



## Summary

Ranked choice voting — also known as RCV, instant runoff voting, or IRV — is an innovative and intuitive voting method that gives voters more voice, choice, and power in the political system. By giving voters the option to rank candidates in order of preference, the system guarantees the winner of an election actually has majority support and that voters can express themselves honestly, while providing increased electoral opportunities for underrepresented groups.

## The Problem

When no candidate receives majority support (over 50 percent) in an election, states can handle results in two ways:

1. A plurality system, which allows someone to win with minority support; as little as 34% in a three-way contest. The threshold can be even lower if more candidates are in the race.
2. An expensive and timely runoff, which requires voters to participate in a second election between the two most popular candidates from the first election.

Plurality elections don't produce winners that are representative of voters at-large. In most plurality elections, winners lack majority support and underrepresented groups are placed at a disadvantage. In the case of presidential primaries, millions of votes are wasted on candidates who don't meet viability or drop out of the race before election day, discounting the preferences of voters and the value of voter participation.

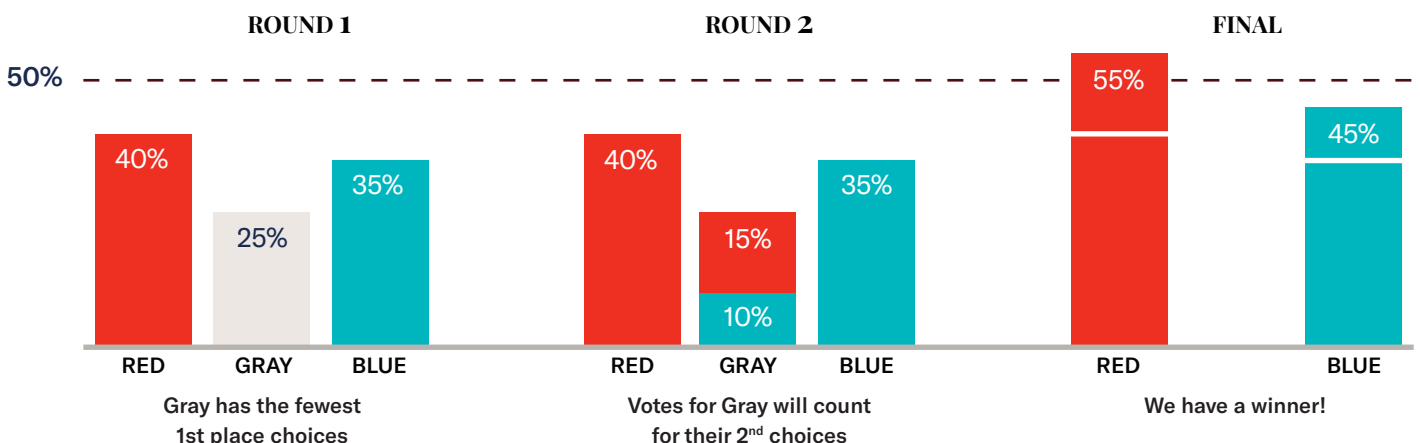
## The Solution

Ranked choice voting gives policymakers another choice: require candidates to earn over 50% of the vote in order to be declared the winner, using RCV to do so.

Ranked choice voting captures complete voter sentiment in a single ballot, allowing for faster results and fewer expenses. Plus, when elected officials have majority support, they're more likely to represent what voters prefer.

1. Voters rank candidates on their ballot, favorite to least favorite: 1 for their favorite candidate, 2 for their second favorite candidate, and so on. If they prefer, voters can choose to still vote for only one candidate.
2. First place votes are counted. If no candidate earns a majority of votes, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated.
3. Ballots in support of the eliminated candidate are recounted, this time accounting for voters' next choice. These votes are added to the remaining candidates' totals. This process continues until someone earns majority support.

SAMPLE ELECTION BALLOT				
RANK CANDIDATES IN ORDER OF PREFERENCE	1	2	3	
	RED			
	GRAY			
	BLUE			



## Benefits

- Values Voter Preference** | By eliminating the “spoiler effect,” ranked choice voting allows voters to vote for the candidate they like most, rather than a candidate they may dislike but believe can win. Multiple candidates from the same party, or a third party, can run without splitting the vote.
- Promotes Civil Campaigns** | When candidates care about earning 2nd and 3rd place votes, they are less likely to attack their opponents in order to build a broader coalition. Candidates succeed in a ranked choice voting model not only when they attract a strong base of support, but when they connect with other likely supporters. Studies suggest candidates running in a ranked choice voting election are less likely to attack their opponents.<sup>1</sup> In a study of cities that used RCV, voters were twice as likely to report campaigns were “a lot less negative.”<sup>2</sup>
- Reduces Costs** | Many cities, and some states,<sup>\*</sup> hold runoff elections if no candidate earns majority support on the first ballot. Each year, hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars are spent administering runoff elections. RCV saves costs by combining two elections into one efficient and decisive election. Runoff elections, which experience lower turnout compared to primary elections, tend to reward candidates who garner support from a smaller, more extreme electorate that turn out to vote.<sup>3</sup>
- Enfranchises Military & Overseas Voters** | Military and overseas voters in five states use instant runoff voting to cast ballots for local, state, and federal elections; in the other 45 states, local runoff election ballots must be rushed, often leaving voters abroad out of the final vote.

