

FAIRVOTE

Ranked Choice Voting:

A Look into History and Practice

▶ Rob Richie, Co-Founder & Senior Advisor



ORIGINS OF RANKED CHOICE VOTING

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▶ Invention & Use:

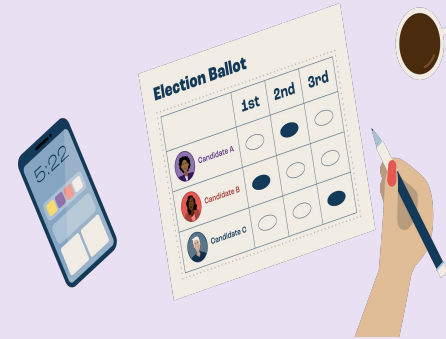
- Proposed in 1870 by W.R. Ware of Massachusetts.
- 1st national uses in Australia & Ireland in early 1900's.

▶ Used widely by major NGOs:

- Recommended by Robert's Rules of Order.
- All 5 Canadian national parties leaders picked w/ RCV.
- Used since 2020 for consequential elections by 4 GOP state parties & 10+ Democratic state parties

▶ Long-time barrier to use in the USA:

- Required hand-counts as states moved to machines



RANKED CHOICE VOTING: International



- ▶ **Australia:** (called “preferential voting”)
 - Adopted for its house in 1918. Widely embraced.
 - RCV ballots also used for senate, states & most cities.

- ▶ **Ireland** (called “single transferable vote”):
 - Used for presidential elections since 1945.
 - RCV ballots used for most other elections.

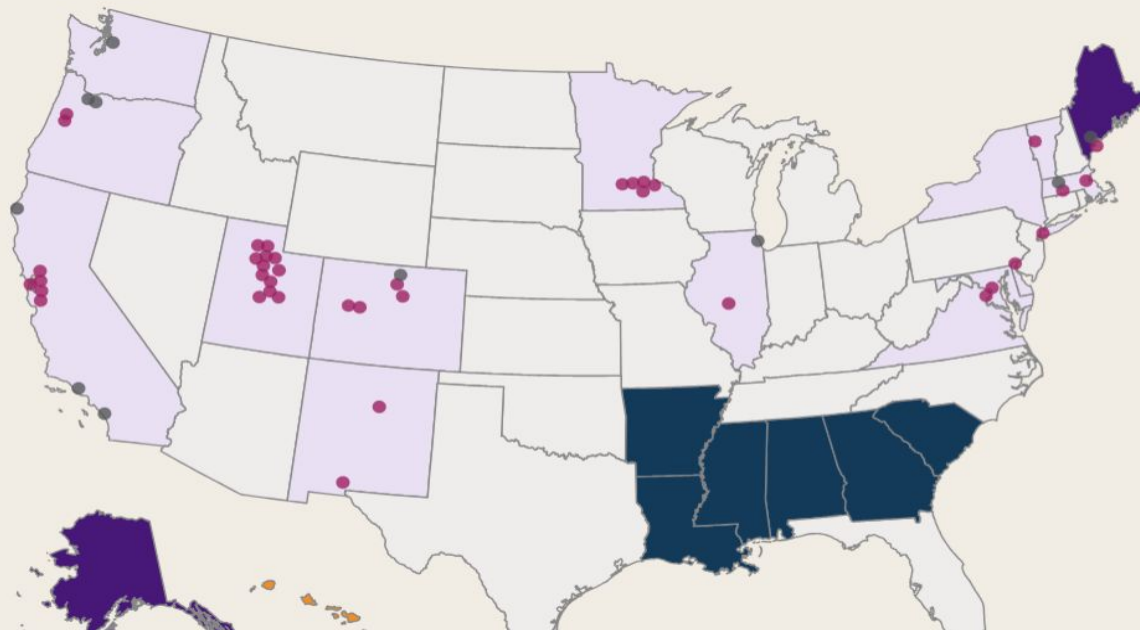
- ▶ **Other notable uses**
 - Major city mayoral elections in New Zealand
 - Presidential election in India (indirect)

WHERE RCV IS USED IN THE USA

<https://fairvote.org/our-reforms/ranked-choice-voting/>

Cities and counties: ● In use ● Upcoming use

States: ■ Used statewide ■ Local elections in some jurisdictions ■ Military and overseas voters
■ Special elections



RCV in Action: RCV Election in US



- ▶ 500+ RCV Elections in past 15 years in the United States
- ▶ Overall conclusions:
 - Voters handle RCV well with best practices for ballot design and voter education
 - The impact on share of decisive votes counting for one of the top 2 candidates far exceeds every other modern reform
 - This presentation has examples of RCV in action.

