



# Ranking Presidents: How Ranked-Choice Voting Can Improve Presidential Primaries

By Drew Johnson and Matthew Germer

**By better reflecting voter preferences, RCV could lead to more representative results, improve our political culture and help restore the parties as institutions.**

## Executive Summary

The presidential primary system is a long and convoluted process. Candidates compete in dozens of independent elections across every state and territory in an attempt to secure enough backing to become their parties' nominee for president. Each state runs its own elections, and both the Republican and Democratic parties have their own rules for how votes convert into national convention delegates.<sup>1</sup> While each of these systems has its own set of benefits and problems, all of them could be improved by the use of ranked-choice voting (RCV).

RCV is not a new idea, but it has been spreading across the country in recent years, with five states now allowing voters to rank their favorite choices in the Democratic presidential primary. This paper explores how RCV can improve presidential primaries, both by creating more flexibility for voters as candidates drop out of the race and by more accurately allocating delegates to reflect voters' preferences.

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1. Robert Longley, "How Political Party Convention Delegates are Chosen," ThoughtCo., July 13, 2022. <https://www.thoughtco.com/how-party-convention-delegates-are-chosen-3320136>.

## Introduction

Every four years, the Democratic and Republican parties use a series of primary elections to help determine their presidential nominees.<sup>2</sup> These elections take place in all 50 states and 6 territories for the purpose of sending delegates to the parties' national convention where nominees are selected. The goal of each candidate during the primary process is to accumulate delegates by winning a certain proportion of votes in congressional districts or statewide. The candidate who receives a majority of the party's delegates at the convention becomes that party's nominee for president.<sup>3</sup> Primary election dates vary by state, typically beginning in early February and continuing until late May or early June.<sup>4</sup>

The Democratic and Republican parties each use different rules for allocating delegates, and each state and territory also may have unique methods for conducting their primary elections. In most states, the standard way of voting allows each voter to choose one candidate and either the candidate with the most votes wins all the available delegates (winner-take-all elections) or candidates who receive above a certain threshold of votes receive a portion of the delegates (proportional elections).<sup>5</sup>

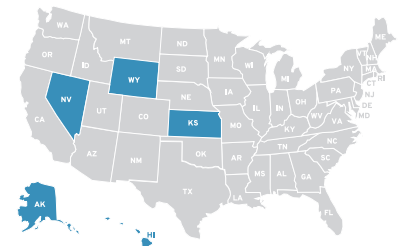
However, in five states, the Democratic party uses an alternative system to conduct the presidential primary: ranked choice voting (RCV).<sup>6</sup> RCV allows voters to rank their favorite candidates in order of preference (first choice, second choice, third choice, etc.). These rankings are then used to conduct an instant-runoff election, whereby poor-performing candidates are eliminated and votes are reallocated until all candidates meet or exceed 15 percent of the vote and are allocated delegates.<sup>7</sup>

This paper lays out the history and purpose of RCV as a method of conducting elections and explores the ways in which an expansion of RCV could benefit the presidential primary process for both parties, whether through a winner-take-all or a proportional format. In particular, RCV solves the "wasted vote" problem that occurs in presidential primaries when candidates drop out or suspend their campaign but still appear on the ballot and impact the vote totals. RCV also bolsters the delegate-allocation process by more accurately reflecting the interests of voters.<sup>8</sup>

While voters are increasingly moving away from formal party affiliation, presidential primary elections have only gained importance over time.<sup>9</sup> By better reflecting voter preferences, RCV could lead to more representative results, improve our political culture and help restore the parties as institutions.

