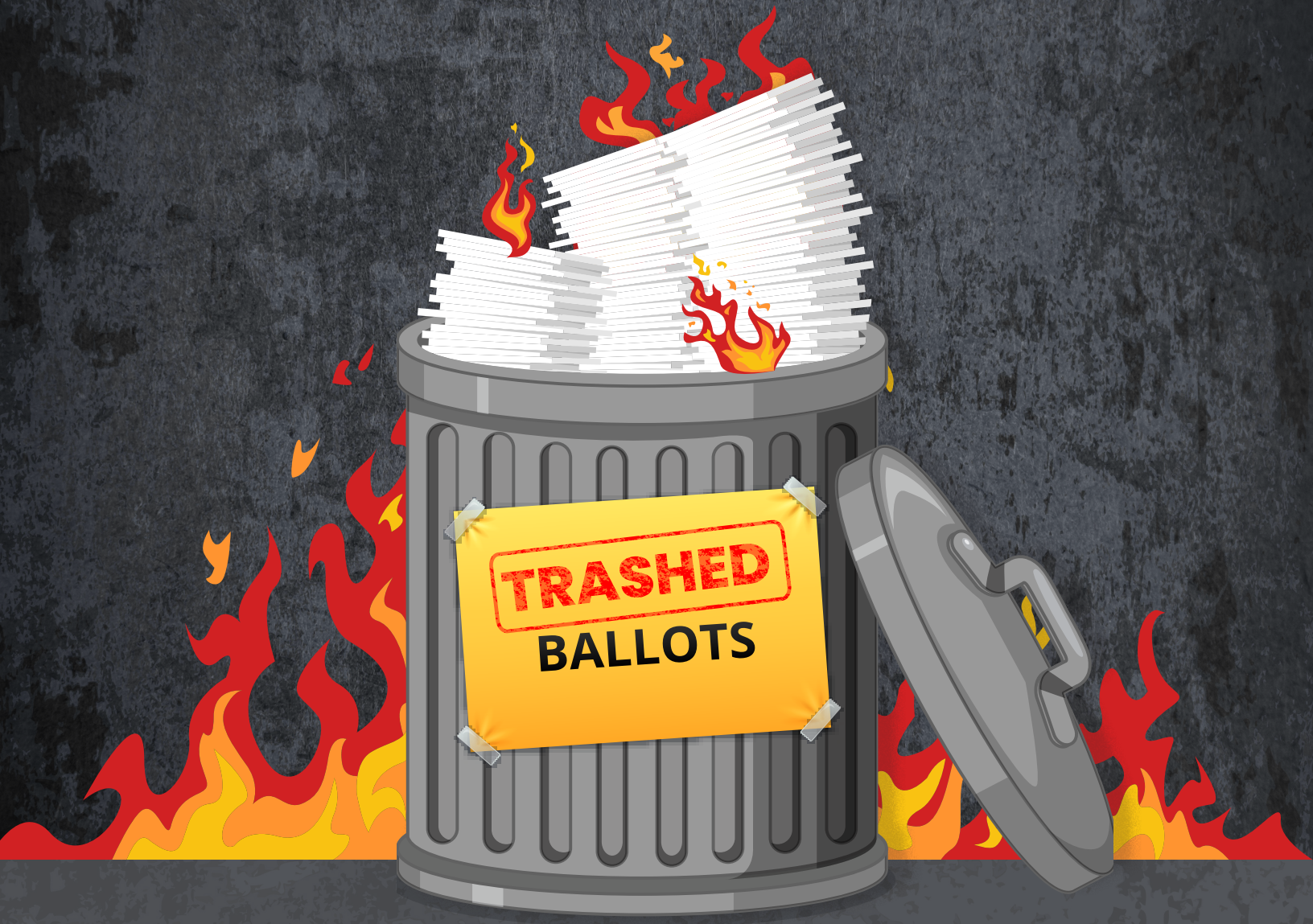


# RANKED-CHOICE VOTING: A PARTISAN PLOT TO ENGINEER ELECTION RESULTS



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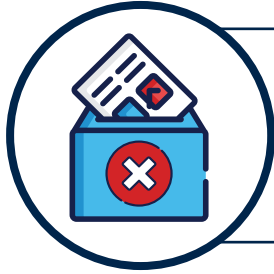
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[TheFGA.org/research/ranked-choice-voting-partisan-plot-to-disrupt-elections](https://TheFGA.org/research/ranked-choice-voting-partisan-plot-to-disrupt-elections)