RCV in Action: New York City



- ▶ New York timeline with RCV for primaries & special elections
 - 2018 – City charter commission considers RCV recommendation, but passes it to 2019 commission
 - 2019 – Commission puts RCV on ballot. Wins 73% – 27%.
 - 2021 – 1st uses in special city council elections and wide number of competitive primaries up and down ballot

RCV in NYC in 2021: Voter Reaction

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VOTERS LIKE RANKED CHOICE VOTING

Edison Research exit polling in NYC found overwhelming majorities in favor of RCV

83% of voters ranked 2+ candidates

95% say RCV is simple to use

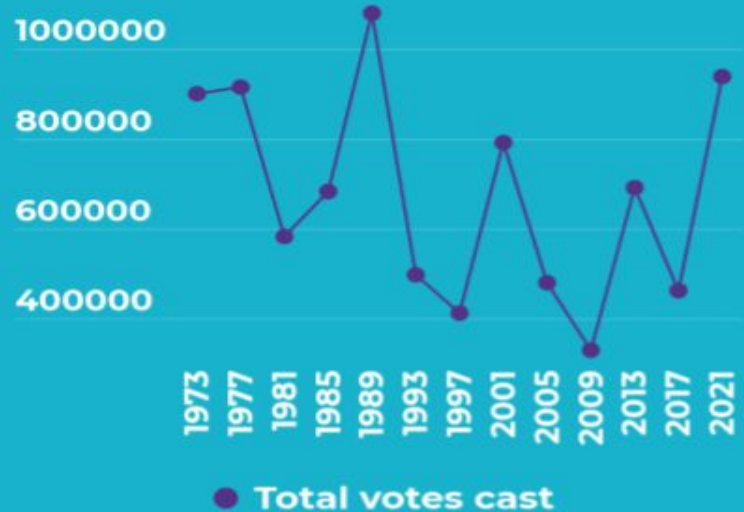
77% want to keep using RCV

More at RankTheVoteNYC.org

RCV in NYC: Voter Turnout

VOTERS WERE ENTHUSIASTIC

More than **930,000** voters participated in New York City's 2021 primaries, the highest since 1989.*

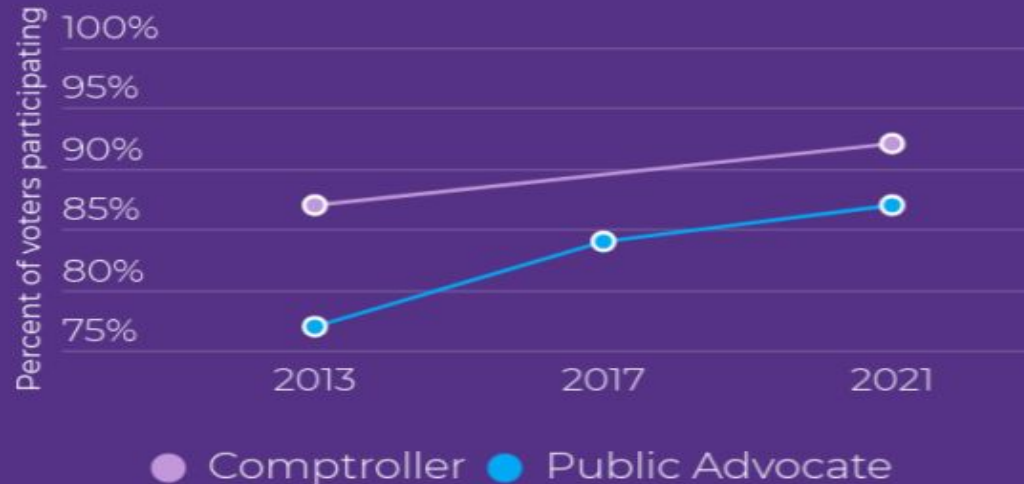


*In years that went to runoffs, the round with higher turnout is used.

