Midway City Council
2 February 2021
Regular Meeting

Ranked Choice Voting

BP

Ranked-choice voting (RCV)

A **ranked-choice voting** system (RCV) is an electoral system in which voters rank candidates by preference on their ballots. If a candidate wins a majority of first-preference votes, he or she is declared the winner. If no candidate wins a majority of first-preference votes, the candidate with the fewest first-preference votes is eliminated. First-preference votes cast for the failed candidate are eliminated, lifting the second-preference choices indicated on those ballots. A new tally is conducted to determine whether any candidate has won a majority of the adjusted votes. The process is repeated until a candidate wins an outright majority.[1][2]

See the sections below for additional information on the following topics:

1. **Background**: This section lists the general steps involved in ranked-choice voting (RCV) and details an example of its application.
2. **Ranked-choice voting in the United States**: This section details the usage of ranked-choice voting systems in the United States.
3. **Support and opposition**: This section details the arguments in favor of and opposed to ranked-choice voting.
4. **State legislation**: This section lists state legislation dealing with ranked-choice voting.
5. **Ballot measures**: This section lists statewide ballot measures dealing with ranked-choice voting.

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PUBLICPOLICY

HIGHLIGHTS

- As of 2020, one state (Maine) had implemented RCV at the state level, eight states contained jurisdictions that had implemented RCV at some level, and another five states contained jurisdictions that had adopted but not yet implemented RCV in local elections.

- In November 2020, Alaska approved a ballot initiative to establish ranked-choice voting and top-four primaries with 50.4% of the vote. Voters in Massachusetts defeated a ballot initiative to establish ranked-choice voting for state-level elections with 54.9% of voters voting against it.

- In November 2020, Maine voters were the first to vote for president using ranked-choice voting.

- The Maine Legislature approved a bill in 2019 (LD 1083) to extend the state's RCV system to the presidential election. The Maine Republican Party filed a veto referendum to suspend LD 1083 and let voters decide whether to approve it. On September 22, 2020, the Maine Supreme Judicial Court ruled that not enough signatures were submitted for the veto referendum to qualify it for the ballot, which meant LD 1083 was not suspended.

- In November 2019, New York City voters approved a measure to enact ranked-choice voting for primary and special elections beginning in 2021. This made NYC the most populous jurisdiction in the U.S. to employ the ranked-choice voting election method.

Background

How ranked-choice voting works

Broadly speaking, the ranked-choice voting process unfolds as follows for single-winner elections:

1. Voters rank the candidates for a given office by preference on their ballots.

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2. If a candidate wins an outright majority of first-preference votes (i.e., 50 percent plus one), he or she will be declared the winner.
3. If, on the other hand, no candidates win an outright majority of first-preference votes, the candidate with the fewest first-preference votes is eliminated.
4. All first-preference votes for the failed candidate are eliminated, lifting the second-preference choices indicated on those ballots.
5. A new tally is conducted to determine whether any candidate has won an outright majority of the adjusted voters.
6. The process is repeated until a candidate wins a majority of votes cast.

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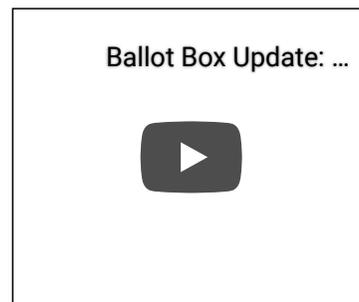
The above video explains the ranked-choice voting process, specifically as it applied to the 2016 RCV ballot initiative in Maine.

Example

Assume that there are four candidates for mayor in a hypothetical city. The table below presents the raw first-preference vote totals for each candidate.

Raw first-preference vote tallies in a hypothetical mayoral race		[hide]
Candidate	**First-preference votes**	**Percentage**
Candidate A	475	46.34%
Candidate B	300	29.27%
Candidate C	175	17.07%
Candidate D	75	7.32%

In the above scenario, no candidate won an outright majority of first-preference votes. As a result, the candidate (Candidate D) with the smallest number of first-preference votes is eliminated. The ballots that listed candidate D as the first preference are adjusted, raising their second-preference candidates. Assume that, of the 75 first-preference votes for Candidate D, 50 listed Candidate A as their second preference and 25 listed Candidate B. The adjusted vote totals would be as follows:

Adjusted vote tallies in a hypothetical mayoral race		[hide]
Candidate	**Adjusted first-preference votes**	**Percentage**
Candidate A	525	51.22%
Candidate B	325	31.71%
Candidate C	175	17.07%

On the second tally, Candidate A secured 51.22 percent of the vote, thereby winning the election.