### **Democratic Presidential Primary: Five States Use Rank-Choice Voting**

*These rankings are used to conduct an instant-runoff election, whereby poor-performing candidates are eliminated and votes reallocated.*



2. Ibid.  
3. Ibid.  
4. "2020 State Primary Election Dates," National Conference of State Legislatures, Nov. 3, 2020. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/2020-state-primary-election-dates.aspx>.  
5. Longley. <https://www.thoughtco.com/how-party-convention-delegates-are-chosen-3320136>.  
6. Deb Otis, "Ranked Choice Voting in 2020 Presidential Primary Elections," FairVote, July 21, 2020. [https://fairvote.org/report/ranked\\_choice\\_voting\\_in\\_2020\\_presidential\\_primary\\_elections](https://fairvote.org/report/ranked_choice_voting_in_2020_presidential_primary_elections).  
7. Ibid.  
8. "Ranked Choice Voting: The Solution to the Presidential Primary Predicament," Unite America Institute, June 2020. <https://www.uniteamericainstitute.org/research/ranked-choice-voting>.  
9. Jeffrey M. Jones, "Quarterly Gap in Party Affiliation Largest Since 2012," Gallup, April 7, 2021. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/343976/quarterly-gap-party-affiliation-largest-2012.aspx>.

## Ranked-Choice Voting, Explained

RCV is a deep-rooted, increasingly popular and quickly spreading voting system that makes elections more efficient and encourages voters to be more engaged. At its core, it is a straightforward process. In races with more than two candidates, voters rank their candidates in order of preference. The rankings can then be used to conduct an instant-runoff election.<sup>10</sup> Under an instant runoff, a candidate needs a majority of votes to be declared the winner. If no candidate receives a majority of first-place votes, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated. People who voted for that eliminated candidate have their vote reallocated to their next highest-ranked candidate until one candidate receives a majority of votes.<sup>11</sup>

RCV elections may feel new to many American voters, who have long relied upon winner-take-all plurality elections in which voters choose a single, favorite candidate and the candidate with the most votes wins.<sup>12</sup> But RCV is not new, nor is it new to the United States. The earliest known use of RCV dates back to 18th-century Germany, when a system created by French mathematician Jean-Charles de Borda was used on a limited, experimental basis.<sup>13</sup> This “Borda Count” system allowed voters to support more than one candidate by awarding points based on voters’ rankings.<sup>14</sup> The primary difference between the Borda Count and modern instant-runoff system is related to the reallocation of votes for eliminated candidates. Unlike the Borda Count system, in which voters can cast more than one vote (or point) for a candidate, under instant runoffs, each voter can cast only one vote in the final count.

Since that time, RCV has spread around the world.<sup>15</sup> Ireland’s voters use RCV to determine their president. Australia and Malta rely on RCV to elect members of parliament. England, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Scotland, India, Nepal and Pakistan also use RCV in some capacity.<sup>16</sup> In the United States, RCV has been adopted by two states, Alaska and Maine, as well as by 57 local governments, including Minneapolis, New York City, Oakland, San Francisco and Santa Fe.<sup>17</sup> An additional six states use RCV for their military and overseas ballots.<sup>18</sup> In the context of presidential primaries, five states—Alaska, Hawaii, Kansas, Nevada and Wyoming—utilize RCV in their Democratic primary contests.<sup>19</sup> All told, RCV is used by more than 11 million voters in the United States and hundreds of millions of voters around the world.<sup>20</sup>

RCV has steadily increased in popularity and use because of several key benefits it offers over plurality elections. First, RCV reduces the impact of “strategic voting.”<sup>21</sup> Unlike a plurality election, in which voters might worry about “throwing away their

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10. See, e.g., “Ranked Choice Voting,” FairVote, last accessed Oct. 24, 2022. <https://fairvote.org/our-reforms/ranked-choice-voting>.

11. Grace Birnstengel, “Ranked choice voting, explained,” MPR News, Aug. 31, 2021. <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2021/08/31/ranked-choice-voting-explained>.

12. Drew Desilver, et al., “More U.S. locations experimenting with alternative voting systems,” Pew Research Center, June 29, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/06/29/more-u-s-locations-experimenting-with-alternative-voting-systems>.

13. Gary Arndt, “Ranked Choice Voting,” *Everything Everywhere*, Sept. 6, 2022. <https://everything-everywhere.com/ranked-choice-voting>.

14. “Borda Count,” Electoral Reform Society, last accessed Aug. 12, 2022. <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/voting-systems/types-of-voting-system/borda-count>.