RCV in NYC: Voter Engagement

VOTERS PARTICIPATE IN DOWN-BALLOT RACES

92% and **87%** of voters participated in elections for comptroller and public advocate, an **increase over prior elections.**



RCV in NYC: Major Office Winners

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CITYWIDE & BOROUGH WINNERS REFLECT THE CITY



ERIC ADAMS

Nominee for Mayor (D)



JUMAANE WILLIAMS

Nominee for Public Advocate (D)



BRAD LANDER

Nominee for Comptroller (D)



DONOVAN RICHARDS

Nominee for Queens Borough President (D)



VANESSA GIBSON

Nominee for The Bronx Borough President (D)



ANTONIO REYNOSO

Nominee for Brooklyn Borough President (D)



MARK LEVINE

Nominee for Manhattan Borough President (D)



VITO FOSSELLA

Nominee for Staten Island Borough President (R)

*Projections assume each party will win the same seats it won in 2017.

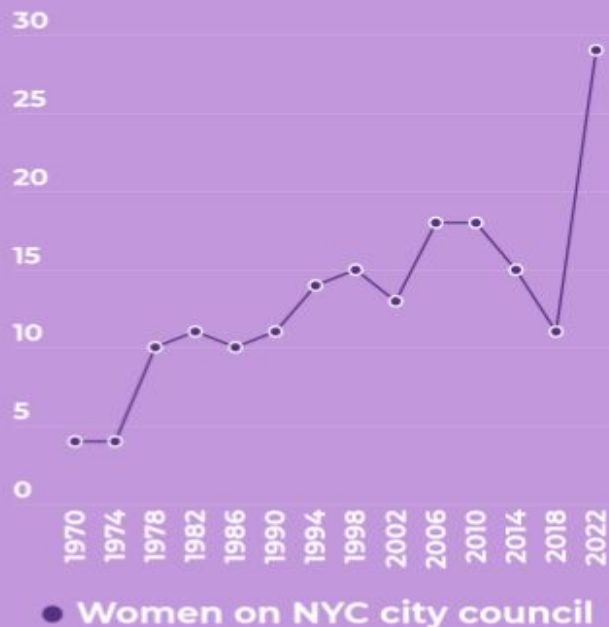
RCV in NYC: 31 Women on City Council



WOMEN WIN HISTORIC NUMBER OF SEATS

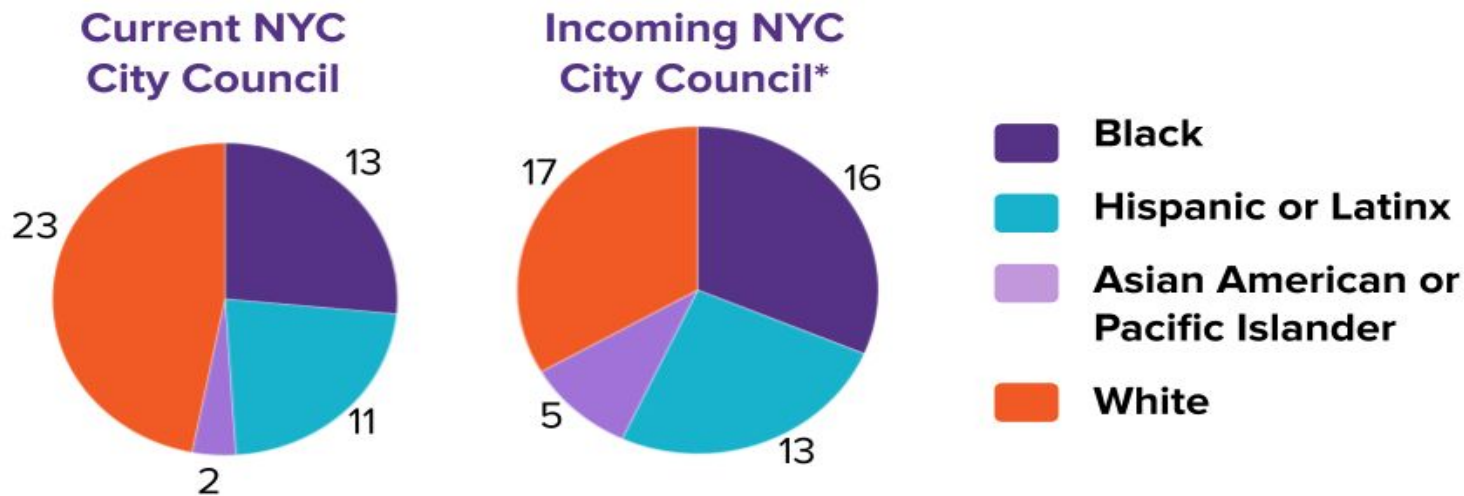
29 of 51 seats are projected* to go to women, the **highest number of women** in the history of the NYC City Council.