Note: The above is a simplified example used for illustrative purposes. Specific procedures vary by jurisdiction and according to the nature of the election (i.e., whether it is a single-winner or multi-winner contest).

▷

Related terms

The term *instant-runoff voting* is sometimes used as a synonym for ranked-choice voting. In other contexts, the term *instant-runoff voting* is used to describe ranked-choice voting processes used in single-winner elections. The term *single-transferable voting* is also sometimes used synonymously with ranked-choice voting. *Single-transferable voting* can be more narrowly construed to refer to ranked-choice voting processes used in multi-winner elections.[1][3]

The term *ballot exhaustion* is used to describe situations in which a ballot is no longer ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ di marked on the ballot are no longer in the contest. This can occur in ranked-choice vo ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ an ___ ___ y candidates that did not make it to the final round of counting, the voter's ballot is said to have been exhausted. ___

Ranked-choice voting in the United States

As of November 2020, one state (Maine) had implemented RCV at the state level, and one state (Alaska) had adopted but not implemented RCV. Another eight states contained jurisdictions that had implemented RCV at some level. Another five states contained jurisdictions that had adopted but not yet implemented RCV in local elections. See the map and table below for further details.[6]

Ranked-choice voting in the United States

The map below details the use of ranked-choice voting (RCV) in the United States. States shaded in orange have implemented RCV at the state or local levels. States shaded in blue contain jurisdictions that have adopted but not implemented RCV. The remaining states do not utilize RCV in public elections. Hover over a state for additional details.
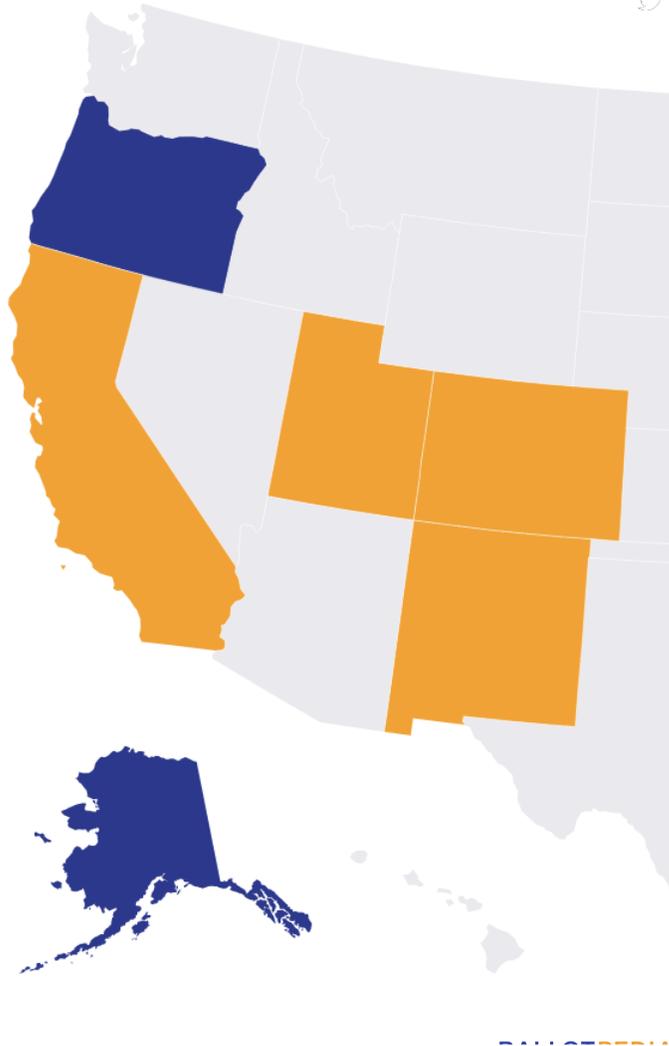
Current as of November 17, 2020

