

Making Sense of...Ranked-Choice Voting

Authored by Jamie Neikrie

Overview:

- Ranked-choice voting (RCV or choice voting) is a method in which voters rank candidates from most to least desirable. Once the votes are totaled, candidates with the least support are eliminated, with those votes being attributed to the voter's next choice. This process continues until the desired number of candidates secure the requisite percentage of votes.
- RCV has been adopted in 17 cities and towns across the US, with five more set to implement this system in the next two years. In 2020, Maine will use choice voting statewide, including in the general election for president. Additionally, this fall Massachusetts voters will be faced with a ballot initiative that could enact RCV for state and federal elections, beginning in 2022.
- Proponents of RCV argue that it ensures voters will play a role in electing their representative, even if their most preferred candidate does not win. In doing so, this system can improve citizen satisfaction and sense of efficacy.
- Choice voting may also lead to greater diversity and representation. In majority-white districts, voters of color can still select backup candidates, potentially swinging elections and making representatives more accountable to minority interests.
- Opponents argue that RCV creates confusion and leads to voters selecting too many or too few candidates for a particular ranking.
- In some cases—including Minneapolis—ranked choice voting combines the primary and general elections. This style of voting reduces costs and mitigates drawn-out, negative campaigns, but it can also prevent voters from getting to know a candidate as well.

Readings:

- [Ranked Choice Voting 101](#), Fairvote
- [Campaign civility under preferential and plurality voting](#), Electoral Studies
- [White men are 31 percent of the American population. They hold 65 percent of all elected offices](#), The Washington Post
- [What to know about the debate over the Massachusetts ranked choice voting ballot measure](#), Boston.com
- [Maine's Fitful Experiment with a New Way of Voting](#), The Atlantic
- [Maine ranked-choice voting as a case of electoral-system change](#), Journal of Representative Democracy

Questions for discussion:

- What are the strongest arguments for and against choice voting?
- How, if at all, would choice voting have changed the 2016 presidential election? What about the 2020 primaries?
- How, if at all, would ranked choice voting change your view of our electoral process?
- How can we bring more voices, particularly those of historically marginalized populations, into the political sphere in the U.S.?
- What do you think of the dominant two parties in the U.S.? Do you feel represented by candidates in recent elections? Why or why not?