## RCV Promotes Diverse Representation

Women and people of color are underrepresented in our first past the post system. RCV has been shown to both increase the percentage of underrepresented groups running for office and their likelihood of winning.

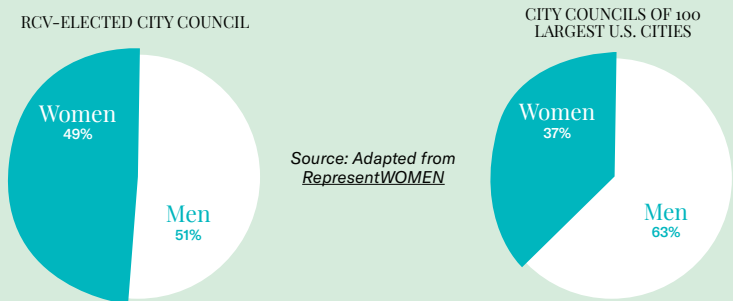
In Minnesota, where ranked choice has been used in select municipalities since 2009, RCV elections have resulted in Minneapolis’s most gender-balanced and ethnically diverse city council. In 2017, RCV helped elect St. Paul’s first African-American mayor. That same year, candidates who were women, people of color, or from different political parties were elected in record numbers.<sup>4</sup>

In California cities where RCV has been used since 2004, people of color have won 60 percent of all contests and women have won 40 percent.<sup>5</sup> In 2018,<sup>6</sup> RCV in San Francisco helped elect London Breed, the city’s first female African American mayor.

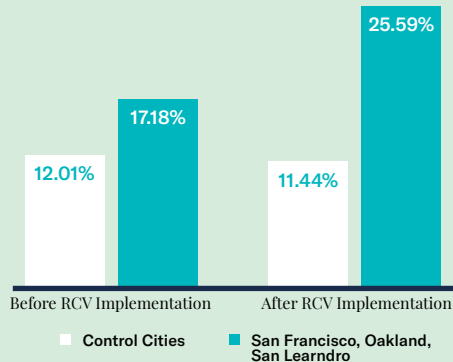
In a 2018 study comparing elections from 1995 to 2014 in San Francisco, Berkeley, Oakland, and San Leandro, California, the adoption of ranked choice voting increased the percentage of candidates of color from 17.2 percent to 25.6 percent. The study also found the probability of women winning increased from 40.2 percent to 44.6 percent, compared to control cities where the probability of women winning decreased. Women of color were also slightly more likely to be elected when ranked choice voting was used; in contrast, the electability of women of color in control cities without ranked choice voting decreased.

Ranked choice voting also eliminates the need for runoff elections, which are used in many southern states when no candidate receives a majority of support. Minorities are less likely to participate in runoff elections compared to white Americans. RCV is an effective tool to improve minority voter participation.

### WOMEN IN RCV-ELECTED CITY COUNCIL



### Effect of RCV on the Percentage of Candidates of Color



\* Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas hold runoff elections.

1 FairVote: “Ranked Choice Voting and Campaign Civility”

2 Donovan, Todd et al. “Campaign civility under preferential and plurality voting,” Electoral Studies Volume 42 (June 2016)