# KEY FINDINGS



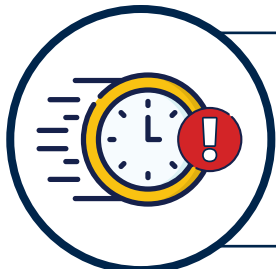
**RANKED-CHOICE VOTING'S TRACK RECORD IS THE BEST ARGUMENT AGAINST IT.**



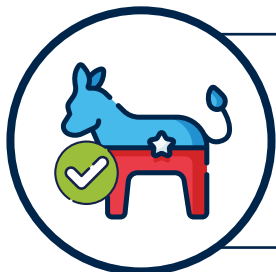
**RANKED-CHOICE VOTING REQUIRES THAT LEGITIMATE VOTERS' BALLOTS BE THROWN IN THE TRASH WHEN NO CANDIDATE RECEIVES A MAJORITY OF THE VOTE.**



**CANDIDATES WITH THE MOST VOTES OFTEN LOSE WHILE THOSE RECEIVING AS LITTLE AS FOUR PERCENT OF THE VOTE WIN, DIMINISHING VOTER CONFIDENCE IN ELECTIONS.**



**RANKED-CHOICE VOTING LEADS TO ERRORS AND DELAYED RESULTS LASTING WEEKS, OR EVEN MONTHS.**



**LEGISLATION SUPPORTING RANKED-CHOICE VOTING IS OVERWHELMINGLY SPONSORED BY DEMOCRATS.**

## THE BOTTOM LINE:

**TO PROTECT VOTERS AND THEIR BALLOTS, STATES SHOULD FOLLOW THE LEAD OF FLORIDA, IDAHO, MONTANA, SOUTH DAKOTA, AND TENNESSEE AND BAN RANKED-CHOICE VOTING.**



## Overview

Democrats are changing the rules of the game when it comes to elections. Across the country, they are introducing legislation to implement ranked-choice voting, which would completely change how votes are counted.<sup>1-3</sup> While there are plenty of reasons to oppose ranked-choice voting, the best argument against it is its track record.

Thousands of ballots are thrown in the trash to produce the majority vote required for ranked-choice voting. This means that when voters in ranked-choice voting jurisdictions leave their polling station, they cannot be sure if their vote will be counted or end up in the dump with last week's dinner.



**THOUSANDS OF BALLOTS ARE THROWN IN THE TRASH TO PRODUCE THE MAJORITY VOTE REQUIRED FOR RANKED-CHOICE VOTING.**

Ranked-choice voting also complicates the voting process, which diminishes voter confidence in election results. Rather than just voting for their favorite candidate, voters must vote for all candidates to ensure that their ballots are counted and not trashed. This includes voting for candidates that a voter personally dislikes or are opposed to his or her deeply held beliefs, and even voting for your opponent when the voter is a candidate themselves. Not only does voting get more complicated, but results can be confusing when election winners lose and losers win.

Since an election that fails to result in one candidate receiving a majority of the original vote leads to another round of counting, ranked-choice voting elections lead to delayed results, often lasting weeks, or even months.

Unsurprisingly, Democrats are pushing this alternative voting system across the country.<sup>4</sup> Other legislators are standing up for the people they represent by introducing bans to stop the practice. States should follow the recent examples of Florida, Idaho, Montana, South Dakota, and Tennessee which have all banned ranked-choice voting statewide in the last two years.<sup>5-10</sup>



**Since an election that fails to result in one candidate receiving a majority of the original vote leads to another round of counting, ranked-choice voting elections lead to delayed results, often lasting weeks, or even months.**

