



I support legislation to allow local jurisdictions to begin using ranked-choice voting in their districts.

What is ranked-choice voting?

Ranked-choice voting is an election method by which voters have the option to rank multiple candidates in order of preference. If, when votes are counted, no candidate reaches the threshold needed to win, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated. Voters who picked the eliminated candidate as their first choice would have their votes count for their next choice.

It's coming. Let's be prepared.

Ranked-choice voting has gained popularity in the U.S. Over 50 municipalities use or have approved ranked-choice voting. The states of Alaska and Maine use ranked-choice voting for their statewide elections.

Here in Washington State, ranked-choice voting is the leading contender among political reform proposals. Each year it gains more momentum.

From 2019 through 2021, King County has studied ranked-choice voting and it is still under consideration.

In 2021, the city councils of Seattle, Spokane, Vancouver, Olympia, and Bellingham publicly supported the local option ranked-choice voting legislation.

In November 2022, Clark County and San Juan County voters will decide whether to amend their county charters to allow for ranked-choice voting.¹

Ranked-choice voting is strongly supported by Washington's young voters. By 2028, Millennials and Generation Z are poised to surpass older generations in their share of votes. Ranked-choice voting will likely be part of this profound generational shift.

Ranked-choice voting is beneficial.

Although the two major parties have a huge advantage in *any* electoral system, ranked-choice voting opens a window for untraditional and minor party candidates.

¹ Vancouver already amended its charter in 2009 to authorize ranked-choice voting for city offices.

Ranked-choice voting reduces the potency of “spoiler” or “not viable” claims. With today’s electoral system, a vote for the terrific underdog candidate could inadvertently help the worst candidate to prevail. The pressure to not cast a “spoiler” vote artificially suppresses nonpartisan and minor party candidates.

Ranked-choice voting allows a voter to vote their conscience with reduced risk, knowing that if their underdog candidate fails to make it past the first round, their second-place vote is counted instead.

When candidates know that they need to secure the second or third choice support of voters who will be voting for their opponents, they are more likely to embrace civility in their campaign.

Ranked-choice voting is more likely to tamp down polarization and promote consensus building. It provides an incentive for politicians to highlight areas of agreement as much as differences, as there’s benefit to gaining a voter’s second-choice vote and a risk of losing second-choice votes by employing attack ads.

In ranked-choice elections, more voters participate in the selection of the winning candidate when primary and general elections can be combined into one event, thereby increasing turnoutⁱ.

When primary and general elections are combined, candidates only need to raise money for one election. This lowers campaign costs, making personal wealth less of a gatekeeper and a predictor of electoral success.

Establishing ranked-choice voting sets the table for proportional ranked-choice voting. In the future, jurisdictions may wish to replace single-winner districts with larger, multi-winner districts. Proportional ranked-choice voting² is used to elect members of a legislative body - like a city council. Candidates run in a pool, and more than one candidate wins. For example, if there are three open seats to fill, then the top three vote-getters are elected.

This means that a group of like-minded voters that has 40% of the voting power will be able to elect 40% of the seats on the city council. Similarly, a like-minded group of 60% of the voters will be able to elect 60% of the seats. The majority will elect most seats - but not all the seats - while the minority gets a seat at the table.

Proportional ranked-choice voting eliminates safe seats and renders partisan redistricting battles irrelevant. Gerrymandering of district lines is difficult or impossible with proportional ranked-choice voting. This is another important step toward reducing polarization.

Multnomah County in Oregon is poised to vote on this reform in November 2022.

² U.S. cities using proportional ranked-choice voting include Cambridge, MA, Minneapolis, MN, and Albany, CA (beginning in 2022). Voters in Portland, Oregon will decide this November whether to adopt proportional RCV for their city council.

Let's get started and address real concerns

Election administrators have not warmed to ranked-choice voting because they have resource concerns (time, money, staffing). A particular worry is the complexity of running ranked-choice voting in certain districts, while concurrently running Washington's traditional top-two primary system in other districts.

And now - with today's distrust in elections - county officials worry about public perception, trust, and confusion with the introduction of an unfamiliar vote counting process.

There are operational questions that aren't addressed in the ranked-choice voting bill currently under consideration. Rather, the legislation expects the Secretary of State to resolve operational "details," such as:

- Voter intent rules.
- When and how ranked-choice voting results should be released.
- How to manage write-in candidates on a ranked-choice voting ballot.
- How to create tests and audits for ranked-choice voting elections.
- How to conduct a hand recount of a ranked-choice voting election.

Also, there are technology challenges. There are four tabulation vendors³ in Washington, in varying states of readiness for ranked-choice voting. Few counties have tabulators that can count ranked-choice races. Software upgrades are required, and the software will need to be tested and certified. This process can take years. The good news is that ranked-choice standards for voting equipment vendors have already been developed through National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Voluntary Voting Systems Guidelines (VVSG).

Who pays for this new research and development? Vendors are sure to exact a hefty fee for the required software. I will work with state legislators to devise a grant program for counties required to conduct ranked-choice voting when it's adopted in their jurisdiction. "First in" shouldn't mean footing the bill for all who follow.

There are free, open source ranked-choice voting tabulation tools that are very close to being certified by the Election Assistance Commission. With certification, these tools would allow election administrators to export cast vote records from their standard certified tabulation equipment and run the algorithm within their own secure election system environment using only certified equipment. This will help counties in Washington State implement ranked-choice voting, securely and efficiently.

³ Clear Ballot, ES&S, Hart, and Dominion

ⁱ General elections typically have twice the turnout of primaries.