3 Underhill, Wendy and Katharina Owens Hubler. “LegisBrief: Primary Runoff Elections,” NCSL (August 2017)

4 Ranked Choice Voting for St. Louis Park, FairVote Minnesota

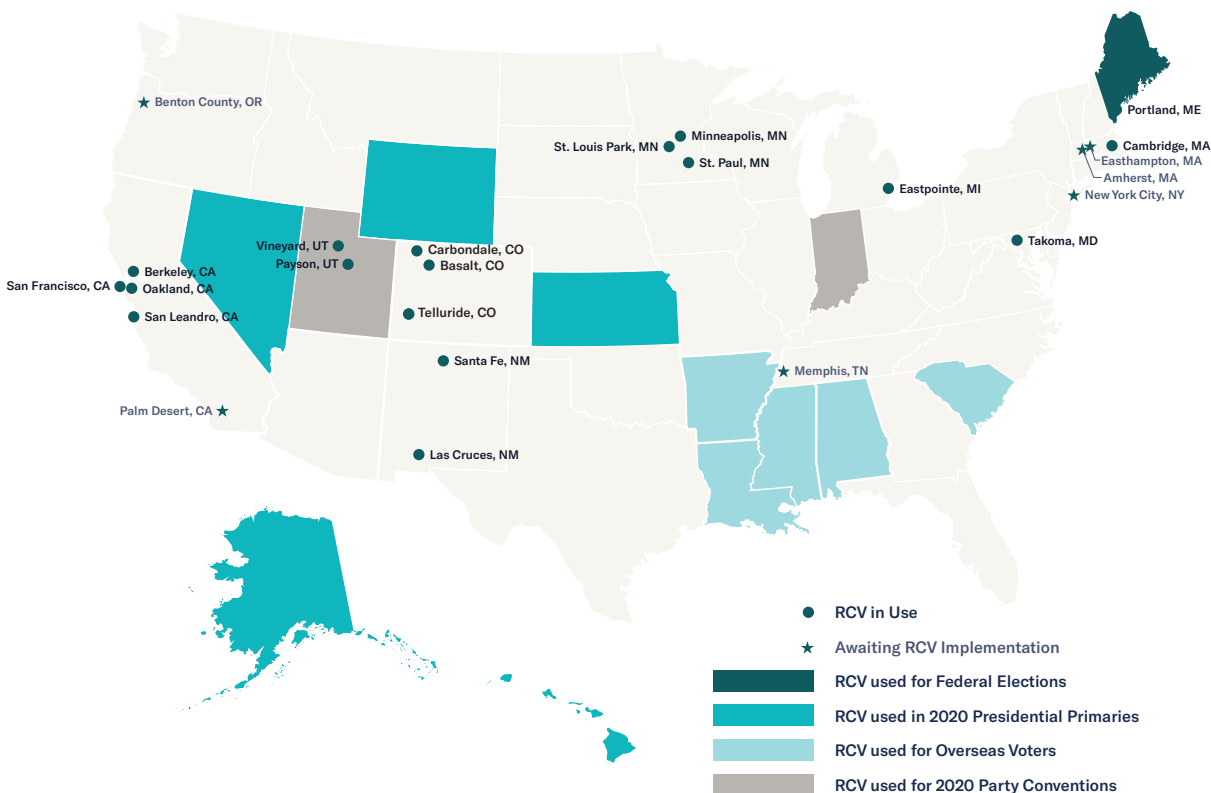
5 RCV and Representation, FairVote

6 John, Sarah et al. The alternative vote: Do changes in single-member voting systems affect descriptive representation of women and minorities? (August 2018)



## Where Ranked Choice Voting is Used

Ranked choice voting is used in 23 American municipalities and in Maine for federal elections. Five states use ranked choice voting for military and overseas voters to allow voters to participate in potential runoff elections with one ballot. Ranked choice voting is also used in all elections in Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, and Scotland.



## RCV in Presidential Primaries

There are three main problems inherent in the presidential primary process: votes are wasted on candidates who drop out before election day or on candidates that don't reach the 15 percent viability threshold to receive delegates; in a crowded field of candidates, delegates are often pledged disproportionately to votes received; caucuses experience limited turnout and disenfranchise voters. **In 2020 Democratic primaries alone, over three million votes were wasted, nearly 11 percent of all votes cast.**<sup>7</sup>

3,457,745  
~~WASTED VOTES~~

“A partisan fever is imperiling our democracy. I believe ranked choice voting can lower the temperature by giving voters more choices, discouraging slash-and-burn politics, and rewarding candidates who appeal to a broad majority of voters. Our bill encourages states and local governments that wish to adopt this promising reform.”

Senator Michael Bennet (D-CO)  
on The Voter Choice Act

RCV is a direct solution to these problems. RCV values voters' backup preferences if their first choice candidate drops out of the race or doesn't meet viability. During delegate allocation, RCV helps more candidates reach the 15% threshold. For caucus-goers, ranked choice voting allows voters to participate in early voting instead of having to show up in-person on election night.

In 2020, Democratic parties in five states, Alaska, Hawaii, Kansas, Wyoming, and Nevada, successfully used ranked choice voting for their presidential primary contest. In every case, turnout set a new record, virtually no votes were wasted on candidates, and a clear picture of candidate viability allowed election administrators to allocate delegates fairly. Combined with absentee voting, the system also helped states conduct one, decisive election remotely amid the pandemic.