*Projections assume each party will win the same seats it won in 2017.



RCV in NYC: 34 People of Color on Council

NEW CITY COUNCIL COULD BE MOST DIVERSE COUNCIL EVER



*Projections assume each party will win the same seats it won in 2017.

RCV in NYC: What Can Go Better



- ▶ Consistent voter education on *why* to rank as well as *how*:
 - 99.7% cast valid mayoral votes - but seek higher comfort-level
- ▶ Keep working with campaigns on best practices for candidates:
 - “Don’t count out voters... Keep looking for connections”
- ▶ Ballot-counting: Quicker RCV tallies - and no optical mistakes!
- ▶ 2024 charter commission’s preliminary report: “New York City’s experiment with RCV is still in its early stages. In an encouraging sign, the 2021 primary election saw 26.5% of New Yorkers turn out to vote, making it the mayoral primary with the highest turnout in decades... 89.3% of Democrats ranked multiple unique candidates in at least one race.”

RCV in Maine: 1st Primaries in 2018 - 1



Democratic Gubernatorial Primary Results				
Candidate	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4
Janet Mills	33.3% 41,735 votes	35.5% 44,042 votes	40.8% 49,945 votes	54.1% 63,384 votes
Adam Cote	28.3% 35,478 votes	30.3% 37,543 votes	34.8% 42,623 votes	45.9% 53,866 votes
Betsy Sweet	16.6% 20,767 votes	18.5% 22,987 votes	24.4% 29,943 votes	Defeated
Mark Eves	14.3% 17,887 votes	15.7% 19,521 votes	Defeated	
Mark Dion	4.1% 5,200 votes	Defeated		
Diane Russell	2.2% 2,728 votes	Defeated		
Donna Dion	1.3% 1,595 votes	Defeated		

Democratic CD 2 Primary Results		
Candidate	Round 1	Round 2
Jared Golden	46.4% 20,937 votes	54.3% 23,611 votes
Lucas St. Clair	39.2% 17,742 votes	45.7% 19,853 votes
Craig Olson	8.8% 3,953 votes	Defeated
Jonathan Fulford	5.5% 2,469 votes	Defeated

RCV in Maine: 1st Primaries in 2018- 2

88% of Maine Democratic voters in primary for governor ranked 2 or more candidates



RCV in Action: June 2024 in Arlington VA



- ▶ **Arlington County (VA) uses RCV for primaries. Highlights of its Democratic primary for County Board**
 - Of 20,338 Democrats at polls, 99.8% cast valid vote
 - 1st round: Spain- 32%, Roy- 28%, Others - 40%
 - Of 40% of votes for others, 88% rank Spain or Roy:
 - Decisive votes rise from 60% in 1st round to 95%
 - Spain wins 55% - 45%: A recent head of County NAACP, Spain is projected to be the Board's only Black member

RCV in Action: Nov. 2023 in Santa Fe



▶ **Santa Fe has used RCV in its nonpartisan elections since 2018. Example: Alma Castro won an open seat for District 1 in Nov. 2023**

- Led 37%- 35% & won instant runoff 52%-48%
- Relied on \$22,500 in public financing, winning against an older opponent who spent \$83,000
- A 35-year-old restaurant owner & Hispanic activist, Castro is now the youngest member of city council.
- New Mexico's 2nd largest city Las Cruces also has shifted to using RCV for its last 3 elections