15. Arndt. <https://everything-everywhere.com/ranked-choice-voting>.

16. *Ibid.*

17. “Ranked Choice Voting,” FairVote. <https://fairvote.org/our-reforms/ranked-choice-voting>.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Otis. [https://fairvote.org/report/ranked\\_choice\\_voting\\_in\\_2020\\_presidential\\_primary\\_elections](https://fairvote.org/report/ranked_choice_voting_in_2020_presidential_primary_elections).

20. “Ranked Choice Voting,” FairVote. <https://fairvote.org/our-reforms/ranked-choice-voting>.

21. James Brooks, “Strategic voting is possible but risky on a ranked choice ballot, mathematicians say,” Alaska Public Media, Nov. 7, 2022. <https://alaskapublic.org/2022/11/07/strategic-voting-is-possible-but-risky-on-a-ranked-choice-ballot-mathematicians-say>.

votes” on also-ran candidates, RCV gives voters the freedom to vote secure in the knowledge that if their favorite candidate proves to be unpopular, their votes will be transferred to their next choices. This may not change the ultimate outcome of the election, as frontrunning candidates are often frontrunners for a reason, but it does remove the need for voters to engage in political forecasting or research candidate popularity. Rather than struggling to figure out who everyone else is voting for or allowing bandwagon effects to influence their decision, RCV gives voters the power to confidently choose their favorite candidates while still having input on the final outcome.

Second, RCV reduces the pressure of a “binary choice” and provides more opportunities for independent and third-party candidates to compete. In a two-party system, candidates who belong to a third party or no party at all not only need to provide voters with a reason to give their support, but they must also convince voters that casting a vote for them will not be “wasted” or otherwise empower the voters’ least favorite candidate.<sup>22</sup> This additional burden for third-party and independent candidates is one of the reasons why the two-party system is so deeply entrenched in American politics. RCV creates a pathway for third-party and independent candidates and thus creates more competitive elections with more viable choices for voters.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, RCV creates healthier incentives for politicians and their campaigns.<sup>23</sup> In a plurality election, candidates need only earn more votes than any other candidate. This creates incentives for negative, mudslinging campaigns and strategies that focus more on turning out deeply partisan base voters than appealing to a broad base of voters. Conversely, RCV creates incentives for candidates to reach out to as many voters as possible, in hopes that even if the voters prefer another candidate as a first choice, they may be willing to provide critical second-choice votes. While these incentives are no guarantee against mudslinging or hyper-partisan campaigning, they do serve to nudge candidates in a healthier direction.

## Benefits of Ranked-Choice Voting for Presidential Primaries

The general advantages of RCV are applicable in the context of presidential primary elections; however, RCV provides additional benefits specific to presidential primaries due to the unique nature of these contests. First, political parties could employ RCV to reallocate votes for candidates who have dropped out or suspended their campaigns during the primary but still appear on primary ballots. Second, RCV can be used to reduce “wasted votes” on candidates who fail to earn the minimum votes necessary to receive delegates based on the state’s and party’s rules.

### Reduces Wasted Votes

Due to the sequential nature of presidential primaries, with elections occurring in batches from February to August, it is extremely common for candidates who perform poorly in early primaries to suspend their campaigns. For example, in

#### **RCV: The Benefits**

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*RCV creates healthier incentives for politicians and their campaigns.*



22. Marsha Mercer, “How ranked-choice voting could make voters more open to third-party candidates,” PBS NewsHour, Sept. 2, 2016. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/instant-runoffs-better-way-vote>.

23. Martha Kropf, “Using Campaign Communications to Analyze Civility in Ranked Choice Voting Elections,” *Politics and Governance* 9:2 (2021), pp. 280-292. <https://www.cogitatiopress.com/politicsandgovernance/article/view/4293/4293>.