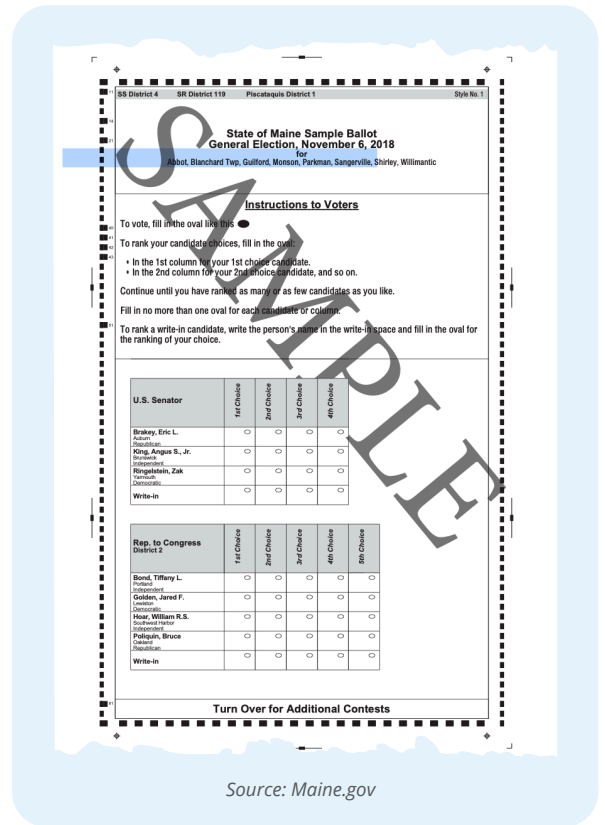


# Promoters' arguments for ranked-choice voting do not add up

Ranked-choice voting has been touted by the Left as a way to reform elections, or even to save democracy.<sup>11-12</sup> In reality, it's led to voter disenfranchisement, trashed ballots, and confusion. While there are plenty of reasons to oppose ranked-choice voting, the best argument against it is its own track record.

Currently, both Alaska and Maine use ranked-choice voting for some statewide elections.<sup>13-14</sup> Both states have witnessed ranked-choice voting result in sending a Democrat to Congress when voters' preference was to send a Republican to represent them.<sup>15-16</sup> Now, a growing number of local jurisdictions are using ranked-choice voting to elect candidates, and the process is being pushed by Democrats and the Left nationwide.<sup>17-18</sup>

People who take the time to vote should be presented with a ballot that is easy to follow and comprehend, but ranked-choice voting ballots are neither. They are likely to both confuse the electorate and increase the likelihood of voter error.



Supporters of ranked-choice voting argue that the system guarantees that elected officials receive majority support from the electorate.<sup>19</sup> But this is a false majority that only comes about after ballots are thrown out and discarded.

Proponents also argue that it gives voters more candidates to choose from.<sup>20</sup> But in reality, it just forces them to vote for candidates they dislike and who hold policy positions they oppose or they risk trashing their vote. It even requires candidates to vote for their opponents to avoid this risk.

## Ballots are trashed, not exhausted

When no candidate receives a majority of the vote in the first round, some voters' legitimate ballots in ranked-choice voting elections must be trashed to get to a forced majority. This is not a flaw in the system, it is the system.



**VOTERS' LEGITIMATE BALLOTS IN RANKED-CHOICE VOTING ELECTIONS MUST BE TRASHED TO GET TO A FORCED MAJORITY.**



Supporters like to call these “exhausted ballots” or “ballot exhaustion,” as if the ballots just got tired and failed to make it to the end of counting. But make no mistake, these ballots are thrown in the trash. People who took the time to educate themselves and vote no longer have a say in the election.

**The number of trashed ballots is not insignificant—depending on the size of the electorate and the number of candidates, thousands or even tens of thousands of ballots are trashed.**

These ballots are not just pieces of paper, each is connected to a voter and his or her preference. By throwing away these ballots, ranked-choice voting is erasing their opinion and leaving their voice unheard in the democratic system.

The public learned of trashed ballots from the very beginning. Maine was the first state to use ranked-choice voting in a federal election in 2018.<sup>21</sup> In a highly contested race in Maine’s 2nd Congressional District, 8,253 voters who wanted their voices heard instead had their ballots thrown away.<sup>22</sup>

Likewise, in Alaska’s congressional special election to fill its At-Large District, nearly 15,000 ballots were tossed from consideration.<sup>23</sup> This includes more than 11,000 ballots that were trashed because they voted for only one Republican candidate and no one else.<sup>24</sup>



**MAINE - 2018**

- ▶ Voters in the 2nd Congressional District
- ▶ **More than 8,000 trashed ballots**
- ▶ Republican candidate received the most votes
- ▶ But the Democrat candidate won the election



**ALASKA - 2022**

- ▶ Voters in the At-Large Congressional Special Election
- ▶ **Nearly 15,000 trashed ballots**
- ▶ Republican candidates received 60 percent of vote
- ▶ Democrat candidate still won
- ▶ Results took more than two weeks

Trashed ballots also wreak havoc in local elections. In the 2021 mayor race in Sandy, Utah, more than 18 percent of the original ballots, more than 4,000 in total, were trashed in a race decided by just 21 votes.<sup>25</sup> In New York City’s 2021 Democratic Mayoral Primary, an astounding 140,000 ballots—nearly 15 percent of the total—were trashed.<sup>26</sup>

Taking the cake for trashed ballots is a 2010 Board of Supervisors race in San Francisco. In that race, more ballots were trashed than were counted.<sup>27</sup> After 20 rounds of counting, 8,200 ballots decided the winner while 9,503 ballots were trashed and an additional 605 ballots were tossed for overvoting.<sup>28</sup> To get to the forced majority vote required by ranked-choice voting, a majority of all votes were thrown in the trash.