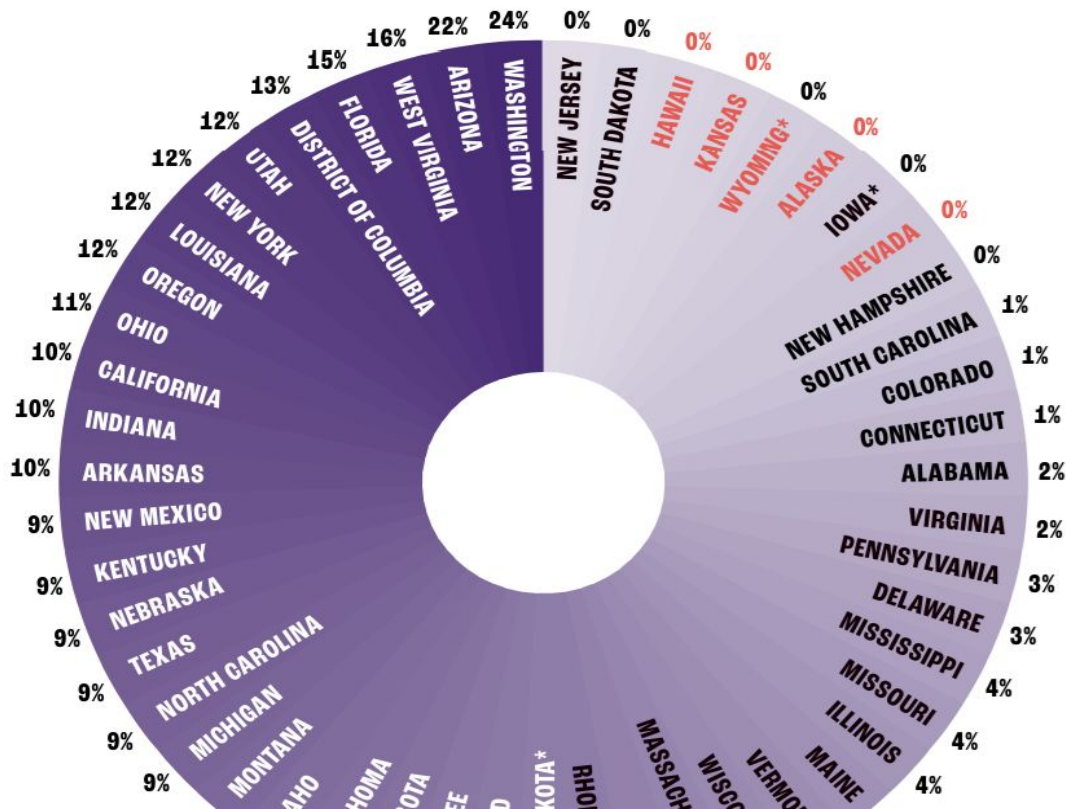
RCV in Action: 2020 Primaries in Pandemic



- ▶ Democrats used RCV in Nevada (early voters) & in 4 party-run presidential primaries in Alaska, Hawaii, Kansas, and Wyoming
- ▶ Republicans used RCV in Utah (convention nominations for governor & Congress), Indiana (convention nomination for AG) and Virginia (3 congressional nominations and party chair)
- ▶ Maine used RCV in all state legislative and congressional primaries, with a number of multi-candidate races

2020 Democratic Presidential Primaries: “Lost Votes” due to Early Voting, Calendar, & Withdrawn Candidates

3 million Democrats cast “wasted votes” in 2020! How does your state stack up?



Lost Votes: Data from Washington State

CASE STUDY 1: WASHINGTON

Washington held a vote-by-mail election without RCV on March 10th and had an unusually high number of wasted votes. FairVote showed that the earlier ballots were cast, the more likely there were to be wasted.

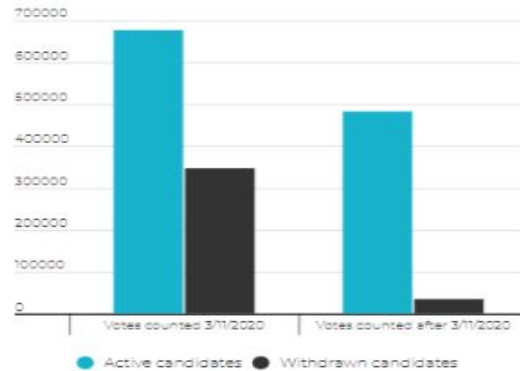


Figure 7: Wasted votes in Washington. Washington's Democratic primary was held entirely by mail. Ballots were accepted if they were postmarked by 3/10/20.

RCV in Action: 2020 Democratic Primaries

In addition, the ballot error rate was very low, in line with error rates in other RCV contests. More than 99.8% of primary voters cast valid ballots in contests with up to ten candidates.