2020, 27 Democrats launched a campaign to be president.<sup>24</sup> However, only three candidates remained after the first week of March, known as “Super Tuesday,” when 14 states held a primary, covering nearly one-third of the delegates available.<sup>25</sup> The same phenomenon occurred in the GOP primary in 2016.<sup>26</sup> When Iowa held its caucuses in February 2016, 12 candidates were actively campaigning for the nomination. By the end of March, only three candidates remained.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, many of those failed candidates continued to appear on ballots long after they dropped out of the race. Many voters, perhaps unaware of the change in their preferred candidate’s status, voted for that candidate only to learn that their vote was “wasted.” While this effect has occurred on both sides of the aisle, the 2020 Democratic presidential primary provides the clearest example. After Super Tuesday, all of the Democratic candidates except for Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders and Tulsi Gabbard had dropped out of the race, yet Elizabeth Warren, Pete Buttigieg, Amy Klobuchar, Michael Bloomberg and Tom Steyer continued to appear on ballots and accumulate votes well into July.<sup>28</sup> In fact, Michael Bloomberg earned 10 delegates from the Puerto Rican primary in mid-July despite having ended his campaign after Super Tuesday in early March.<sup>29</sup>

The shift of many states toward increased mail balloting and early voting has only exacerbated the problem. With a rising number of people voting weeks before their state’s primary Election Day, more voters’ ballots are being “wasted” because their preferred candidate has withdrawn from the race after they put their ballots in the mail but before their vote is counted. In Washington state, which conducts its elections fully by mail, nearly one-quarter of voters chose a candidate that had dropped out of the race in the week before Election Day.<sup>30</sup>

All told, more than 3 million Democratic voters in 2020 found themselves in the unfortunate position of casting presidential primary votes for candidates who dropped out when their ballot was waiting to be counted.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, at least half a million Republican votes were wasted in 2016, either on candidates who dropped out after the beginning of early voting and before Election Day or on candidates who failed to receive enough votes to earn delegates in a certain state.<sup>32</sup>

RCV would provide a solution to the problem of “wasted votes” on failed candidates. By allowing voters to rank candidates, primary elections can adapt as candidates drop out. For example, following the exodus of nearly all 2020 Democratic candidates after Super Tuesday, voters who had already cast an RCV ballot in one of the nine primary elections later for a candidate like Pete Buttigieg or Elizabeth Warren could have had their vote transferred to Joe Biden or Bernie

**RCV: A Solution to  
Eliminating Wasted Votes**



**2016**

.5 million  
Republican  
“wasted”  
votes



**2020**

3 million  
Democratic  
“wasted”  
votes

24. Kathryn Watson, et al., “All the Democratic candidates who ran for president in 2020,” CBS News, June 22, 2020. <https://www.cbsnews.com/media/2020-democratic-presidential-candidates>.

25. Nate Silver, “After Super Tuesday, Joe Biden Is A Clear Favorite To Win The Nomination,” FiveThirtyEight, Mar. 6, 2020. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/after-super-tuesday-joe-biden-is-a-clear-favorite-to-win-the-nomination>.

26. Carl Bialik, “How The Republican Field Dwindled From 17 To Donald Trump,” FiveThirtyEight, May 5, 2016. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-the-republican-field-dwindled-from-17-to-donald-trump>.

27. Ibid.

28. “Puerto Rico Presidential Democratic Primary Election Results 2020,” *The New York Times*, July 20, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/12/us/elections/results-puerto-rico-president-democrat-primary-election.html>.

29. Ibid.

30. “Live Results: Washington State Presidential Primary 2020,” *The New York Times*, March 20, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/03/10/us/elections/results-washington-president-democrat-primary-election.html>.

31. “Ranked Choice Voting: The Solution to the Presidential Primary Predicament.” <https://www.uniteamericainstitute.org/research/ranked-choice-voting>.

32. Ibid.



Sanders. Joe Biden ultimately won the Washington primary by 20,000 votes, roughly 1 percent of the ballots cast, and received 46 delegates while runner-up Bernie Sanders received 43.<sup>33</sup> If the hundreds of thousands of ballots cast for candidates who had dropped out had been reallocated to continuing candidates, it is possible that Sanders may have won the primary or Biden could have gained even more delegates. By employing a mechanism that adapts to changing circumstances, RCV would allow for a more accurate reflection of voters’ preferences based on which candidates are still in the running on Election Day.