**These ballots are not exhausted as proponents like to pretend, they are trashed, and the voters are in effect disenfranchised.** People who wanted to, and thought they had, vote for a certain candidate, did not. They may even tell a failed candidate in town, “Sorry, I voted for you,” when in fact this vote did not count in the end.

## **Ranked-choice voting diminishes voter confidence in elections**

Voting should be simple, with an easily understandable ballot. The low opportunity cost of voting helps to enhance participation. Likewise, voting should result in a simple process to explain who won the election and why they did so. For centuries in this country, election winners were the ones who received the most votes—simple. Ranked-choice voting is anything but simple and results in confusing outcomes.



**RANKED-CHOICE VOTING IS ANYTHING BUT SIMPLE AND RESULTS IN CONFUSING OUTCOMES.**

## **WINNERS LOSE AND LOSERS WIN**

Under ranked-choice voting, candidates with the most votes often lose, while those with less support end up winning. In the same 2018 Maine congressional race that saw 8,253 votes trashed, the Republican candidate had the most first-place votes but lost after going through the ranked-choice voting process.<sup>29</sup> Under traditional election rules, the Republican Bruce Poliquin would have prevailed with 46.33 percent of the vote versus Democrat Jared Golden’s 45.58 percent.<sup>30</sup> The Democrat candidate that was declared the winner never even truly received a majority of the vote, he only did so after thousands of ballots were thrown in the trash.<sup>31</sup>

In Alaska’s 2022 congressional special election, Republican candidates received 60 percent of the vote in the first round, but the Democrat won because of the ranked-choice voting process.



**In Alaska’s 2022 congressional special election, Republican candidates received 60 percent of the vote in the first round, but the Democrat won because of the ranked-choice voting process.**



In the 2021 Portland, Maine, Charter Commission race that elects four candidates, two of the top four vote receivers in the first round ended up losing, including the second-place finisher.<sup>32</sup>

In that same charter commission race a candidate that started with just four percent of the vote ended up winning a seat.<sup>33</sup> Only one in 25 voters wanted this candidate, but it is who they got. A candidate that originally had more than 1,800 votes lost to a candidate with only 367 votes.<sup>34</sup> The candidate had gone home instead of attending an election party because she assumed she had lost, only to be called and told she had won.<sup>35</sup>

## VOTERS ARE GIVEN AN ULTIMATUM

Ranked-choice voting gives voters an ultimatum: Either vote for people you dislike and who oppose your principles, or risk having your ballot trashed. It also puts candidates in the awkward position of voting for their opposition or risk not having their vote for themselves counted. Being tasked to vote for even the most repugnant candidates is not a way to excite people about performing the civic duty of voting.

When voters do fail to vote for every candidate it is unclear if this is a principled stand against voting for a candidate they cannot stomach, or, because of the complexity of the ballots, they were genuinely confused by how to fill it out. Either way, the result is often that their ballot is trashed, and the voter is in effect disenfranchised.

## Delayed results and counting errors sow mistrust

Ranked-choice voting guarantees multiple rounds of ballot counting if no candidate originally receives a majority of the vote. This process delays results, which leads to voter frustration and lowers confidence in election results. The gap between voting and results lends itself to accusations of voter fraud.<sup>36</sup> For instance, voters waited more than two weeks before the results of Alaska's special election were announced.<sup>37</sup>



**THIS PROCESS DELAYS RESULTS, WHICH LEADS TO VOTER FRUSTRATION AND LOWERS CONFIDENCE IN ELECTION RESULTS.**

Delayed results not only reduce voter trust, but can also reveal errors caused by the complex voting system. Two months after a 2021 school board election using ranked-choice voting in Alameda County, California, and after the election was certified, a software error was found.<sup>38</sup> The announced third place finisher had actually won the election.<sup>39</sup> As a result of this error, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to recount several ranked-choice voting races.<sup>40-41</sup>

Likewise, New York City's 2021 Mayoral Democratic Primary was thrown into chaos because of ranked-choice voting. After a week of counting and 11 rounds of tabulations, it was discovered that 135,000 test ballots had been counted by mistake.<sup>42-43</sup> In the end it took an additional 8 rounds of counting and nearly a month to declare a winner in the race.<sup>44</sup>



These delays and counting errors have been widely reported but some jurisdictions continue to use ranked-choice voting. While many legislators continue to mistakenly push to expand the use, others are stepping up and stopping the system.



