



Ranked Choice Voting Basics

How does ranked choice voting work?

Ranked choice voting lets voters rank their choices based on individual preference. First choices are counted, and if no candidate has a majority of the vote, an “instant runoff occurs in which the candidate with the least support is eliminated. Voters that picked the eliminated candidate as their first choice have their vote counted for their next choice. In a three-person race, we now have a winner with majority support in the final round of tabulation. In a race with more than three candidates, this process is repeated until one candidate has a majority.

A. To vote, fill in the OVAL to the right of the candidate of your choice like this .

B. If you wrongly mark, tear or spoil the ballot, return it and get another.

- Rank candidates in order of preference.
- Fill in the ① next to your first choice.
Fill in the ② next to your second choice.
Fill in the ③ next to your third choice.
- Do not fill in more than one oval per candidate. Do not fill in more than one oval per column.
- Ranking a 2nd, 3rd, etc. choice candidate will not hurt your first choice candidate.

	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice
Candidate 1	<input checked="" type="radio"/> ①	<input type="radio"/> ②	<input type="radio"/> ③
Candidate 2	<input type="radio"/> ①	<input type="radio"/> ②	<input type="radio"/> ③
Candidate 3	<input type="radio"/> ①	<input type="radio"/> ②	<input type="radio"/> ③

Why is ranked choice voting considered as an alternative to our current system?

Our current voting system, plurality voting, works well when there are only two candidates because one of them is guaranteed to win with majority support. But three and four-way races among competitive candidates are common in Maine and can lead to results where the winner fails to receive a majority of the votes cast (50% + 1). Dating back to 1974, the winner has failed to receive a majority vote in 9 of the last 11 gubernatorial elections in Maine. In 5 of those races, the elections were won with less than 40 percent support. Given the frequency with which this was happening in Maine elections, the League of Women Voters of Maine convened a study in 2008 to consider alternative voting systems. That study concluded in 2011 with an endorsement of ranked choice voting as the best way to ensure a majority vote in competitive, single-seat, multi-candidate elections.

What are the benefits of ranked choice voting?

- ✓ **Gives voters more meaningful choices:** Ranked choice voting allows candidates from outside the two major parties to compete. It helps create a richer dialogue on the issues and increases the diversity of views available for voters to consider.
- ✓ **Eliminates spoilers and strategic voting:** Ranked choice voting allows voters to support their favorite candidate without worrying that they might “throw their vote away,” or worse, split their votes with like-minded voters and unintentionally help elect the candidate they like the least.
- ✓ **Reduces negative campaigning:** Candidates running in ranked choice elections must ask for second and, sometimes, third choice rankings. Voters are less likely to rank a candidate highly who is negative toward their preferred candidate.



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- ✓ **Reduces the influence of money in politics:** Campaigns and special interest groups spend a lot of money on negative advertising. By making negative advertising less effective, ranked choice voting reduces the need for, and influence of, money in politics.

What are the concerns about ranked choice voting?

- ✓ **Tabulation** - Under RCV, the ballot tabulation in districts that cross municipal boundaries will require central tabulation if there is no majority winner after the first round. The final outcome of elections cannot be ascertained or declared independently of central processing for races that cross municipal boundaries.
- ✓ **Cost** – Ranked choice voting will be more expensive to implement than the current system. Current estimates project the cost for the statewide implementation of ranked choice voting to be around \$500,000 per year for the first two fiscal years.
- ✓ **Time** - Where there is a clear majority winner after the first round, the winner will be known on Election Night or soon thereafter, just as it is now. However, if additional tabulation rounds are required, it could take anywhere from a couple of days to a few weeks to have a winner, especially in competitive, statewide races, depending on implementation options.
- ✓ **Constitutionality** – There is an unanswered question about whether the system would be permitted under the Maine Constitution. Specifically, the Maine Constitution says that the candidate with “the plurality of votes” is elected. It also says that municipalities must “sort, count and declare” votes in open meetings. These provisions raise constitutional issues for RCV in Maine, and there is no clear consensus in the legal community about which argument would prevail if RCV were challenged in court.

Where is ranked choice voting being used?

- ✓ More than 50 colleges and universities use ranked choice voting for some or all of their student government elections.
- ✓ 11 cities across the United States currently use ranked choice voting to elect city officers, including San Francisco, Cambridge, and Minneapolis.
- ✓ 5 states provide military and overseas voters with ranked choice ballots to participate in federal runoff elections.
- ✓ 4 countries, including Australia, Ireland, Malta, and New Zealand, use ranked choice voting in federal elections.
- ✓ Numerous public and private sector organizations, including the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Science, use ranked choice voting for their elections.

Contact Information:

Finn Melanson, Project Manager for the LWVME Ed Fund

Cell: (207)-420-0469

Email: finn@lwvme.org