### More Accurately Allocates Delegates

While presidential primary elections in many ways appear to be standard elections, in which candidates compete against one another to earn the most votes, the truth is a bit more complicated. Unlike a typical primary election, where winning ensures you a spot on the general election ballot, the winners of presidential primary elections earn the right to send delegates from that state who are pledged to support the candidate—at least initially—to the party’s national convention. Adding to the complexity, each state or territory conducts its own primary election, with its own rules for voting, and each party independently determines how to award delegates, the number of delegates awarded and the way those delegates are allocated.<sup>34</sup>

### Republican Presidential Primaries

Although nearly every state or territory has a slightly different approach to distributing delegates for GOP candidates, three predominant primary systems are used:<sup>35</sup>

- **Winner-Take-All:** A “traditional” system for American elections, in which the candidate with the most votes wins. In the context of a presidential primary, the winning candidate earns all of the state's delegates.
- **Proportional:** This method awards a proportion of delegates relative to the vote. For some states, the allocation is based on the statewide vote. Other states allocate delegates at the congressional district level. Similar to the Democrats, several states have a minimum threshold that must be met to receive any delegates.
- **Threshold (Hybrid):** The threshold system represents a hybrid of winner-take-all and proportional systems. If one candidate reaches a set threshold of votes—typically 50 percent—a winner-take-all system is triggered, and the leading candidate receives all of the delegates. If no candidate reaches the threshold, delegates are dispersed proportionally.

In winner-take-all states, RCV could be used to reward the candidate with the broadest support in the state and prevent delegates from being assigned to a candidate with limited appeal. Looking at the 2016 primary in South Carolina, for example, Donald J. Trump won all 50 delegates despite earning only 33 percent



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33. “Live Results: Washington State Presidential Primary 2020.” <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/03/10/us/elections/results-washington-president-democrat-primary-election.html>.

34. Longley. <https://www.thoughtco.com/how-party-convention-delegates-are-chosen-3320136>.

35. Ibid.

of the vote.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, Jeb Bush, John Kasich and Ben Carson, who earned 24 percent, 21 percent, 8 percent, 8 percent and 7 percent, respectively, came away with no delegates.<sup>37</sup> If the state had used RCV ballots, an instant-runoff election could have determined which candidate had the broadest support from South Carolina Republican primary voters, giving them a stronger claim on the state's 50 delegates.

RCV also provides value in proportional and threshold states. New Hampshire, for example, used the threshold system in 2016, and delegates were awarded to any candidate who reached 10 percent of support.<sup>38</sup> Only five of the 26 candidates met the 10 percent threshold to earn delegates, and these five candidates earned roughly 84 percent of the total votes in the primary.<sup>39</sup> This means that 16 percent of the votes that were cast went to candidates who earned no delegates. If these votes had been reallocated to more popular candidates using RCV, every voter could have had a meaningful say in the final allocation of delegates.

The Republican presidential primary uses a variety of rules across the country to assign delegates, but no matter the structure—winner-take-all, proportional or threshold—RCV helps to better reflect the will of the voters.

### **Democratic Presidential Primaries**

In all states and territories, Democrats award delegates proportionally to any candidate who receives 15 percent in either an entire state or each congressional district within a state, depending on each state's specific allocation rules.<sup>40</sup> If multiple candidates reach the 15 percent threshold, they split the delegates proportionally. However, in a crowded field, it is possible that only one candidate breaks the 15 percent threshold, and, in such a case, that person would receive all of the available delegates.<sup>41</sup>

In states or congressional districts that do not employ an RCV structure, the votes of the candidates that fail to reach the 15-percent requirement do not contribute to the proportional split of delegates. A candidate who earns 14 percent of the vote receives the same number of delegates—zero—as a candidate who earns 1 percent of the vote. However, five states—Alaska, Hawaii, Kansas, Nevada and Wyoming—allow voters to rank up to five candidates using RCV.<sup>42</sup> These states eliminate the least-popular candidate and reallocate their votes until all remaining candidates have at least 15 percent.<sup>43</sup> Ultimately, no votes are “wasted” on a candidate who receives no delegates. Instead, all voters have the chance to impact the final allocation of delegates. Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that a recent study found that voters in RCV states were able to effectively express their preferences and elevate their favorite candidates while also forming consensus on a nominee.<sup>44</sup>



