Ranked Choice Voting

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A Ranked Choice Voting Ballot

Recommended by Robert’s Rules of Order and used in major elections around the world, ranked choice voting gives voters the freedom to rank candidates in order of choice: first, second, third and so on.
All first choices are counted to see if any candidate has a majority of the vote. A candidate with a majority of the vote wins, just like any other election.
If no candidate has a majority, the candidate in last place is eliminated.

Those voters have their ballot count for their next choice.
This process continues until a candidate wins with a majority of the votes.

When down to 2 finalists in the “instant runoff,” it means the winner is preferred by more voters in a head-to-head race.
Avoid Plurality (Non-Majority) Outcomes

- When more than 2 candidates run, votes can be split among candidates and someone wins with less than a majority. This can produce “winners” opposed by most voters.
  
  - *Examples*: Adopted in Maine after 9 of last 11 governor races won by plurality / Utah primary elections under new rules creating concerns

Replace Runoff Elections

- Ranked choice voting produces the consensus results that runoffs are meant to provide without the low turnout and high costs associated with holding a second election. RCV is known as “instant runoff voting,” as it does the job of a runoff more efficiently.
  
  - *Examples*: Major cities adopting RCV include Minneapolis and St. Paul (MN), Oakland and San Francisco (CA), and Memphis (TN) / Costly primary runoffs in the South
Helping Military and Overseas Voters Participate

- Runoff elections pose logistical challenges to overseas voters, which is why five states use ranked ballots for congressional elections that might go to a runoff. Military and overseas voters return two ballots: the first is a standard ballot, and the second is a ranked ballot to be used in the case of a runoff.
- Presidential primaries with significant early voting would benefit from RCV ballots.
- *Examples:* Use in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina

Improving the “Top Two” Primary System

- Top Two systems seek to give voters more power in primaries, but can limit choice in November. To enhance voter choice, the same primary election could advance *four* candidates, and use ranked choice voting in November to elect a consensus winner.
For More Information

Websites

- RankedChoiceVoting.org: Website created by retired election officials to be helpful to election officials and policymakers
- FairVote.org: Our organizational website, as advocates and researchers

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