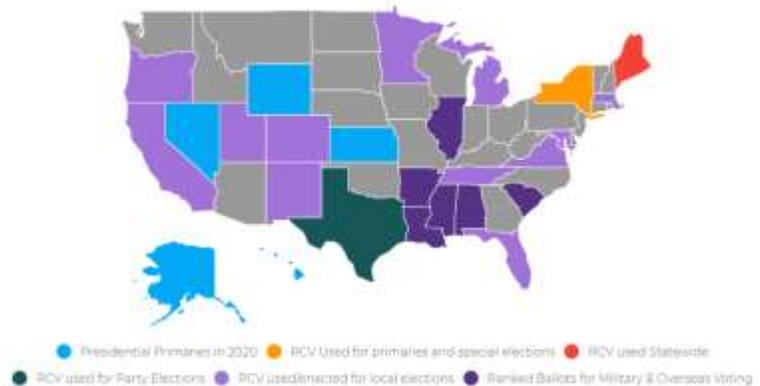# FAQ: Ranked Choice Voting

What is ranked choice voting?

Ranked-choice voting (RCV) is an electoral system that focuses on voters ranking candidates, as opposed to voting for only one. Massachusetts – and most of the country – currently uses a "first-past-the-post" electoral system. Under such a system, voters cast their ballot for one candidate per race. Whoever has the most votes, regardless of whether or not they attain a majority, wins the election.[1]

This is well-exemplified in the 2018 Democratic Primary in the Third Congressional District of Massachusetts. 10 candidates sought the Democratic nomination, and the winner, Lori Trahan, attained only 21.7% of the vote.[2] As a result, nearly 80% of the votes cast had no bearing on the results of the election. Under RCV, however, voters would rank candidates based on preference.

Source: FairVote

How does RCV work?

If, for example, six candidates are running in one race, voters can rank those candidates from one to six, in order of preference. If a candidate wins a majority of votes on the first ballot, then the election ends there. But if no one attains a majority, then the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and those votes count towards the individual's second choice. This continues until one candidate attains the majority of support.[3]

What are the benefits of RCV?

1. **Guarantees majority support**: for any candidate to attain victory in a ranked-choice system, they must have majority support. Even if they end up being the second or third preference of some

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[1] https://voterchoice2020.org/about/
[2] https://electionstats.state.ma.us/elections/search/year_from:2018/year_to:2018/office_id:5/district_id:58686
[3] https://voterchoice2020.org/about/

voters, they still have a broader base of legitimate supporters than many candidates do in our current first-past-the-post system.

2. **Promotes diverse candidates**: instead of being criticized as "spoiler candidates," RCV encourages candidates of all backgrounds to run for office, without fear of splitting votes amongst specific demographics. Specifically, women and people of color have proven to run for office and win more in locations with RCV than locations without.[4]

3. **Increases voter choice and competition**: With more candidates and parties running for office, voter choice and competition increase. This is especially relevant in Massachusetts, where the vast majority of incumbent state legislators face no competition in upcoming elections. It is estimated that 125 out of 200 state legislators will run unopposed in both the September 1 State Primary and November 3 General Election, facing no opponent from either the Democratic or Republican party.[5]

4. **Increases voter turnout**: with more competition, increased voter interest and investment comes naturally. The six largest cities across the country that have implemented RCV have seen increased voter turnout. Since RCV eliminates the need for any second-round or runoff elections, RCV facilitates higher voter turnout in the long term also.[6]

What do elected officials think of RCV?

"Ranked choice voting strengthens our democracy and places more power in the hands of voters on Election Day" – **Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley (MA-07)**

"Ranked choice voting will make our democracy stronger and give voters more power" – **Senator Ed Marky (MA)**

"During the midst of a pandemic, we need to make sure our democracy is strong. We not only need vote by mail, but we should have ranked-choice voting too" **Congressman Joe Kennedy (MA-04)**

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[4] https://voterchoice2020.org/about/

[5] https://commonwealthmagazine.org/politics/incumbents-to-rule-again-in-coming-election/

[6] https://www.nonprofitvote.org/america-goes-to-the-polls-2018/