*A recent study found that voters in RCV states were able to effectively express their preferences and elevate their favorite candidates while also forming consensus on a nominee.*

36. “South Carolina Primary Results,” *The New York Times*, Sept. 29, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2016/results/primaries/south-carolina>.

37. Ibid.

38. “New Hampshire Primary Results,” *The New York Times*, Sept. 29, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2016/results/primaries/new-hampshire>.

39. Ibid.

40. Michael Levenson, “How the Democrats’ ‘15% Rule’ Could Reshape the Race on Super Tuesday,” *The New York Times*, March 1, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/01/us/15-percent-rule-democratic-delegates.html>.

41. Ibid.

42. Emily Risch, “How Ranked Choice Voting Will Affect the Democratic Presidential Primary,” FairVote, June 14, 2019. [https://fairvote.org/press/how\\_ranked\\_choice\\_voting\\_will\\_affect\\_democratic\\_presidential\\_primary](https://fairvote.org/press/how_ranked_choice_voting_will_affect_democratic_presidential_primary).

43. Ibid.

44. Baodong Liu, et al., “Ranked-Choice Voting Delivers Representation and Consensus in Presidential Primaries,” *New America*, April 27, 2021. <https://www.newamerica.org/political-reform/reports/ranked-choice-voting-delivers-representation-and-consensus-in-presidential-primaries>.

## Improves Candidate and Party Legitimacy

RCV would not only reduce the number of “wasted” votes and give voters a more meaningful say under all primary structures, but it would also increase the legitimacy of the winner and strengthen the party as a whole.

When candidates win a far greater proportion of delegates than votes, it sends a message to candidates that they do not need to appeal to the entire party but, instead, just need to develop a larger following than their rivals. Looking again at the Republican primary in South Carolina in 2016, Donald J. Trump won 100 percent of the delegates with just one-third of the vote.<sup>45</sup> This means that, despite two-thirds of voters preferring someone else, Trump earned every delegate. Similarly, Joe Biden won 52 percent of the delegates in Washington state with just over one-third of the vote.<sup>46</sup> While the Democratic Party’s reliance on the proportional allocation of delegates mitigates the disparity, a disparity exists nonetheless.

Under RCV, the final allocation of delegates would more closely resemble the candidate’s actual support in the state. For winner-take-all states like South Carolina, the eventual winner could make a much stronger claim on the state’s entire delegation, confident that a majority of voters are more satisfied with him than with the other frontrunners. The winner could be someone different from the plurality winner, but, for the vast majority of elections, the candidate in the lead after the first round of votes ultimately wins.<sup>47</sup> In 2016, Trump himself boasted that he would likely be the second choice for many voters if their first-choice candidates dropped out of the race.<sup>48</sup> Without RCV, candidates have to rely on hypotheticals to argue for their broad popularity. With RCV, candidates would know for certain and can make stronger legitimacy claims.

These stronger claims for candidates could also provide greater legitimacy for the party. With closer connections between voter sentiment and delegate allocation, the parties can firmly declare that the voters truly preferred the winning candidate over the alternatives. This may help reduce the time needed to convince losing candidates’ supporters to “come home” to the party—a problem that became particularly sticky for Republicans in 2016 and Democrats in 2020.<sup>49</sup>

Further, RCV may increase voter participation in presidential primaries. Voters who participate in RCV elections are overwhelmingly satisfied with the process and want to keep using it in the future.<sup>50</sup> Satisfaction with the process could lead to increased turnout and may also encourage new voters to participate in presidential primaries. If turnout were to increase, more voters may start to develop comfort with the parties and become even more tied to their candidates and platforms.

