

# Ranked Choice Voting Should Be Ranked Dead Last as An Election Reform

## THE ISSUE

Ranked choice voting (RCV) is a confusing, chaotic election “reform” being pushed by mega-liberal political donors and other activists that would fundamentally change the election process, effectively disenfranchise voters, and allow marginal candidates not supported by a majority of voters to be elected. It is a confusing and opaque process that robs voters of the ability to re-examine the top two vote-getting candidates in a run-off election when one candidate does not initially win a majority—diminishing the ability of voters to make an informed, knowledgeable choice of who would best represent them.

## HOW IT WORKS—AND DOES NOT WORK

- With RCV, a voter is asked to rank every candidate in a race, from his number one choice to his last choice. For example, in a race with five candidates, a voter is asked to rank the candidates from one through five, with the candidate ranked as number one being the voter’s first choice and the candidate ranked as number five being the voter’s last choice.
- If no candidate wins a majority in the tabulation of the ballots, then the candidate with the fewest number of votes is eliminated, and the voters who selected that candidate as their number one choice automatically have their votes changed to their second choice, and another round of vote tabulation occurs.

- If no candidate wins a majority in the second round of counting, the lowest-scoring candidate is again eliminated and the voters who selected that candidate as their top choice (or as their second choice if that voter’s top choice was eliminated after the first round) have their ballots redistributed to their next choice, and another round of vote tabulation occurs.
- Such candidate elimination, redistribution of ballots, and recounting keeps occurring until one of the remaining candidates achieves a majority.
- But that candidate may ultimately have been the second, third, fourth, or last choice of the majority of voters—meaning that a candidate could win who was not the first choice of a majority of voters.

## CONFUSION, COMPLICATIONS, AND DISENFRANCHISEMENT

- RCV is a confusing and opaque process that is prone to errors.
- Alameda County, California officials admitted two months after a 2022 school board election that they had incorrectly tabulated the RCV votes and had certified the wrong person as the winner. No election official noticed the mistake because of the overly complicated process of RCV vote counting until an outside advocacy group flagged the issue.

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This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/fs242>

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- In the 2021 New York mayor’s race, it took eight rounds of vote counting of the 10 candidates during two weeks’ time before a final winner was announced. By the eighth round, the ballots of more 140,000 voters had been thrown out because they did not completely rank all candidate choices; they were effectively disenfranchised due the recognized problem of “ballot exhaustion,” which leads to disenfranchisement.
- Nearly one in three voters do not rank multiple candidates in RCV elections. Thus, if a voter does not rank all the candidates in a race, that voter’s ballot may be thrown out in subsequent rounds of vote tabulation. Since RCV makes the voting process more complicated, it is also more likely that voters may make mistakes that will cause their ballots to not be counted.
- RCV forces voters to vote for and rank candidates they do not support if they want to ensure that their ballots are not discarded in multiple rounds of vote tabulation.
- In the 2022 U.S. House of Representatives general election in Alaska, one of the two states that has implemented RCV for federal elections, it took three rounds of vote-counting before the Democratic candidate was declared the winner over two Republican candidates—but not before more than 15,000 ballots were thrown out by the final round because those voters had not ranked all candidates in the race. In the August 2022 RCV special election for that seat, the two Republican candidates garnered 60 percent of the vote—yet the Democrat candidate was declared the winner after over 11,000 ballots were eliminated.
- In the 2018 Maine U.S. House of Representatives general election, the incumbent Republican congressman who received the most first-choice votes was defeated by his

Democratic challenger in a second round of ballot tabulation after the votes for two other third-party candidates were redistributed and the ballots of more than 8,000 voters were discarded.

## DAMAGING THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

- The ultimate winner in RCV is often not the choice of a majority of voters who participated in the election; instead, the candidate with an RCV “majority” may be the first, second, third, or last choice of only the voters whose ballots remained in the tabulation until the last count.
- That also means that the winner of a multi-round, RCV election will not have a genuine mandate from a majority of voters, which should be an important consideration in a democratic system where more and more voters distrust government.
- Eliminating the several weeks between a general election and a run-off election deprives voters of the opportunity to re-examine the top two candidates, and for the candidate to re-educate voters about his or her positions and stance on issues, thereby shortchanging voters from making a fully informed choice.
- Using RCV to eliminate runoffs does not guarantee faster election results because the multiple rounds of vote tabulation can substantially delay the determination of a winner.

## CONCLUSION

- Voters and state legislators—no matter which political party they support or with whom they are affiliated—should oppose RCV as an ill-advised, imprudent election “reform” that would confuse and hurt voters, unnecessarily complicate the election process, and result in marginal candidates winning elections.