

FAQ: Ranked Choice Voting NYC

Why should we experiment with a new voting system?

- * RCV isn't a new voting system. It's an election improvement that's been road tested in cities like San Francisco, Minneapolis & St. Paul and Santa Fe. Just last year, the state of Maine started using RCV for statewide and congressional elections and, starting in 2020, will use RCV for its presidential election.
- * RCV is used around the world — Australia and Ireland have used RCV for decades.

How do I know if Ranked Choice Voting will help/hurt my community/base?

- * Candidates win by bringing communities together. Instead of splitting the community's vote so that no candidate from the community wins, candidates from one community or communities with aligned interests can work together and use the ranking so that a community-backed candidate wins.
- * RCV has increased representation of women and communities of color running for office and winning in the four Bay Area cities that have had it the longest. Ranked Choice Voting helped San Francisco elect its first Asian-American mayor in 2011 and its first African-American mayor in 2018.
- * Ranked Choice Voting has helped Minneapolis obtain its most diverse city council, including an African-American councilmember, 2 transgender people of color and the re-election of the first Somali-American and Latina councilmembers in 2017. The first African-American mayor was elected in St. Paul, MN with ranked choice voting that same year.
- * RCV is a nonpartisan reform and does not favor any one political party.

Won't this be confusing to voters?

- * Post-election surveys routinely show voters, across all demographics, understand and like RCV. Post-election audits of ballots show voters understand how to rank candidates, if they choose to do so.

RCV & CANDIDATES/CAMPAIGNING

Why should we adopt Ranked Choice Voting when it won't solve the problem of [money in politics, corruption, cybersecurity threats, etc.]?

- * No one voting reform can solve every problem people have with our politics, but experience shows that Ranked Choice Voting can help make our elections more fair and functional by giving voters more choices.
- * Experience with Ranked Choice Voting in other American cities shows that it can help eliminate winners chosen with less than majority support, as well as allow voters to vote for their first choice rather than the "lesser of two evils".

Does RCV create an environment where candidates can game the system?

- * RCV decreases the likelihood of negative campaigning and encourages collaboration among candidates, but doesn't create an environment where candidates can stack the deck in order to win.

Doesn't this mean candidates will run to the mushy center?

- * It's actually the opposite. Candidates have to talk to more voters and go beyond their local bases. This gives candidates the opportunity to expand their base and talk about their positions to voters who no longer feel forced to vote for the "lesser of two evils".

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RCV & WINNING ELECTIONS

Do second or third or fourth choice candidates win because of RCV?

- * If a candidate is ranked highest by a majority of voters, that candidate will win, like under any system.
- * If no candidate earns a majority, it is possible for a candidate who did not lead in first choices to win, but only if they earn more overall support than their opponents. Regardless, a candidate must run a strong campaign and earn the support of the majority of voters. RCV does not elect candidates who could not possibly win under the current rules.
- * Frontrunners generally go on to win the election.
 - * 86% were won by the candidate who led in the initial round;
 - * 14% were won by the candidate who placed second in the initial round;
 - * Only a single contest was won by the candidate who placed third in the initial round (and there, the top 3 were virtually tied in the first round). No candidate has ever placed fourth in the initial round and gone on to win under RCV.

RCV & ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

How are the votes counted?

- * The votes are counted by computer, just as they are under our current system, in the following way: If no one candidate receives over 50 percent of the first choice preferences, the candidate with the fewest first choice preferences is eliminated and voters who liked that candidate the best have their ballots instantly counted for their second choice preference. This process repeats and last-place candidates lose until there are only 2 candidates left.

Does the Board of Elections have the necessary equipment to implement RCV?

- * New York City already has the requisite voting machines to implement RCV — they are the same ones used in Minneapolis for RCV. A simple firmware upgrade is all that is needed for full implementation. (And that's done by the vendor — not the Board of Elections)

How are affidavit and absentee ballots treated?

- * Affidavit and absentee ballots in an RCV election are treated like they would be in non-RCV elections. After election day, the Board of Elections will check affidavit ballots to ensure they were submitted by eligible citizens at the correct polling place before tabulating votes. Affidavit absentee ballots deemed validly cast will then be folded into the counting process as they are today.



A citywide education and outreach initiative from Common Cause/NY.

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