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### **Trump 2016: South Carolina**

**100% of delegates  
for one-third of votes**

### **Biden 2016: Washington**

**52% of delegates  
for one-third+ of votes**

45. “South Carolina Primary Results.” <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2016/results/primaries/south-carolina>.

46. “Live Results: Washington State Presidential Primary 2020.” <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/03/10/us/elections/results-washington-president-democrat-primary-election.html>.

47. “What Did New York’s Mayoral Primary Tell Us About Ranked-Choice Voting?” FiveThirtyEight, July 7, 2021. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/new-yorks-mayoral-primary-has-put-ranked-choice-voting-under-the-microscope>.

48. Luciana Lopez and Steve Holland, “Trump wins decisively in South Carolina, Clinton clinches Nevada,” *Reuters*, Feb. 20, 2016. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election/trump-wins-decisively-in-south-carolina-clinton-clinches-nevada-idUSKCN0VT06F>.

49. Burgess Everett, et al., “How Cruz got from ‘vote your conscience’ to ‘vote for Trump,’” *Politico*, Sept. 23, 2016. <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/09/ted-cruz-donald-trump-backstory-228609>; Nicole Goodkind, “‘Settle for Biden’ hopes to bring Bernie Sanders supporters to the polls,” *Fortune*, Nov. 2, 2020. <https://fortune.com/2020/11/02/settle-for-biden-bernie-sanders-voters-2020-election-millennials-gen-z-voters-2020-election>.

50. Kyle Dunphey, “Did Utahns like ranked choice voting? A new poll has answers,” *Deseret News*, Nov. 15, 2021. <https://www.deseret.com/utah/2021/11/15/22783224/did-utahns-like-ranked-choice-voting-a-new-poll-has-answers-elections-2021-local-politics-election>.



While tribalism and polarization are presenting problems in our current political environment, a substantial cause for this concern is the increase in negative partisanship, where voters and parties define themselves by what they stand against rather than what they stand for. By comparison, an increase in partisan affiliation as a result of satisfaction with the voting system would be a net benefit. Holding elections that voters want to participate in is good for the parties, and RCV could help the parties move in that direction.

## Conclusion

Presidential primary elections have become a mainstay in American politics since their expansion in the 1960s. Over the last 60 years, states and parties have improved their primaries in an effort to be more responsive to voters.<sup>51</sup>

The implementation of RCV should be at the top of the list for future reforms to the presidential primary process. Not only would RCV reduce strategic voting, create more competitive options for voters and incentivize healthier campaigning, but it could also bring unique value to the presidential primary process. RCV allows for flexibility when candidates drop out or suspend their campaigns by not requiring election administrators to remove names from the ballots. It also can allow for greater use and effectiveness of early voting and mail-in ballots. Additionally, RCV could improve the delegate-allocation process by more accurately reflecting the interests of voters no matter what allocation structure is used by the parties.

Although it offers many potential benefits, RCV is not a silver-bullet reform. Both non-presidential elections and presidential primary elections would likely continue to be chaotic scrambles for the support and attention of voters, donors and the press, and RCV is not designed to dramatically swing the outcome of an election. It can, however, strengthen voters' voices and solve several problems inherent in the current presidential primary system. As states enter the 2023 legislative sessions and parties begin to prepare for the 2024 primaries, lawmakers and party officials should look to RCV for the benefits provided to voters, candidates and the parties themselves.



*RCV can strengthen voters' voices and solve several problems inherent in the current presidential primary system.*

51. Reuters Staff, "How selecting U.S. presidential candidates became the people's choice," *Reuters*, March 29, 2016. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-selectionprocess-factbox/how-selecting-u-s-presidential-candidates-became-the-peoples-choice-idUSKCN0WW001>.

## About the Authors

**Drew Johnson** is a fellow in the Governance Program at the R Street Institute. He is a public policy analyst, government watchdog and columnist whose research focuses on tax and budget policy, elections, technology, regulations and energy issues.

**Matthew Germer** is elections fellow in the Governance Program at the R Street Institute. He oversees R Street's efforts to reform electoral incentives and improve trust in elections.