Ranked-choice voting usage in the United States, as of 2020	[hide]	
State	**Ranked-choice voting**	
Alabama	No	
Alaska	Adopted but not implemented for federal and state elections	
Arizona	No	
Arkansas	No	
California	Yes; Oakland, San Francisco, San Leandro, and Berkeley	
Colorado	Yes; Telluride, Basalt, Carbondale	
Connecticut	No	
Delaware	No	
Florida	Adopted but not implemented; Sarasota	
Georgia	No	
Hawaii	No	
Idaho	No	
Illinois	No	
Indiana	No	
Iowa	No	
Kansas	No	
Kentucky	No	
Louisiana	No	
Maine	Yes; Federal[7] and state elections Municipal elections in Portland	
Maryland	Yes; Takoma Park	
Massachusetts	Yes; Cambridge, Amherst (adopted but not implemented), Easthampton (adopted but not implemented)	
Michigan	Yes; Eastpointe Adopted but not implemented; Ferndale	
Minnesota	Yes; Minneapolis, St. Paul, and St. Louis Park (adopted but not implemented)	
Mississippi	No	
Missouri	No	
Montana	No	
Nebraska	No	
Nevada	No	
New Hampshire	No	
New Jersey	No	
New Mexico	Yes; Santa Fe and Las Cruces	
New York	Adopted but not implemented; New York City	
North Carolina	No	
North Dakota	No	
Ohio	No	
Oklahoma	No	
Oregon	Adopted but not implemented; Benton County	

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Ranked-choice voting usage in the United States, as of 2020		[hide]
State	**Ranked-choice voting**	
Pennsylvania	No	
Rhode Island	No	
South Carolina	No	
South Dakota	No	
Tennessee	Adopted but not implemented; Memphis	
Texas	No	
Utah	Pilot program allowing for municipalities to use ranked-choice voting in 2019 elections (participating cities: Payson and Vineyard)	
Vermont	No	
Virginia	Adopted in 2020 allowing cities to opt in to use RCV beginning in 2021.	
Washington	No	
West Virginia	No	
Wisconsin	No	
Wyoming	No	

Support and opposition

Support

The Committee for Ranked Choice Voting, which supported the 2016 Maine ballot measure that approved the use of RCV in statewide elections, made the following arguments in favor of RCV:[8]

> " Ranked choice voting ensures that candidates with the most votes and broadest support win, so voters get what they want. Candidates who are opposed by a majority of voters can never win ranked choice voting elections. ... Ranked choice voting levels the playing field for all candidates and encourages candidates to take their case directly to you with a focus on the issues. Candidates are encouraged to seek second choice rankings from voters whose favorite candidate is somebody else. You are less likely to rank as your second choice a candidate who has issued personal attacks against your favorite candidate.[9] "

—Committee for Ranked Choice Voting

Greg Orman, in a 2016 article for *Real Clear Politics*, made the following argument in support of RCV:[10]

> " In a ranked-choice election, the only way to waste your vote is to actually vote against a candidate. As long as the candidate you like least doesn't reach the 50 percent threshold, they won't win. So only positive votes matter. ... Ranked-choice voting effectively allows voters to vote their actual preferences instead of having to vote strategically. This would have a meaningful impact on elections and governing. It would empower inde̶̶̶̶̶̶̶̶̶̶̶̶̶̶̶̶̶̶̶̶by eliminating the "wasted vote" argument.[9] "

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—Greg Orman

FairVote, an organization that advocates for the adoption of electoral reforms such as ranked-choice voting (RCV), argues that RCV, in combination with other electoral reforms, can foster the development of legislative bodies that better represent the diversity of their constituencies:[11]

> All states and all congressional elections currently use winner-take-all rules that elevate district lines over voters. Legislatures elected by winner-take-all are characterized by distortions in partisan representation, entrenchment of incumbents in safe seats, regional polarization, and low representation of women and racial and ethnic minorities. When combined with multi-winner districts electing at least three members, ranked-choice voting helps to make elections fairer and more reflective in every district. This ends the cycle of gerrymandering, and creates competitive elections in which every vote really counts.[9]

