high turnout.

Election Turnout

Cities with RCV

San Francisco	53%
Oakland	68%
Minneapolis	43%

Cities without RCV

Dallas	6%
New York	22%
Miami	12%

- These dramatic differences in turnout reflect the success of RCV in getting people to vote.

Ranked Choice Voting Eliminates Costly Run-offs

- RCV eliminates the need for run-off elections when it is required that one candidate reach a total of 50% of the vote. This saves the substantial cost and avoids the potential bias of a typically small voter turnout.

Issues with Ranked Choice Voting

If Ranked Choice Voting eliminates spoilers, promotes broad coalitions, discourages polarizing candidates and negative campaigning, and promotes higher voter turnout, why is it not used everywhere? There are a number of problems that have hurt its implementation. RCV

- Is difficult to explain. Voters need to be educated so they can understand the process and the ranking of candidates.
- Can discriminate against less educated voters, who either do not fully understand the system or fill out all of their available choices.
- Requires reprogramming computers and voting machines. Yet all three of the top voting machine vendors have the new capabilities available.
- Is applied differently in different jurisdictions.
 - In Minneapolis, people can rank 6 candidates. In St. Paul, they can only rank 3. Voters should be able to rank all candidates.
- May lead to elections in which the winner does not receive 50% of the votes because some people do not utilize all their rankings, leading to “exhausted” votes that do not count in the final round..

With improved education and voting systems, and more rigorous ballot access requirements, many of these problems can be overcome.

Where is Ranked Choice Voting Used?

- Ranked Choice voting is used in the State of Maine and major cities such as Minneapolis, St. Paul, San Francisco, and Oakland, among others.
- It is also used for military personnel and overseas voters in run-offs in Alabama, Arkansas, South Carolina, Mississippi, and Louisiana, as well as in some special elections in these states, because there are only three weeks between the election and the run-off and there might not be time to get ballots to people in far-flung areas.
- Internationally, Ranked Choice Voting is used in Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, Malta, Northern Ireland, and Scotland, and party elections in Canada and the U.K. Forms of RCV are also utilized in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan.
- RCV is also used in the Academy Awards. Without RCV, with the choice of 10 films, a niche film with loyal supporters could win with less than 20% of the vote.

Ranked Choice Voting In New York City

In the 2019 election, New York City voters with 73% of the vote, passed Ranked Choice Voting for the primaries for Mayor, City Council President, Comptroller, and City Council Seats. There will still be party primaries, but each primary will be handled by RCV.

- This will avoid costly run-offs that have been common in N.Y.C.
- It will force candidates to work together and limit negative campaigning.
- Because it will only be used in the primaries, some independent voters may want to consider registering Democratic so they can have some say.

Ranked Choice Voting in Massachusetts and Alaska- Ballot Initiatives

Massachusetts and Alaska may be the next states to adopt Ranked Choice Voting.

- One of the initiatives on the Massachusetts state ballot in 2020 (unless approved by the legislature by May) will be to have the state approve full Ranked Choice Voting- primaries and final elections for Federal and State offices.
 - If Massachusetts approves RCV in 2020, many other states will likely adopt similar initiatives.
- Alaska is attempting something even more radical. It has a ballot initiative to have a Nonpartisan Primary with the top 4 moving to the general election, and a Ranked Choice Voting Election among these top 4. (We cover this process in a separate White Paper.)

If you live in Massachusetts or Alaska and want to learn more about these initiatives, please contact us.

How Would RCV Work if We Used It in Presidential Elections?

Ranked Choice Voting has never been used in a Presidential election, but nineteen Presidents have been elected with less than 50% of the popular vote. With the “winner take all” system, third party candidates often siphoned away votes from candidates with somewhat similar views, allowing a different minority candidate to get elected.

- In 1912, Teddy Roosevelt and Taft, both of whom had been Republicans, won 50.6% of the popular vote, but Wilson, with only 41.8% of the vote won the election. If Taft’s votes had gone to Roosevelt, the results could have been different.
- If RCV had been used in 1992, many of H. Ross Perot’s voters might have given George H.W. Bush their #2 votes, and he might have defeated Bill Clinton. There is still controversy as to how Perot’s votes would have been distributed.
- In 2000, most Ralph Nader voters would likely have given Al Gore their #2 votes. Gore would likely have won Florida and the election. People who supported Nader would have been able to vote their conscience without worrying about throwing the election.
- To limit candidates with low support, some states, including Alaska, Nevada, Wyoming, Hawaii, and Kansas are utilizing a modified form of Ranked Choice Voting in the primaries and caucuses to eliminate candidates with less than 15% of the vote and transfer their votes to candidates who are the second choice of those voters.

Conclusion

1. Ranked Choice Voting offers a method that increases the likelihood of electing candidates that reflect the will of a broader portion of the total population and are likely to be willing to work together to achieve the generally desired results.
2. RCV eliminates spoilers.
3. RCV limits polarizing candidates and negative campaigning.
4. RCV elections tend to have much higher turnout and the winners tend to be more moderate.

5. RCV is disliked by many politicians and interest groups that anticipate a weakening of their parochial power.
6. Nevertheless, the awareness and appeal of RCV is growing substantially, especially in the press and among political leaders. On Feb. 20, 2020, the New York Times Editorial Board wrote:

“There is a straightforward and elegant solution: ranked-choice voting, also known instant-runoff voting. Already in use all over the world and in cities and towns across the United States. It is a popular and proven way of electing leaders who are — what a radical notion! — actually supported by most voters. It is effective in any multicandidate race, but it’s ideal for making sense of a large and fractured pool of candidates.”

Reform Elections Now believes Ranked Choice Voting is an excellent system that should be adopted by more states and municipalities.

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