

Why Voters and Policymakers Must Oppose Ranked Choice Voting

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THE PROBLEMS

- The principal proponents of ranked choice voting—such as FairVote—are heavily funded by left-leaning globalist oligarchs and dark-money networks, including George Soros, the Rockefellers, and the Tides Foundation.
- These actors are already heavily involved in subverting the entire U.S. election system and the Constitution through initiatives such as the National Popular Vote interstate compact and the Fair Representation Act, which are strongly related to RCV.
- RCV does not solve any of the problems it is ostensibly designed to combat, it only exacerbates them, while posing entirely new threats to free, fair, and secure elections.
- RCV disenfranchises wide swathes of voters, including a disproportionate share of minorities.
- RCV causes substantial voter confusion, decreased turnout, lack of public confidence in the electoral system, significant administrative errors, and delayed processing of results.
- RCV often subverts the will of the people by causing candidates who do not receive the most votes to win the election.
- RCV inherently manipulates third-party voters into believing they have a greater voice. In reality, RCV strengthens the mainstream parties at the expense of alternative parties.
- Efforts to impose RCV are proliferating rapidly.



THE SOLUTIONS

- In states that currently use ranked choice voting, voters and/or legislators can repeal and ban its use in all federal, statewide, and local elections.
- In states that do not currently use ranked choice voting, voters and/or legislators can preemptively ban RCV in all elections.
- In states that are considering adopting ranked choice voting through ballot measures—in 2024 and potentially beyond—voters can reject, rescind, and/or ban RCV in all elections.

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INTRODUCTION

The adoption or rejection of ranked choice voting (RCV) has become a fiercely contested policy debate in recent years. Advocates for RCV—the most prominent of which is FairVote—tout the adoption of this system as a way to break the two-party stranglehold, reduce political polarization, provide voters more choices, and improve overall satisfaction with the electoral process.¹

Though FairVote and other proponents of RCV consistently claim to work on behalf of voters and the advancement of “democracy,” they are heavily funded by left-leaning globalist oligarchs and their networks. For instance, FairVote’s donors include the George Soros-controlled Open Society Foundations, the Jennifer and Jonathan Allan Soros Foundation, and the Soros Fund Charitable Foundation.² Additional donors consist of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Omidyar Network Fund, the Democracy Fund, and the Tides Foundation, among many others with strong ties to hard-left agendas.³ These organizations, and the individuals who control them, have regularly deployed their vast wealth and influence to advance radical, progressive causes that degrade America’s constitutional foundations, extinguish liberty, and consolidate the power of societal elites. Their support for ranked choice voting fits neatly within that pattern.

FairVote, its donors, and other ideologically aligned organizations have also been the driving forces behind the National Popular Vote interstate compact, an insidious initiative that strives to eliminate the Electoral College and determine presidential elections through direct democracy.⁴ Moreover, FairVote is the leading advocate for the Fair Representation Act (FRA), which would transform elections to the



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U.S. House of Representatives into a proportional representation-based system.⁵ Crucially, the creation of multi-member congressional districts via the FRA would rely upon the use of ranked choice voting.

Though these initiatives are not the focus of this *Tip Sheet*, such context is vital to understand, as it clearly conveys these actors’ overarching goal of subverting the entire U.S. electoral system. The widespread adoption of ranked choice voting represents a major step in that dangerous direction. RCV does not solve any problems; it exacerbates existing problems while also creating entirely new ones. Ultimately, ranked choice voting poses an immense threat to free, fair, and secure elections—and therefore to the entire republic.

HOW RANKED CHOICE VOTING WORKS

Ranked choice voting is relatively complicated for the uninitiated, which is likely intentional. The rules surrounding RCV can vary based on jurisdiction, such as the number of candidates allowed on the ballot. However, the RCV process generally adheres to the following sequence:

- When filling out their ballots, voters are required to rank candidates by preference in descending order rather than simply casting one ballot for their preferred candidate. For example, in a race with five candidates, voters rank them from one (first choice) to five (last choice).
- If no candidate wins a majority of votes in the first round, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated.
- Ballots ranking the eliminated candidate first are then automatically transferred to the candidate who is ranked second on those voters' ballots.
- Ballots that do not exhaustively rank candidates and/or contain mistakes are discarded.
- If this initial ballot redistribution still does not result in one candidate gaining a majority of votes, the process repeats, with another candidate being eliminated and those ballots being redistributed.
- This process only ends when one candidate ends up with a majority of votes, which often requires several rounds of candidate elimination and ballot redistribution.

In the end, ranked choice voting allows candidates who did not initially receive the most votes to win the election, which is just one of many problems associated with this system.

