

Ranked-choice Voting (RCV)

Ranked-choice voting in Maine: Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is ranked-choice voting?

Ranked-choice voting, sometimes called "instant run-off voting," allows voters to choose their candidates in order of preference, by marking candidates as their first, second, third, and subsequent choices. The votes are tabulated in rounds, with the lowest-ranked candidates eliminated in each round until there are only two candidates left. The one who is determined to have received the majority of the votes (more than 50%) in the final round is declared the winner. It is different from our previous method of voting, in which voters choose only one candidate for each office and the winner is determined by plurality (whoever gets the most votes).

2. Why are we using ranked-choice voting?

The full timeline of ranked-choice voting in Maine explains the path that has led to the use of this method of voting. At this time, based on statewide votes, legal decisions and the provisions of the Maine Constitution, the State of Maine is using ranked-choice voting for all of Maine's state-level primary elections, and in general elections ONLY for federal offices, including the office of U.S. President. The ranked-choice rounds are used only in races in which there are more than two candidates

3. How does RCV work?

The tabulation process and other details of implementing RCV are explained in the rules that govern the process. If no candidate wins a majority of votes on Election Night in the races that have three or more candidates, the ballots and memory devices from each municipality are securely transported to a central tabulation site in Augusta. There, the winner is determined via rounds. The animated video shows the application of the rules in an example RCV tabulation. You can also view our examples of marked ballots to learn how the tabulation rules are applied.

4. How are you making sure that my vote is secure and will be accurately counted?

The Department of the Secretary of State takes security issues very seriously and has several measures in place to ensure the integrity of the voting process and validity of the results. Implementation of ranked-choice voting will not change the fact that the voting process in Maine is not online nor linked to any network, which makes it far less susceptible to cyberattacks. The RCV tabulation will not be online in any way, at any point in the process. All computers related to ballot layout and tabulation are also closed systems, not connected to any sort of network/internet. Ballots and memory sticks from tabulation machines are locked and sealed, with strict procedures establishing the chain of custody. Those procedures will be retained with RCV. The software to determine the results will be operated on hardwired computers that are on a closed system. None of the tabulator machines currently in use statewide have connectivity capability, and we use paper ballots for all elections, which are fully auditable.

The only aspect of Maine's voting system that is connected to the internet is the Central Voter Registration system, which allows municipal clerks to update voter information. However, it is password-protected and monitored by in-house Information Services staff for any attempts at unauthorized use. Additionally, Maine has same-day voter registration, so no voter can be disenfranchised at the polls due to an error related to their registration.

5. How can I learn more about the candidates and issues on ballots?

The Department of the Secretary of State will post a list of candidates for each office as well as a Citizens Guide to the Referendum Election on our Upcoming Elections page. The non-partisan guide, published for every referendum election, explains the referendum issues. Information on candidates, including their positions on the issues of the day, is not available via our department. Voters should look to candidates websites, social media and printed outreach materials, as well as Maine media outlets and public debates for this information.

6. Why don't we use RCV in the governor's race or legislative races in the general election?

The Justices of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court issue a unanimous advisory opinion at the request of legislators in May 2017, concluding that the parts of the ranked-choice voting law that apply to general elections for State Representative, State Senator and Governor were unconstitutional under the Maine Constitution because the Maine Constitution requires the winners of those offices in a general election to be decided by a plurality. Primary elections in Maine and elections for federal offices are governed by statute and not by the Maine Constitution.

Beginning with the November 3, 2020 General Election, the U.S. Presidential race is also conducted using ranked-choice voting, per the law passed in 2019: *Ch. 539, Public Laws of 2019, "An Act To Implement Ranked-choice Voting for Presidential Primary and General Elections in Maine."*

7. What if I want to rank my choices among the write-in candidates?

The ranked-choice voting law states that a voter may include no more than one write-in candidate among that voter's ranked choices for each office. Thus, you will see only one space on your ballot to write in a candidate's name and rank that candidate. You can view the full list of qualified write-in candidates on our Upcoming Elections page. All write-in candidates must be formally declared as such, by the deadline prior to the election; write-in votes for any undeclared persons will not be counted.

8. How much does ranked-choice voting cost?

For 2018, including startup costs and both the primary and general elections, ranked-choice voting cost \$441,804 in addition to the other regular costs. See the itemized breakdown [here](#).

9. I only want to choose one candidate in a ranked-choice race. How should I mark my ballot?

If you only want to vote for one candidate in a ranked-choice race, the ballot instructs that you mark only the first-choice oval for your candidate. You can also choose to mark the ovals all the way across in every ranking (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc. choice) for your candidate. Both of these markings are valid and will result in your vote being counted for your candidate throughout all the rounds of the ranked-choice voting process, unless/until that candidate is eliminated from the race. See Slides 5 and 6 in our example marked ballots for reference.