—FairVote

Opposition

Louis Jacobson, in a 2013 article for *Governing*, summarized some of the arguments against ranked-choice voting (RCV):[12]

> To be sure, the system has also inspired opposition. For starters, it's more complicated for voters to understand, at least until they get used to it. In addition, some say there may be value in having an actual final round of campaigning between two candidates. That way, voters can see the top two finishers directly battling each other for public support. These drawbacks have come into sharpest relief when second-place or even third-place finishers in the first round ended up winning the election.[9]

—Louis Jacobson

In a 2016 article for *Democracy*, Simon Waxman contended that RCV is not necessarily more likely to produce more moderate candidates or more diverse legislative bodies, as some proponents of RCV contend:[13]

> There is also little reason to believe that RCV will promote legislative moderation—or new campaign tactics—at the federal level, because it usually produces outcomes similar to what one would expect from a standard plurality system. In the 2013 Australian federal election, 90 percent of constituencies elected the candidate with the most first-preference votes, which suggests that choice ranking had little effect on the outcome.[9]

—Simon Waxman

Gordon Weil, a former Maine state agency head and municipal selectman, argued in a 2015 piece for CentralMaine.com that RCV runs counter to the democratic process:[14]

> Ranked-choice proponents dislike [other types of] primaries, because fringe candidates can win, producing an unhappy choice in the general election. That sounds like the position of philosopher-kings who really don't trust democracy and certainly want to see the end of political parties. If there's something wrong with [other types of] primaries, find a way to get more people to vote. But don't manipulate their voting. ... If we want decisions guaranteed to be made by a majority, then a runoff is a better idea, because it allows voters to make a clear choice rather than the muddled, computer-run outcome of ranked-choice voting.[9]

—Gordon Weil

State legislation and ballot measures

State legislation

See also: Electoral systems legislation at the state and city levels in the United States, 2019

The map below provides the number of ranked-choice voting bills that have been introduced in each state as of January 2021. Hover over a state to see the exact number of bills. A darker shade of red indicates a greater number of relevant bills. In those states shaded in white, relevant bills have not been introduced. For state-specific details, click a state in the map below or select a state from the drop-down menu beneath the map. On doing so, a list of state legislation will display, including information about bill status and links to full text. This information is provided by BillTrack50.com. To return to the map, click "Back" in the upper righthand corner of the legislation list.

