



PROGRAM FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY, UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

Ranked Choice Voting

- Questionnaire -

September 2021

Sample Provided by: Nielsen Scarborough
Sample Size: 1,296 Registered Voters

Field Dates: July 13- September 15, 2021
Margin of Error: +/- 2.7%

[Note: Questions 1 through 41 released separately]

[QSample2.4a and QSample2.4b]

A current bill in Congress proposes a new method of electing Members of Congress when there are more than two candidates. First, here are the problems that proponents say this method addresses.

- **In an election with three candidates or more, the winner may not have anywhere near a majority of votes and might even be opposed by the majority of voters.** For example, say Candidate 1 gets 40% of the vote, Candidate 2 gets 30% and Candidate 3 gets 30%. Candidate 1 would win even though 60% voted for someone else.
- **In the current system a third candidate can have a “spoiler effect.”** This creates two problems:
 - Say a voter prefers a third candidate that is an independent or from a third party, but strongly prefers Candidate A from one major party over Candidate B from the other major party. If that voter votes for the third candidate, they will take a vote away from Candidate A. If enough voters do this, it is possible that Candidate A could lose even when the majority would prefer them over Candidate B.
 - Because voters are often afraid that this “spoiler effect” will happen, they do not vote for independent or third-party candidates even if they would like to. This makes it difficult for independent or third-party candidates to get traction.

As you may know, some states deal with these problems by having a run-off election. When there are three or more candidates and none of the candidates get a majority of votes (more than 50%), the top two vote getters have a second election at a later date. Other candidates are eliminated. That way the final winner will have a majority of votes.

One problem with run-off elections is that they cost a substantial amount of money and tend to have lower voter turnout.

An alternative to doing a separate run-off election, is to do what is sometimes called an instant run-off or more commonly: ranked choice voting. Here is how it works:

Voters not only select their first choice but can also select their second choice of candidates. Then, if none of the candidates get a majority--like in a runoff--the candidate with the lowest number of votes is eliminated. Voters who favored the eliminated candidate have their votes switched to their second choice (if they made one). The tally is then recalculated and the candidate with a majority of votes is the winner.

If there are more than three candidates, the process is repeated until there is one candidate with a majority of votes counted.

This method is now used in elections in the states of Maine, Alaska, a number of U.S. cities in Utah, Tennessee and New York, and in some other countries.

The proposal is to use this ranked-choice method in all general federal elections with three or more candidates.

Here is an argument **in favor**:

Q42. In the current system, when there are three or more candidates, a candidate can win even with substantially less than a majority of votes. In fact, a majority might actually strongly oppose that candidate. Ranked choice voting would ensure that the candidate elected is, in fact, the candidate favored by the largest number of voters. This is consistent with the principles of democracy.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
National	22.5%	46.9%	69.4%	17.6%	11.5%	29.1%	1.5%
Republicans	12.3%	46.6%	58.9%	19.9%	18.9%	38.8%	2.3%
Democrats	32.6%	47.0%	79.6%	13.4%	6.0%	19.4%	1.0%
Independents	16.7%	47.4%	64.1%	23.4%	11.2%	34.6%	1.3%

Here is an argument **against**:

Q43. Explaining this new method to voters will be very challenging. People may get confused, and this might discourage them from voting. There will be more doubts about the accuracy of the outcomes, leading to more demands for recounts. This may weaken the legitimacy of our democratic system. The hardest part of elections should be voters' learning about the candidates, not trying to understand how to cast their ballot and how their votes will be counted.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
National	13.0%	34.3%	47.3%	33.0%	19.2%	52.2%	0.6%
Republicans	16.7%	38.4%	55.1%	29.8%	14.2%	44.0%	0.9%
Democrats	10.0%	32.4%	42.4%	35.4%	21.8%	57.2%	0.4%
Independents	13.4%	31.4%	44.8%	32.9%	21.8%	54.7%	0.5%

Here is an argument **in favor**:

Q44. Ranked choice voting has been tried in a number of states and cities. They have found that people are no more likely to make mistakes with RCV as with current elections. Also, polls show that a large majority of people say they understand how it works and support keeping it. Ranking candidates from first to last is simple. The idea that Americans would not be able to understand that is insulting. Furthermore, if someone doesn't want to rank the candidates they don't have to: they can just select their first choice and stop.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
National	30.7%	42.6%	73.3%	17.8%	7.3%	25.1%	1.6%
Republicans	22.0%	42.6%	64.6%	22.7%	10.9%	33.6%	1.8%
Democrats	41.6%	40.8%	82.4%	12.3%	4.3%	16.6%	1.0%
Independents	20.1%	47.0%	67.1%	22.2%	8.2%	30.4%	2.6%

Here is an argument **against**:

Q45. Ranked choice voting is not really fair to the person who does not have the time to study up on all of the candidates. Maybe they only know their first choice. The person who has the time to study up can rank multiple candidates, effectively voting multiple times. If all of a voters' ranked choices are eliminated before the final round, then they end up having no say in the final vote count. This has been shown to happen about 7% of the time, which is a lot of people. We should stick with the principle that one person gets one vote.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
National	11.6%	32.9%	44.5%	31.9%	22.2%	54.1%	1.4%
Republicans	18.1%	33.9%	52.0%	27.5%	19.0%	46.5%	1.5%
Democrats	8.0%	32.0%	40.0%	32.7%	25.7%	58.4%	1.6%
Independents	8.4%	33.3%	41.7%	37.9%	19.4%	57.3%	1.1%

Here is an argument **in favor**:

Q46. If voters do not want to participate by ranking all the candidates that is their choice, just as people can choose to not participate in any election. Ranked choice voting makes it possible for voters to vote for the candidate they most support, without worrying they'll be throwing away their vote. Voters can feel free to vote for a first-time candidate who is not a career politician committed to a long line of special interests and campaign donors. This enables a more diverse array of candidates to have a chance at winning. This will help revitalize our democracy.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
National	29.0%	42.9%	71.9%	18.0%	8.6%	26.6%	1.5%
Republicans	22.0%	41.0%	63.0%	21.8%	12.8%	34.6%	2.3%
Democrats	37.6%	41.5%	79.1%	15.1%	4.9%	20.0%	0.8%
Independents	20.8%	49.7%	70.5%	18.1%	9.7%	27.8%	1.6%

Here is an argument **against**:

Q47. Our system of elections has worked for more than two centuries. This new method will cost the taxpayers extra money and strain our vote counting system. Some cities that put in place ranked choice voting repealed it only a few years later. While in principle this system could help a third party or independent candidate, it is so unlikely that they could actually win that it is really not worth all the trouble.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
National	11.4%	30.8%	42.2%	32.8%	24.0%	56.8%	1.0%
Republicans	19.3%	32.2%	51.5%	30.9%	16.7%	47.6%	1.0%
Democrats	7.3%	32.1%	39.4%	29.8%	30.0%	59.8%	0.8%
Independents	7.0%	25.3%	32.3%	43.3%	23.0%	66.3%	1.4%

So again, here is the proposal.

Voters not only select their first choice but can also select their second choice of candidates. Then, if none of the candidates get a majority--like in a runoff--the candidate with the lowest number of votes is eliminated. The voters who favored the eliminated candidate have their votes switched to their second choice (if they made one). The tally is then recalculated and the candidate with a majority of votes is the winner.

If there are more than three candidates, the process is repeated until there is one candidate with a majority of votes counted.

Q48. Please select how acceptable this method of ranked choice voting in federal elections would be to you.

	Mean	Not at all acceptable (0-4)	Just tolerable 5	Very acceptable (6-10)	Ref./DK
National	5.7	39.7%	10.9%	49.2%	0.3%
Republicans	4.7	48.8%	11.7%	39.3%	0.2%
Democrats	6.7	30.2%	9.0%	60.4%	0.4%
Independents	5.2	45.9%	13.9%	39.9%	0.3%

Q49. So, finally, do you favor or oppose using this method of ranked choice voting in federal elections with three or more candidates?

	Favor	Oppose	Ref./DK
National	61.2%	37.5%	1.3%
Republicans	49.1%	50.3%	0.6%
Democrats	72.7%	25.5%	1.8%
Independents	55.2%	43.4%	1.4%