## State Legislative Action

State legislatures are looking to RCV as a solution to the problems inherent in plurality elections. In 2002, then-state senator Barack Obama introduced SB1789 in Illinois to elect statewide and congressional offices using RCV. Illinois legislators recently considered the topic again in 2020 (SB2267), as did 20 other states.<sup>8</sup> In 2020, Democrats in the Virginia legislature passed a bipartisan bill to allow municipalities to pilot RCV.

“If we are believing in democracy and the right for people to have the freedom to cast their vote and not have to choose the lesser of two evils [ranked choice voting] is something I support.”

Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT)

## RCV Election Outcomes

### Ranked Choice Voting in Maine

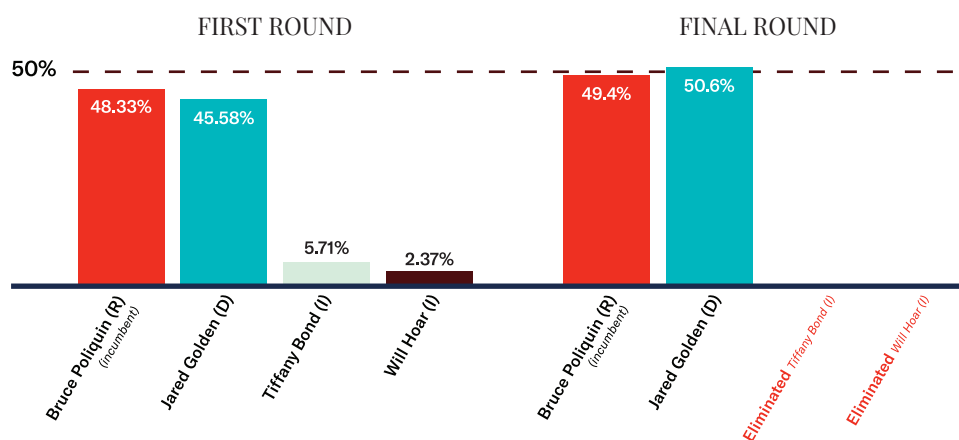
In November 2016, Maine became the first state to adopt ranked choice voting for use in statewide races. In June 2018, voters used RCV for the first time in primaries for certain statewide and federal offices. RCV helped clearly determine an otherwise close congressional election in Maine’s 2nd Congressional District.

Three candidates, including Democrat Jared Golden, and independents Tiffany Bond and Will Hoar, challenged Republican incumbent Bruce Poliquin. In the first round of vote-tallying, no candidate received a majority. Bruce Poliquin received a plurality of the vote, but held the lead by a slim margin and did not receive majority support.

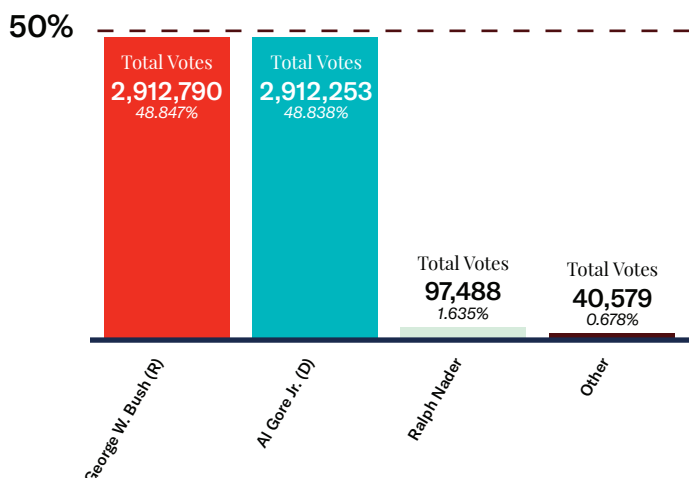
After the final round of vote tallying, Bond and Hoar had been eliminated from the contest, and voters who selected either as their first-choice candidate had their vote reallocated to their second choice candidate (if they ranked more than one candidate).

After the second round, Jared Golden received a 50 percent majority of the vote-share and won the contest. Following the success of Maine’s 2018 elections, legislation passed to expand RCV to presidential primary and general elections.

### 2018 GENERAL ELECTION FOR MAINE CD 2, RANKED CHOICE VOTING



### 2000 GENERAL ELECTION, FLORIDA



### 2000 Florida Presidential Election

In the 2000 presidential contest, Republican George W. Bush defeated Democrat Al Gore by a margin of only 537 votes in Florida, and received all 25 electoral votes to become the president-elect. President Bush did not receive a majority of the votes, and third party candidates crowded the race.

Ranked choice voting could have led to an alternative election outcome that better represented the majority, especially if voters who voted for independent or third party candidates were able to express more than one preference.