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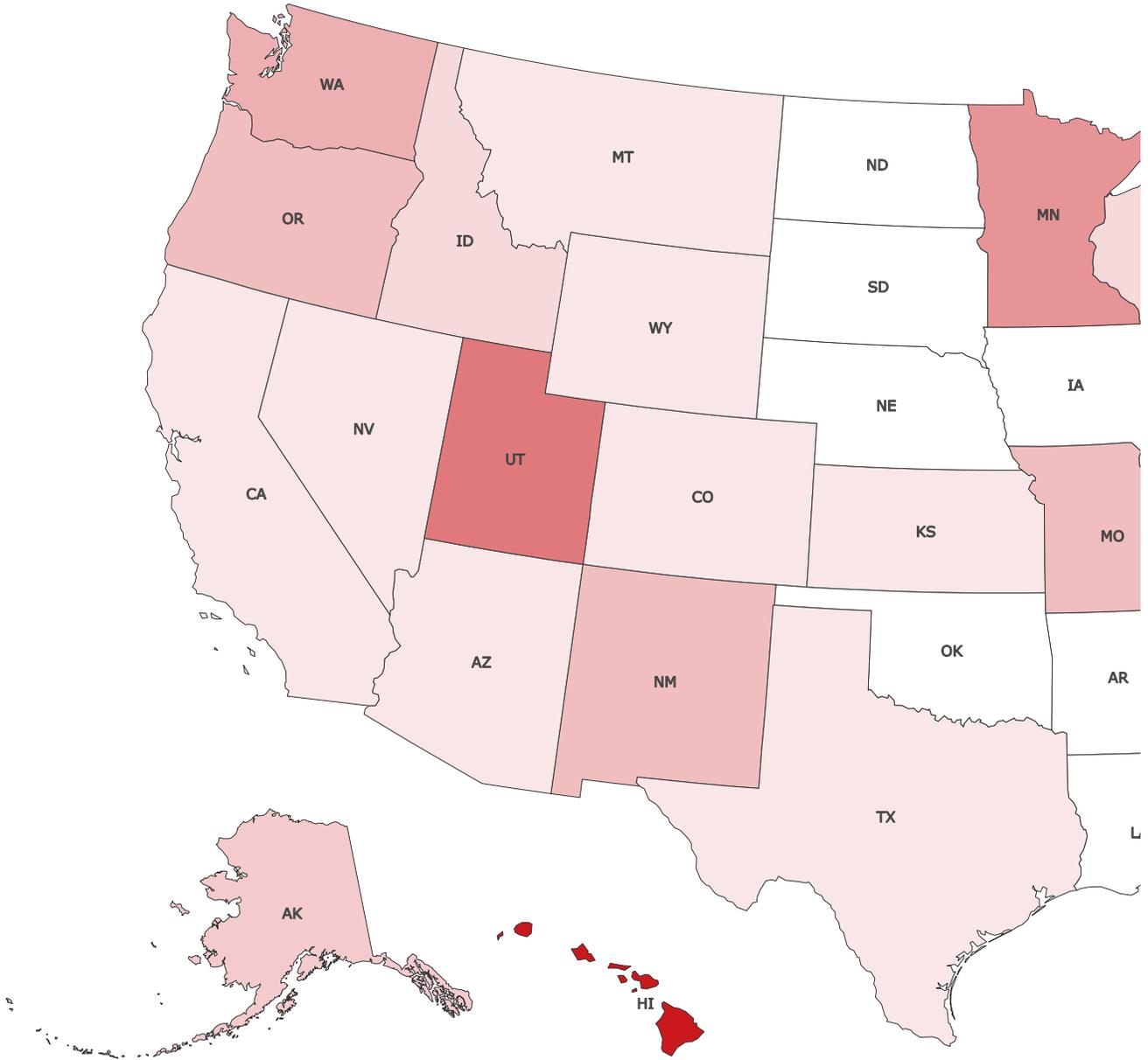
Choose a state   ⌄

The following is a list of recent ranked-choice voting bills that have been introduced in or passed by state legislatures. To learn more about each of these bills, click the bill title. This information is provided by BillTrack50   and LegiScan   .

Note: Due to the nature of the sorting process used to generate this list, some results may not be relevant to the topic. If no bills are displayed below, no legislation pertaining to this topic has been introduced in the legislature recently.

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Electoral systems bills in the United States, 2019

NJ A226 - Repeals the "Agreement Among the States to Elect the President by National Popular Vote."

This bill repeals the "Agreement Among the States to Elect the President by National Popular Vote," adopted as part of the New Jersey statutes pursuant to P.L.2007, c.334, and amends various parts of the statutory law to remove any...

01/09/2018: Introduced, Referred to Assembly Oversight, Reform and Federal Relations Committee

NJ A913 - Requires presidential electors to award one electoral vote to popular vote winner in each congressional district and two electoral votes to sta...

This bill would modify the method in which the members of electoral college in the State cast their votes for the President and the Vice President in the general election. Under the bill, the process would be changed from the "Winner-Takes-All"...

01/09/2018: Introduced, Referred to Assembly State and Local Government Committee

NJ A1230 - Requires candidates for President and Vice-President of United States to disclose federal income tax returns to appear on ballot; prohibits E...

This bill provides that the names of candidates for President and Vice-President of the United States would not be printed on the ballot in New Jersey unless the candidates submit their federal income tax returns to the Division of Elections...

01/09/2018: Introduced, Referred to Assembly State and Local Government Committee

NJ A5205 - Establishes ranked-choice voting procedure for elections for Governor, State Senate, State General Assembly, United States Senate and Hou...

This bill establishes a ranked-choice voting procedure for primary and general elections to elect candidates to the offices of Governor, New Jersey Senate, New Jersey General Assembly, United States Senate, and United States House of Representatives...

03/18/2019: Introduced, Referred to Assembly State and Local Government Committee

NY A07387 - Creates a pilot program to provide for an instant runoff voting method to be used in up to ten local governments, selected by the state bo...

AN ACT to create a pilot program to test a ranked choice voting method of elections; and providing for the repeal of such provisions upon expiration thereof The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assem- bly, do enact...

