### Ranked-choice voting, explained

Ranked-choice voting allows citizens to rank their candidate preferences on an election ballot instead of voting for a single candidate. If one candidate does not initially win a majority, competitors with the fewest votes are eliminated from the race and their voters’ second choices are applied to the tallies of the remaining candidates until one candidate achieves a majority.

According to the group FairVote, two states have 2020 ballot initiatives to install a statewide ranked-choice system. Alaska’s Ballot Measure 2 would replace partisan primaries with an open primary in which the top four finishers advance to a ranked-choice general election, while Massachusetts’ Question 2 would retain partisan primaries, but implement ranked-choice voting in both primaries and the general election starting in 2022.

Maine’s state Supreme Court voted on Sept. 8 to allow ranked-choice voting to appear on 2020 presidential election ballots but has not decided whether a ballot initiative challenging use of ranked-choice voting will actually keep voters from selecting candidates that way.

### How ranked-choice voting works

1. **Voters rank their candidate preferences on ballots**
   
   Voters can choose to rank candidates, indicating on a ballot which person is their first choice, second choice, third choice, etc., for election to office.

2. **First-choice candidate votes on ballots are tallied**
   
   If one of the candidates receives more than 50 percent of the first-preference votes, that candidate wins the election.

3. **Second-choice votes of losing candidates are distributed among winning candidates**
   
   If no candidate receives more than 50 percent of the votes, the candidates with the lowest percentages of votes are eliminated and their supporters’ second-choice selections are allocated to the remaining candidates on the ballot. This vote-redistribution process continues until one candidate reaches over 50 percent of the cast votes.

### PROS

- **Could ensure that a winning candidate has a majority of votes**
  
  In elections in which there are several candidates, ranked-choice voting allows voters to support like-minded competitors to defeat an unfavored candidate. Fractured opposition can result in an unfavored candidate winning an election even if most voters oppose them.

- **Voters’ ballots count, even if their first choice loses**
  
  Even if your first-choice candidate does not win, your vote still counts toward electing a candidate of your choice.

### CONS

- **Voters’ choices may not count if all of them are eliminated**
  
  If a voter does not rank all of the candidates’ names on a ballot, leaving some selections blank, and if all of the voter's choices are eliminated, that could result in the ballot not being counted at all.

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**Sources:** Ballotpedia, FairVote, POLITICO staff reports

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