

FAQ: Ranked Choice Voting

Starting in 2021, New York City voters will have the option to rank their top 5 candidates (including a write-in) in our local primary and special elections for Mayor, Comptroller, Public Advocate, Borough President, and City Council. If voters still want to vote for just one candidate, they can. Runoffs are eliminated & candidates will need to win with at least 50% + 1 of the votes.

What is Ranked Choice Voting?

Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) allows voters to rank candidates by preference instead of choosing just one. It works like this:

- 1st Choice: The candidate you love.
- 2nd choice: The candidate you like.
- 3rd or 4th choice: The candidate you like slightly less.
- 5th choice: The candidate you can stand.

Why change the system? Why change if now?

After years of careful study, in the 2019 election, New Yorkers voted overwhelmingly (almost 75%) to adopt Ranked Choice Voting. Ranked Choice Voting promotes candidates who are able to get broader support than plurality elections (the current system) since the winning candidate typically has strong first-choice support and also receives a high number of second and third-place votes.

What benefits has Ranked Choice Voting brought to other cities and states?

Ranked Choice Voting gives voters more say in who gets elected. Even if your first-choice candidate does not win, you are still able to affect the outcome by supporting your 2nd, 3rd, 4th, or even 5th choice. Because candidates will need broad support (even from voters who may not rank them first), campaigns are more likely to focus on appealing to voters and less on attacking each other.

Ranked Choice Voting also leads to more diverse candidates winning office. Cities that have implemented Ranked Choice Voting have elected more women and more women of color, making their elected officials more representative of their communities.

Who else uses Ranked Choice Voting?

Seventeen U.S. cities including San Francisco, Santa Fe, and Minneapolis use Ranked Choice Voting, in addition to the State of Maine. It is also used by the Academy Awards!

How are ranked choice ballots counted?

To win, a candidate must receive at least a majority of total votes counted. A majority is 50% of the total, plus one vote. After all the votes (including absentee and affidavit ballots) are in, counters will tally only the first-choice votes. If no candidate wins a majority based on first-choice votes, the candidate with the lowest number of votes is defeated, and the second choices from each voter whose candidate was defeated are reallocated as if they were first choices.

We repeat the process until we are down to the last two candidates. In each round, the candidate now in last place is defeated, and the second choice votes on those ballots are redistributed. If the second choice on those ballots has already lost, the voter's third choice is then redistributed, and so on. The process is repeated until the top vote-getter of the final two candidates is declared the winner.

How many candidates can a person rank?

You can rank up to 5 candidates, as many or as few as you'd like.

Why should someone rank the candidates?

- More choice, more power!
- Even if your favorite candidate doesn't win, you still have a say in who's elected.
- You can vote your conscience without worrying that you're wasting your vote or electing a candidate you don't like.
- Ranking a 2nd, 3rd, etc. choice will never hurt your favorite candidate.

What is +1 actually referring to (50+1)?

50% + 1 is the definition for a majority of voters. The 50% represents half of voters, and the + 1 represents the one single vote needed to get over 50% and achieve the required majority.

How likely are we to know who the winner is on election night?

Not very likely.

We won't know the actual winner until all of the absentee and affidavit ballots have been counted and added in with the in-person early voting and Election Day ballots. In New York state, that often takes more than 10 days or 2 weeks.

Is there training available about ranked choice voting?

Yes!

The New York City Campaign Finance Board, and Rank the Vote NYC offer training. Visit nycfb.info and rankthevoteny.org to learn more and request training.

Where can someone learn more about Ranked Choice Voting?

[Fair Vote](#), [Rank the Vote NYC](#), and the [New York City Campaign Finance Board](#) all have educational materials about Ranked Choice Voting. Also, there are videos on YouTube explaining how ballots are counted.

Sources: [New York City Campaign Finance Board](#) and [Rank the Vote NYC](#)