### NEW YORK CITY - 2021

- ▶ Voters in the Mayoral Democratic Primary
- ▶ **140,000 trashed ballots (nearly 15 percent of the total)**
- ▶ Nearly a month to declare a winner
- ▶ 135,000 test ballots counted by mistake



### ALAMEDA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA - 2021

- ▶ Voters in the race for school board
- ▶ Software error was found after the election was certified
- ▶ **The third place finisher had actually won**
- ▶ This was found two months after the election

## States are saying “no” to ranked-choice voting

Ranked-choice voting was first used in a statewide election in 2010 to elect a judge to the North Carolina Court of Appeals.<sup>45</sup> Just three years later, North Carolina would reverse course and end this experiment.<sup>46</sup> But the state is not the only jurisdiction to do so.

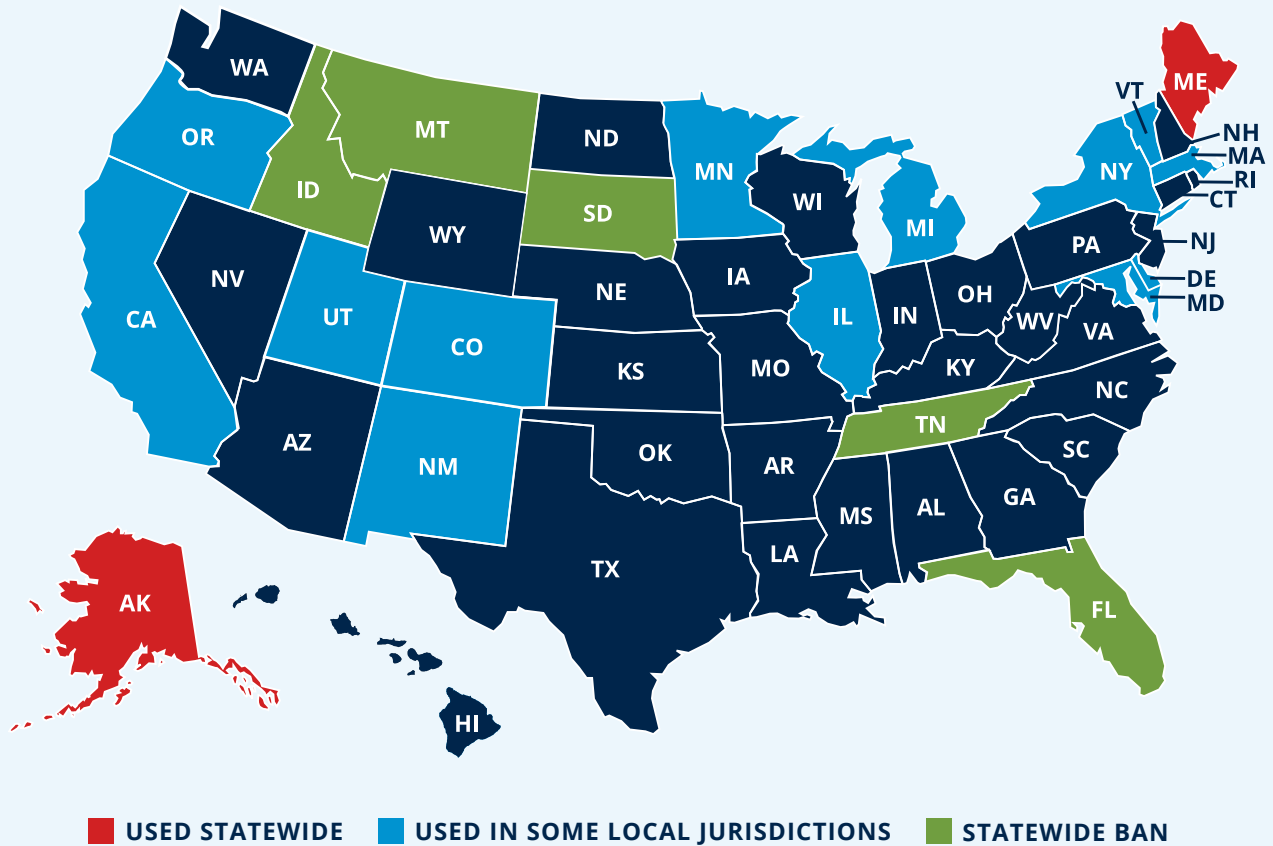
Arlington County, Virginia used ranked-choice voting for the first time in June 2023 for a primary election.<sup>47</sup> After the experience, and just a month later, the county announced that it would not use ranked-choice voting in the fall elections.<sup>48-49</sup> Meanwhile, in the nation’s capital, there is a lawsuit to try to stop ranked-choice voting before it can be implemented.<sup>50</sup>