THE PROBLEMS

There are several significant problems that result from ranked choice voting. Each of them alone is cause for concern. Taken together, that concern escalates by multiple orders of magnitude.⁶

First, when voters do not exhaustively rank

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candidates—or make mistakes on their ballots—their votes are simply thrown out. This process, which is officially called “ballot exhaustion,” effectively disenfranchises wide swathes of voters. Studies have estimated that anywhere between 9 and 27 percent of ballots are discarded in RCV elections, on average.^{7,8} Such disenfranchisement disproportionately affects voters who are part of minority groups, have received less education, and for whom English is not their first language.^{9,10}

Second, ranked choice voting causes substantial voter confusion, decreased turnout, and a lack of confidence in the election system. For instance, in Maine’s 2018 congressional midterm election—the first federal election in the country using RCV—26 percent of voters stayed home due to confusion over the ranking system.¹¹ Overall, it has been estimated that RCV causes an 8 percent decrease in voter turnout.¹² Further, academic studies have shown that RCV has no positive impact on voters’ confidence in election results, that voters prefer traditional elections, and that voters do not believe RCV procedures result in fair election outcomes.¹³

Third, ranked choice voting often leads to significant administrative errors and delayed processing of results. For example, in New York City’s first RCV election in 2021, 135,000 test ballots were mistakenly counted in the results, which was not discovered until after the 11th round of tabulation.¹⁴ Moreover, it took 15 days for those results to be processed.¹⁵ There are many instances of such problems occurring in other jurisdictions. One particularly glaring example occurred in Alameda County, California. In the county’s 2022 school board elections, RCV led to the losing candidate being mistakenly certified as the

winner. Worse, it took almost two months before this mistake was caught by an external advocacy group.¹⁶

Fourth, ranked choice voting is inherently manipulative and creates a system that can be—and has been—used to subvert the will of the people. RCV often causes candidates and/or parties who do not receive the most votes in the first round to end up winning the election. For example, in the aforementioned 2018 election in Maine, incumbent Rep. Bruce Poliquin (R) initially received the most votes. However, after ballot redistribution—including the “exhaustion” of more than 8,000 ballots—challenger Frank Golden (D) was declared the winner.¹⁷ A similar situation unfolded in Alaska’s 2022 special congressional election, in which Republicans Sarah Palin and Nick Begich combined to receive approximately 35,000 more votes than Democrat Mary Peltola. After third-place finisher Begich’s votes were redistributed—which, similar to Maine, entailed throwing out more than 11,000 ballots—Peltola was declared the winner by a margin of approximately 5,000 votes.¹⁸ Despite 60 percent of Alaskans having voted for a Republican in the first round, a Democrat still won.

Beyond this subversion of the will of the people lies the manipulation of third-party voters. Advocates of RCV consistently proclaim that their system gives third-party voters a greater voice and fosters true multi-party competition. It does not. If third-party voters do not exhaustively rank candidates, their ballots are thrown out. If third-party voters do rank candidates, their votes are almost always transferred to one of the mainstream party candidates at some point during the ballot redistribution process—the very candidates such voters typically have no interest in supporting in the first place. Ultimately, ranked choice voting is a bait-and-switch; it actually strengthens the mainstream parties at the expense of third parties.

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Threats to the U.S. election system are already pervasive. The American people harbor an unprecedented degree of skepticism about election integrity and fairness in electoral processes. Such skepticism is valid. Three separate polls—conducted by The Heartland Institute and Rasmussen Reports in December 2023, April 2024, and July 2024, respectively—found that more than one-in-four mail-in ballots submitted in the 2020 election were likely illegal;¹⁹ that nearly three-in-10 voters would submit illegal ballots in 2024 if given the opportunity;²⁰ and that 62 percent of all voters—including a majority of every sociopolitical demographic²¹—believe cheating will affect the results of the 2024 election.²²

Ranked choice voting represents yet another assault upon America’s already damaged electoral institutions, which cannot withstand such attacks for much longer. The U.S. election system does not need yet another systemic vulnerability that can be exploited. To preserve the system—especially while efforts are undertaken to shore up its weak points—RCV must be vehemently opposed.

As of August 2024, 10 states have passed legislation outright banning ranked choice voting in federal, statewide, and/or local elections.²³ While this is a step in the right direction, efforts to impose RCV are surging throughout the country. In 2024 alone, 28 states introduced pro-RCV legislation, with three states passing pro-RCV laws.²⁴ RCV is already used in different types of elections within at least 18 states, including Alaska and Maine, which use RCV in

local, statewide, and federal elections.²⁵ In the 2024 elections, Alaska will become the first state that uses RCV to cast votes for U.S. president—a significant escalation.²⁶

The battle over ranked choice voting is not confined only to state legislatures, however. Both pro- and anti-RCV actors are also using statewide ballot measures to achieve their goals. In 2024, seven states and the District of Columbia will put RCV directly on November’s ballot. Voters in Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington, DC will decide whether to adopt pro-RCV ballot measures.²⁷ In tandem, voters in Missouri will decide whether to preemptively ban RCV via a constitutional amendment.²⁸ Lastly, voters in Alaska will decide whether to rescind what is currently the most all-encompassing RCV system in the country.²⁹

Because the use of ranked choice voting is being determined through both ballot measures and the legislative process, voters and policymakers alike are empowered to take concrete action and stop its proliferation.

- In states that currently use ranked choice voting, voters and/or legislators can repeal and ban its use in all federal, statewide, and local elections.
- In states that do not currently use ranked choice voting, voters and/or legislators can preemptively ban RCV in all elections.
- In states that are considering adopting ranked choice voting through ballot measures—in 2024 and potentially beyond—voters can reject, rescind, and/or ban RCV in all elections.

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