01/08/2020: referred to election law

Ballot measures

The term *ballot measures* describes all questions or issues that appear on election ballots for voters to approve or reject. Ballot measures may apply to state and local jurisdictions (including cities, counties, special districts, etc.). Initiatives permit citizens to propose (or initiate) statutes or constitutional amendments via petition. Referenda allow citizens to refer statutes passed by legislatures to the ballot for enactment or repeal by voters. Legislative referrals appear on voters' ballots as a result of actions taken by legislatures; these can include state statutes, constitutional amendments, and bond issues.

The sections below list ballot measures related to electoral systems and campaign laws in 2019 and 2020. These are proposed measures that may or may not make the ballot. For additional information about the status of these measures, click the links below.

2019

Ballotpedia has tracked the following ballot measure(s) pertaining to electoral systems for 2019.

1. Ohio National Popular Vote for President Initiative (2019)

2020

Ballotpedia has tracked the following ballot measure(s) pertaining to electoral systems for 2020.

1. Alaska Ballot Measure 2, Top-Four Ranked-Choice Voting and Campaign Finance Laws Initiative (2020)
2. Maine Ranked-Choice Voting for Presidential Elections Referendum (2020)
3. Massachusetts Question 2, Ranked-Choice Voting Initiative (2020)
4. Nevada Ranked-Choice Voting Initiative (2020)
5. North Dakota Top-Four Ranked-Choice Voting, Redistricting, and Election Process Changes Initiative (2020)

See also

Select a state on the map below to read more about electoral systems in that state.

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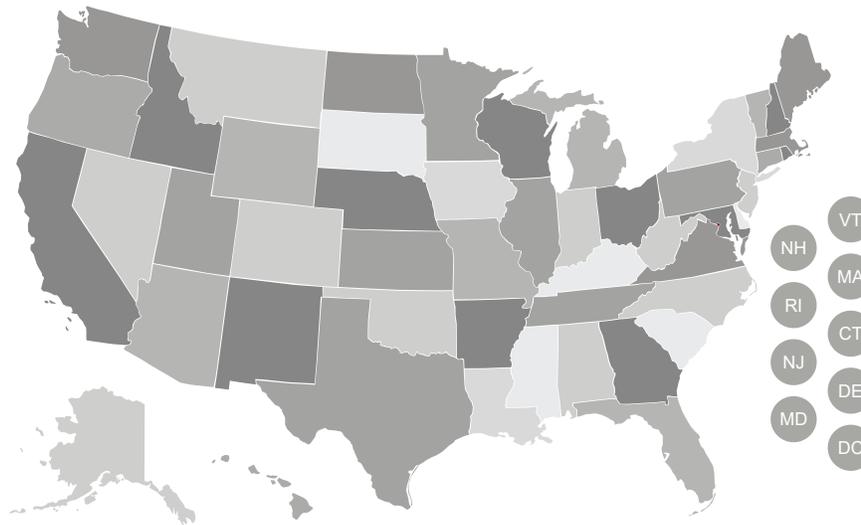
- Electoral systems legislation at the state and city levels in the United States, 2017
- Primary systems legislation at the state and city levels in the United States, 2017
- Electoral system
- Ballot exhaustion

External links

- FairVote, "Data on Ranked Choice Voting"
- ACE: The Electoral Knowledge Network
- Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center
- Electology.org (The Center for Election Science)
- Protect My Ballot

Footnotes

1. *FairVote*, "Electoral Systems," accessed July 7, 2017
2. *MinneapolisMN.gov*, "Frequently Asked Questions about Ranked-Choice Voting," accessed July 7, 2017
3. *MinneapolisMN.gov*, "Frequently Asked Questions about Ranked-Choice Voting," accessed July 7, 2017
4. *FairVote*, "RCV Elections and Runoffs: Exhausted Votes vs Exhausted Voters in the Bay Area," October 19, 2016
5. *MinnPost*, "Ranked-choice-voting reality: Theoretical 'perfect case' doesn't happen," August 26, 2013
6. *FairVote*, "Where RCV Is Used," accessed May 18, 2018
7. *This includes the presidential election.*

Only the first few references on this page are shown above. Click to show more.

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