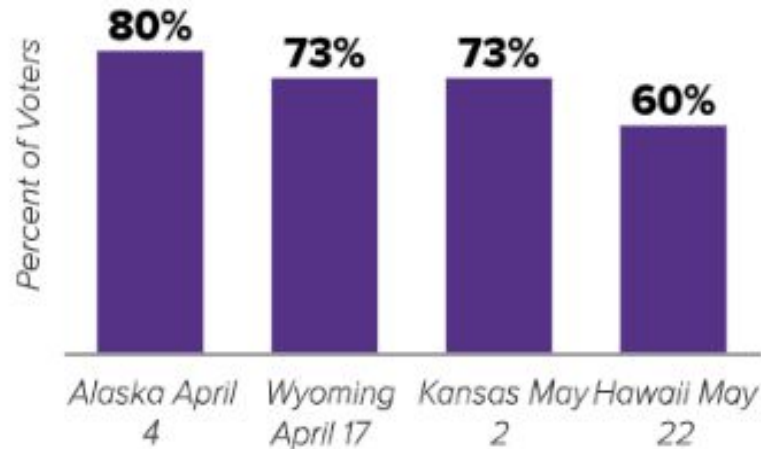


Figure 3: Percent of voters who ranked multiple candidates.

SAMPLE BALLOT From 2020 Democratic Presidential Primaries

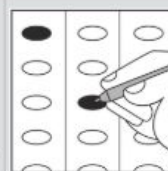
Instructions for marking a Ranked Choice Ballot

To rank your candidates, fill in the oval:

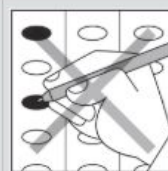
- In the 1st column for your 1st choice.
- In the 2nd column for your 2nd choice.
- In the 3rd column for your 3rd choice.

Making selections:

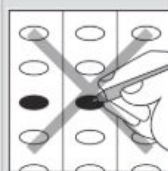
Rank candidates in the order of your choice.
You may rank as many or as few candidates as you wish, up to 5 choices.



Fill in the oval completely.



No more than one oval in a column.



No more than one oval for a candidate.

For the Democratic Nomination for President of the United States

	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice	4th Choice	5th Choice
	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Joseph R. Biden	○ ¹	○ ²	○ ³	○ ⁴	○ ⁵
Tom Steyer	○ ¹	○ ²	○ ³	○ ⁴	○ ⁵
Bernie Sanders	○ ¹	○ ²	○ ³	○ ⁴	○ ⁵
Amy Klobuchar	○ ¹	○ ²	○ ³	○ ⁴	○ ⁵
Tulsi Gabbard	○ ¹	○ ²	○ ³	○ ⁴	○ ⁵
Elizabeth Warren	○ ¹	○ ²	○ ³	○ ⁴	○ ⁵
Michael R. Bloomberg	○ ¹	○ ²	○ ³	○ ⁴	○ ⁵
Pete Buttigieg	○ ¹	○ ²	○ ³	○ ⁴	○ ⁵
(undeclared)	○ ¹	○ ²	○ ³	○ ⁴	○ ⁵

RCV in Action: 2020 Democratic Primaries

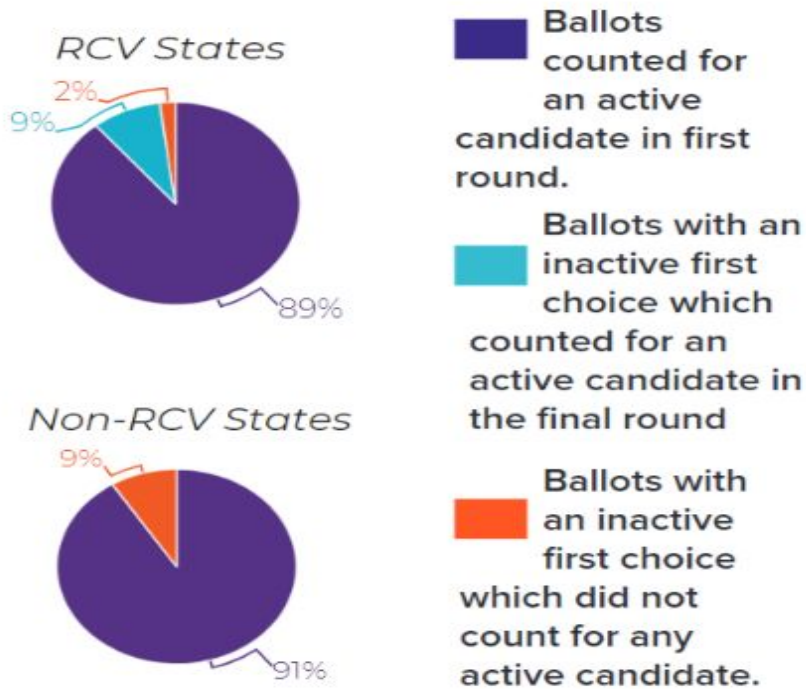


Figure 4: Percent of votes counting towards active candidates.

Questions?



www.fairvote.org

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