Ranked choice voting (RCV) is accelerating in adoption and use with major RCV elections held from 2017 to 2018.

These elections demonstrated high turnout, few ballot errors, and effective and inexpensive election administration. As election officials and candidates come to better understand RCV, it consistently results in better elections.

From Santa Fe’s first-ever RCV race in March to San Francisco’s special June mayoral election and RCV elections in the Bay Area in November, 2018 saw great success for ranked choice voting with high turnout and low ballot error rates.

The biggest RCV story of 2018 was its first use in statewide partisan primaries and general congressional elections in Maine. After leading in first choices with 33 percent of votes in the seven-way Democratic gubernatorial primary, Janet Mills ultimately won the nomination with 54 percent support by the final round of the RCV tally. Maine voters also voted to keep RCV for future elections by a higher margin than the initial 2016 adoption.

Four-way races in Maine’s general election contests for U.S. Senate and two U.S. House seats saw high turnout and few instances of “blank votes.” RCV shined brightest in Maine’s 2nd Congressional District, protecting majority rule in the top-financed, “bellwether” race despite a close contest in which no one earned a majority of first choices. Although Republican Bruce Poliquin narrowly lost in the

As candidates, what you’re trying to do is convince a large universe of voters to support you. Because you’re hoping that even if they don’t rank you first, maybe they’ll rank you second or third.

— Rebecca Chavez-Houck, Former Utah Democratic House member/Utah Ranked Choice Voting
first round, the Democrat Jaren Golden, who won a slim but decisive majority in the final round thanks to transfers from independent voters. Poliquin’s attempt to stop the count by filing a lawsuit was rebuffed by a federal district court judge who reaffirmed the decision of the people of Maine.

**TURNOUT SURPASSES EXPECTATIONS**

2017 established high turnout, with Minneapolis and St. Paul both seeing record-level participation in their mayoral elections. That continued in 2018, with turnout in San Francisco reaching 53 percent in a special mayoral election, far surpassing the state average of 38 percent.

Maine’s Democratic primary saw more votes cast than any prior Democratic primary election or its most recent general elections with turnout exceeding 60 percent of registered voters. Far fewer voters skipped the RCV races for U.S. Representative and Senator in 2018 than in 2016 or 2014 as well; the median number of undervotes in those contests in 2014 and 2016 was over 5,000 more votes than in 2018.

**EFFECTIVE USE OF RANKINGS**

Most voters take advantage of the opportunity to rank choices. In Santa Fe, 65 percent of voters ranked all five candidates on the ballot for mayor. In San Francisco’s special election, nearly 70 percent of voters used all three rankings (the maximum allowed). In Maine’s Democratic gubernatorial primary, 86 percent of voters ranked two or more candidates.

Error rates in RCV races remained consistently low. No RCV election in the United States has exceeded a 1 percent error rate since 2010, and those already low rates continue to decline. In Maine’s 2nd District, 99.8 percent of voters cast valid ballots, a rate generally consistent with error rates from other jurisdictions.

**SMOOTH ELECTION ADMINISTRATION**

First uses of RCV in 2018 for both Santa Fe and Maine were largely successful. Maine’s story is notable given the logistical, administrative and election requirement difficulties, in addition to lack of funding for RCV implementation.

Even so, a Bangor Daily News exit survey showed that 74 percent of voters found ranking choices somewhat or very easy, and less than 10 percent found it hard. Over 60 percent of voters wanted to keep or expand the use of RCV. While state law and practice delayed results, the count went smoothly.

**WHAT I HEARD FROM FOLKS IS THAT THEY REALLY LIKED RANKED CHOICE VOTING. THEY LIKED BEING ABLE TO HAVE CHOICES.**

— Matthew Dunlap, Maine Secretary of State

**2018 turn out in San Francisco special mayoral election, surpassing state election average.**

**53%**

**38%**

**5,000 MORE VOTES**

**99.8% VALID BALLOTS**

**70% Voters using all three rankings.**