

## The History and Present of Ranked Choice Voting

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### Background & History

Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) is a fairly new electoral system that has gained popularity recently. Ranked Choice Voting is an electoral system in which voters have the option to rank candidates in order of preference. The first city documented to use RCV was San Leandro, California. San Leandro first began using it as an option to charter amendments and was later used in 2010 to elect the mayor and city council members. Since then, over 22 cities are currently using Ranked Choice Voting, including New York City, San Francisco, St. Louis Park, Oakland, Minneapolis, and the state of Maine. There are also more states and cities planning to implement RCV including the state of Alaska and Easthampton, Massachusetts. Many people feel that voting for several people in the order of their preference makes them feel that they are not “wasting their vote on a losing candidate and will reduce the idea that you should only vote against someone else but not for a candidate you believe in,” as explained by a NYC ranked choice advocate. This brings happiness to voters, which in turn, leads to a higher voter turnout as more voters feel their votes are being heard. Others are concerned that in many communities, including across NYC, people are unaware of RCV or believe that it is too confusing or complicated.

### How It Works

Ranked choice voting is an electoral system that allows voters to rank candidates by preference. In New York City, each voter can rank up to five candidates, or they can vote for one candidate if preferred. According to some advocates, ranked choice voting helps eliminate vote splitting and encourages more third-party and centrist candidates. Ranked choice voting will be used in upcoming primary elections. This way of voting allows voters to only vote for who they prefer, instead of having to vote strategically. When voting strategically, voters do not vote for the candidates they truly prefer. A winner is determined automatically if a candidate wins over 50% of first-preference votes. If no candidate wins the majority of first-preference votes, the counting process begins again. ***IMPORTANT: If a voter’s first-preference candidate does not win, their vote still counts as it goes towards their next highest ranked candidate.***

The candidates with the least number of first-preference votes get eliminated, lifting the second-preference choices. If there is a candidate with over 50% of second-preference votes, they win, but if not, the same process continues down the ranks until there are only two candidates left. The candidate with the most preferred votes wins the election.

## RCV in NYC

In 2019, New Yorkers voted for a change in the election process, when the adoption of Ranked Choice Voting won by a margin of 73.5%. In NYC, all primary and special elections for local offices including Mayor, Public Advocate, Comptroller, Borough President, and City Council will now be decided by a voter ranking system. New York City is by far the most-populated city in the U.S. to adopt the new voting system, and it will triple the number of people around the country who are using it. The system was supported for a multitude of reasons including the removal of costly and low turnout runoff elections, the promotion of more female and nonwhite candidates, and more civil and positive elections. Ranked Choice Voting has been proven to encourage more minority candidates to run in elections, and election trends show the system favoring candidates who are supported more broadly in the electorate. The method also eliminates the need for runoff elections which are held if no candidate achieves 50 percent of the vote. Without runoff elections, taxpayers save money; each election cycle that does *not* require a runoff saves approximately \$20 million. Additionally, Ranked Choice Voting promotes more positive elections, since candidates are not solely focused on attacking their opponents. Candidates compete for the second-choice votes from their opponents' supporters, so they will be less inclined to run a harmful and negative campaign. The benefits to RCV will be felt across New York City for all voters and taxpayers, and across the entire U.S. for all areas considering a change in their election system.

## The Future of Voting

Overall, Ranked Choice Voting is beneficial to all voters in the NYC area, including non-white and female candidates. An electoral system that allows voters to rank their preferred candidates, Ranked Choice Voting promotes a more positive and satisfying election for citizens across New York City. It promises more civility in elections and less negative campaigning, which is a benefit for all voters even across the US. NYC decided to use RCV because the system was supported for numerous reasons and has proven to encourage more people including minorities to vote. These reasons bring more happiness to voters, which leads to more voter turnout and makes the voting environment less negatively competitive. Encouraging more people to vote and viewing voting as a positive experience is the main goal of NYC, and with the Ranked Choice Voting system in place, this becomes a realistic possibility.

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