Even in the states that now regularly use ranked-choice voting, support isn’t strong. Maine and Alaska both adopted the practice through ballot initiatives. Maine narrowly passed ranked-choice voting in 2016 with just 52 percent of the vote.<sup>51</sup> Alaska adopted ranked-choice voting in 2020 with 50.55 percent of the vote, with the measure passing by less than 4,000 votes.<sup>52</sup> Both of these measures passed by fewer votes than are often thrown in the trash in ranked-choice voting elections. In addition to Maine and Alaska, various jurisdictions use ranked-choice voting in local elections where millions of Americans live.<sup>53</sup>

Meanwhile, legislators who care deeply about the integrity of elections and protecting the votes of their citizens have been instituting statewide bans of ranked-choice voting. **Florida, Idaho, Montana, South Dakota, and Tennessee have all banned ranked-choice voting since just 2022.**<sup>54</sup> But while there is growing momentum to protect voters, Democrats are pushing to expand ranked-choice voting across the country.

## STATES ARE SAYING “NO” TO RANKED-CHOICE VOTING

*Ranked-choice voting laws by state*



Source: Ballotpedia

## Ranked-choice voting is a politically driven, partisan approach to voting

Ranked-choice voting is not the bipartisan, or non-partisan, push that many claim. It is a partisan solution in search of a problem, and this is shown by the party affiliation of legislators who are introducing it. In 2023, 74 bills were introduced supporting ranked-choice voting and 57 of these bills had only Democrat sponsors.<sup>55</sup> In fact, just eight percent of the total bills received bipartisan support.<sup>56</sup> By contrast, 17 bills were introduced opposing ranked-choice voting, and all but one, which was introduced by a committee, were introduced by Republicans.<sup>57</sup>

Both the number of bills supportive and opposed to ranked-choice voting saw a large uptick in 2023. The previous year there were 33 supportive bills and just four bills opposed to ranked-choice voting.<sup>58</sup> Part of the reason for this increase is legislators have seen the system allow less popular Democrats beat more popular Republicans in federal races in both Maine and Alaska.

State legislators need look no further than Florida, Idaho, Montana, South Dakota, or Tennessee for a solution. Lawmakers who want to protect ballots and the will of the people should pass legislation to ban ranked-choice voting statewide and for all local elections. This would help ensure that every vote counts and does not end up in the trash.

## **THE BOTTOM LINE: To protect voters and their ballots, states should follow the lead of Florida, Idaho, Montana, South Dakota, and Tennessee and ban ranked-choice voting.**

The best argument against ranked-choice voting is its track record. Supporters argue that the system ensures majority rule, but this is a false majority and only comes about after voters' legal ballots are thrown in the trash. This has happened across the country in places like Alaska, Maine, Utah, New York City, and San Francisco.<sup>59-63</sup>



**The best argument against ranked-choice voting is its track record. Supporters argue that the system ensures majority rule, but this is a false majority and only comes about after voters' legal ballots are thrown in the trash.**



Ranked-choice voting diminishes voter confidence in a multitude of ways. It results in election winners losing and election losers winning. It forces voters to vote against their conscience, or even for their opponent, to ensure that their ballot does not end up in a landfill. Finally, because ranked-choice voting often guarantees multiple rounds of counting, elections results are delayed, which invites distrust and confusion.

Where ranked-choice voting has been implemented it has been adopted narrowly, with spreads that are less than the number of trashed ballots in some ranked-choice voting elections. Now Democrats are introducing legislation supporting ranked-choice voting across the country.<sup>64</sup>

**This complicated and confusing form of counting votes is not a non-partisan solution to give voters greater voice. It is a scheme of the Left to disenfranchise voters and elect more Democrats.** In response, states should follow the lead of Florida, Idaho, Montana, South Dakota, and Tennessee and ban ranked-choice voting across their jurisdictions.



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