

## RANKED-CHOICE VOTING

In 2018, Maine became the first U.S. state to use ranked-choice voting (RCV) for state and federal elections.<sup>31</sup> It met every test – political, legal, and voter acceptance. Utah lawmakers also passed legislation giving local jurisdictions the option to use ranked-choice voting in their local elections. Six cities, including the state’s fourth largest, opted to do so in 2019. More are expected to follow suite in 2020. However, ranked-choice voting is not new. It’s in use in local and state elections in 18 states.

Ranked-choice voting is an upgrade of the current voting method, “plurality voting,” which the U.S. inherited from colonial England in the 1700s. Plurality rules allow candidates to split the vote and win with a simple plurality rather than a majority of votes. A candidate can “win” even if the majority of voters voted for someone else. Plurality voting forces a two-party only system (Duverger’s Law<sup>32</sup>). It puts independent or third party candidates in the role of “spoilers,” and limits opportunities for both more candidates to run and more perspectives to be heard.

In ranked-choice voting, instead of only picking one choice, the voter can rank a second, third, or other choice as well. While giving the ballot more expression, it addresses the problem of split-votes, the spoiler factor, and plurality voting’s anti-competitive and polarizing incentives. For these reasons, in 2011 Robert’s Rules of Order changed its manual to recommend ranked-choice voting be used for all elections with more than two candidates running.<sup>33</sup>

### How It Works

Voters rank the candidates in the order of preference. They mark their first choice and as many backup choices as they want.<sup>34</sup>

1. The voter’s first choice is counted first. If after counting all the first place votes a candidate has an outright majority, that’s it. The candidate is elected.
2. If no candidate has a majority, the candidate with the fewest first place votes is eliminated first. Those votes are transferred to the second choice on the ballot.
3. The process repeats itself as needed until a candidate has a majority and is declared the winner.

Post-election surveys, voters reliably report that they both understand how ranked-choice works and a majority want to see it used for all elections.<sup>35, 36</sup>

State of Maine Sample Ballot General Election, November 6, 2018					
Rep. to Congress District 2	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice	4th Choice	5th Choice
Bond, Tiffany L. Portland Independent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Golden, Jared F. Lewiston Democratic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hoar, William R.S. Southwest Harbor Independent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Poliquin, Bruce Oakland Republican	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Write-in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Benefits and Attributes

- *Ensures a majority winner:* Ranked-choice voting ensures the winner is the consensus choice of the majority of voters.
- *Eliminates vote splitting:* Votes no longer get split among like-minded candidates. Instead, they’re transferred among candidates who share similar views, building support for a consensus winner.
- *Removes the spoiler factor:* Voters can vote with their hearts, knowing that their votes can go to a backup choice. More candidates and parties can compete and express their views without the label of a “spoiler.”
- *Removes a path to victory for polarizing candidates:* Candidates with a narrow base can’t win with a only a plurality or small percent of votes cast when opponents split the vote.
- *Increases voter choice and competition:* More candidates and parties are free to compete. Uncontested elections are rare.

<sup>31</sup> Currently RCV in Maine can be used in federal elections and state primaries. It requires a constitutional amendment to use in the general elections. Plans are underway to make this change.

<sup>32</sup> Duverger’s Law, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duverger%27s\\_law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duverger%27s_law)

<sup>33</sup> Robert’s Rules of Order, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duverger%27s\\_law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duverger%27s_law)

<sup>34</sup> A few jurisdictions like San Francisco limit the voter to three choices.

<sup>35</sup> Voter Support, [https://www.fairvote.org/data\\_on\\_rcv#research\\_rcvotersupport](https://www.fairvote.org/data_on_rcv#research_rcvotersupport)

<sup>36</sup> Executive Summary 2017 Elections in Minneapolis and St. Paul, <http://www.fairvotemn.org/ranked-choice-voting-2017-elections-report><sup>37</sup> 2017 Minneapolis election news conference, YouTube, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrgVh6\\_vvKw&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrgVh6_vvKw&feature=youtu.be)

<sup>38</sup> Civility Brief, <https://fairvote.app.box.com/v/APSA-Civility-Brief-2015>

- *Reduces negativity and incentivizes civility among candidates:* When candidates have to compete for second and third place votes of their opponents, they are much less likely to attack or “go negative.” Candidates still campaign on their differences; they do so with more civility in a less polarizing environment.<sup>37, 38</sup>
- *Saves the cost and time of a second-round runoff:* In states or cities with two-round runoff elections on separate dates, ranked-choice voting eliminates the expenses and time of what usually is a low turnout second election.

### Impact on Voter Turnout

- Ranked-choice voting increases election competition, and with that, the likelihood of higher turnout.
- The six largest cities that use ranked-choice voting have all seen higher turnout since implementation when compared to similar prior elections.
- Studies have shown a significant increase in the otherwise lower turnout associated with a second-round or runoff election.<sup>39</sup>

### Common Questions, Common Myths

- *“It’s complicated”:* It’s not. For single-winner elections as for governor or state legislature it’s just a majority runoff. Surveys show voters find it easy to use and understand what it means to rank their choices. Watch this video on an election for favorite color: <http://bit.ly/VoteWithRCV>
- *“It violates ‘one person, one vote’”:* Federal Courts, most recently in Maine,<sup>40</sup> have consistently found ranked-choice elections constitutional and consistent with all federal law. Voters only have one vote. Ranked-choice voting *strengthens* “one person, one vote” by letting voters cast a more expressive vote. Plurality voting *dilutes* it by unduly restricting choices.
- *“It takes too long to count”:* Voting equipment is now widely available to quickly conduct the count and report results the same day, with a paper trail as needed for audits and recounts. Smaller jurisdictions with all paper ballots may take longer.

### Resources

- FairVote, <https://www.fairvote.org/>
- Ranked-Choice Voting Resource Center, <https://www.rankedchoicevoting.org/>
  - Everything You Need to Know About Ranked-Choice Voting, <https://www.nonprofitvote.org/everything-need-know-ranked-choice-voting/>
  - Fair Voting Methods for Multi-Seat Elections Explored, <https://www.nonprofitvote.org/fair-vote-methods/>
  - Ranked-Choice Voting as a Runoff vs. a Proportional Election: How They Differ and the Benefits of Both, published in IVN news, September 26, 2018, <https://ivn.us/2018/09/26/two-types-ranked-choice-votingdiffer-mean-vote/>

<sup>39</sup> Kimball and Anthony, Voter Participation with Ranked Choice Voting in the United States, October 2016, <http://www.umsl.edu/~kimball/KimballRCV.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> Decision\_ US District Court of Maine, Brett Baber, et al., V. Matthew Dunlap, et al., December 2018, <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/2493>