

Tom's Ranked Choice Voting Rant

Emailed to Julie Hall, election integrity chair for Mass GOP, 3/9/2026

An intellectual exercise in the "Musings from the Chair" series

The "Musings from the Chair" series are essays by the Chair of the Natick Republican Town Committee. The essays are intended to be intellectual exercises on various topics. Use them to provoke your personal analysis. Often they will utilize unusual approaches to the issue. Use the techniques to give you additional analysis tools. There is no expectation that you will agree or disagree with the views in the essays. The essays are solely the musings of the chair and do not represent endorsed opinions of the Natick RTC, State GOP or National GOP.

Julie,

I have enough to juggle with the Natick RTC, but I loathe ranked choice voting.

If you will indulge me, I will try and explain my view. I have not heard anyone else explain it like this, so maybe you can use the notion. The first line is the key, the rest is my nerdy technical rant to support the point.

>>>>

Ranked Choice Voting is always election rigging and here is why: **The average voter cannot look at the results and understand why someone won.**

>>>>

Even when the numbers are published, the average voter cannot see why someone won.

No clarity in the vote count, no credibility in the result.

A traditional election, the person who got the most votes wins. Everyone can see it. Look at the vote tallies. Simple.

The only challenge is "were the votes counted properly?"

With ranked choice vote the challenges are layered and complicated.

Who got all the #1 votes?

How do the #1 votes get disqualified so the #2 vote gets counted (and so on, #3, #4)?

How do I trust the election officials in town to provide the correct ranking, disqualifications and recounts?

That's before the ballots are recounted.

I also hate the jungle primary (no-party primary, top two move on), but with it's problems, the average voter can see who won.

Primaries that require a runoff if no one gets 50% is easy for the average voter to understand why the runoff occurred.

On RCV, what if all republicans vote for the one R candidate for choice 1,2,3,&4? How does that impact the results? i.e. if the R is eliminated, then all R's have their vote eliminated. Total vote tally goes from 10,000 in the first round to 6000 in the second round. Not a recipe for credibility.

With RCV, every republican who does not win should always challenge and demand a hand count of all iterations of the vote algorithm, then bring it to court as election rigging.

Will all towns release a spreadsheet of ranked votes so I (an average nerd voter) can audit every election and certify that the result is correct? If no, it's election rigging.

All that comes from me, a life long electrical test development engineer, I can visualize the Ranked Choice Voting algorithm and I can visualize how it can be manipulated to obscure the real result.

So my disdain for RCV is based on both math (complicated algorithm) and human nature (can't understand why someone won). It fails on both levels.

Elections need to be credible.

Both fighting against Ranked Choice Voting and fighting for the SAVE Act make elections more credible.

You are fighting the good fight.

Tom Currie
Natick RTC Chair

=====

From GROK
"How does ranked choice voting work?"

Ranked Choice Voting (RCV), also known as instant-runoff voting in single-winner elections, lets voters rank candidates in order of preference instead of picking just one. The goal is to ensure the winner has true majority support (more than 50%) rather than just a plurality (most votes but possibly under 50%).

How Voters Fill Out the Ballot

You rank the candidates:

- **1 = your first choice (most preferred)**

- 2 = your second choice
- 3 = your third choice
- ...and so on (some places allow up to 5 rankings, others more or unlimited)

You don't have to rank every candidate—ranking just one is valid, though ranking more gives your vote more chances to count if your top picks are eliminated.

How the Votes Are Counted (Step-by-Step for Single-Winner Elections)

1. Count all first-choice votes.
If any candidate gets more than 50% of first choices → they win immediately. Done.
2. If no one has >50%, eliminate the candidate with the fewest first-choice votes.
3. Redistribute those ballots:
 - Any voter who had the eliminated candidate as #1 now has their vote count for their #2 choice (if they ranked one).
 - Ballots that didn't rank the eliminated candidate stay with their current choice.
4. Recount the active votes (now including the redistributed ones).
5. Repeat steps 2–4:
 - Check for >50%.
 - If not, eliminate the current last-place candidate.
 - Redistribute again.
6. Continue until one candidate crosses the 50%+1 threshold → they win.

This simulates a series of runoffs but all happens with one ballot and in one election—no need for separate runoff elections.

Quick Hypothetical Example

Imagine 100 voters and 4 candidates: A, B, C, D.

Round 1 (first choices):

- A: 35 votes
- B: 30
- C: 25
- D: 10

→ No majority. Eliminate D (fewest votes).

Round 2: D's 10 voters had these next preferences:

- 6 went to A
- 4 went to B

New totals:

- A: $35 + 6 = 41$
- B: $30 + 4 = 34$
- C: 25

→ Still no majority. Eliminate C (now fewest).

Round 3: C's 25 voters' next preferences:

- 18 went to A
- 7 went to B

Final totals:

- A: $41 + 18 = 59$
- B: $34 + 7 = 41$

→ A has 59% → A wins.

Without RCV (just first choices), A would have won with only 35% in a traditional plurality system. With RCV, we see A really was the consensus choice once weaker candidates were removed.

Key Benefits People Often Cite

- Reduces “wasted” votes and spoiler effects (you can vote your true favorite without helping your least-favorite win).
- Encourages positive campaigning (candidates want to be second choices too).
- Guarantees a majority winner (avoids winners with <50% support).

It's used in places like Maine (statewide), Alaska (statewide), New York City, San Francisco, Minneapolis, and many others for various offices.

Different places have slight variations (e.g., how many rankings allowed, whether it's single-winner or multi-winner proportional), but the core idea is the same for single-winner races: rank → eliminate lowest → redistribute → repeat until majority.

=====

GROK, what are the negatives of ranked choice voting.

Ranked choice voting (RCV, or instant-runoff voting in single-winner races) has several criticisms and potential drawbacks, drawn from academic studies, think tanks, election observers, and real-world implementations (e.g., in Maine, Alaska, New York City, San Francisco). Critics argue these issues can outweigh the benefits in some contexts, while supporters often counter that many are overstated or fixable with better education and implementation.

Here are the main negatives commonly cited:

1. Increased Complexity for Voters

Ranking multiple candidates (instead of picking one) is inherently more cognitively demanding. Voters must research more candidates, decide relative preferences, and understand how rankings work.

- This can lead to higher error rates, like overvotes (invalid ballots), accidental bullet voting (ranking the same candidate multiple times), or misunderstanding instructions.**
- Examples include higher rates of voidable or exhausted ballots in lower-education or lower-income areas, as seen in some New York City analyses.**
- Critics say it disproportionately affects less-engaged, minority, or low-information voters, potentially creating barriers or disenfranchisement despite intentions to expand choice.**

2. Exhausted Ballots and “Disenfranchisement”

If a voter ranks only a few candidates and all of them are eliminated before the final round, their ballot becomes exhausted (doesn’t count in deciding the winner).

- This creates an “artificial majority” where the winner may not have true support from all original voters—only from those whose preferences survived.**
- In some races, significant portions of ballots exhaust, silencing those voters in the final tally. Critics argue this violates the spirit of “one person, one vote” since not every ballot influences the outcome equally.**
- To fully participate, voters feel pressured to rank candidates they dislike or don’t know.**

3. Delays in Results and Administrative Challenges

Counting requires multiple rounds of tabulation, redistribution, and sometimes software.

- This leads to delayed results (hours or days longer than traditional counts), which can fuel distrust or claims of manipulation.
- Initial setup costs more (new equipment, software, voter education, poll worker training).
- Tabulation is less transparent to the average person—it's harder to follow than a simple plurality count, raising concerns about errors or corruption opportunities.

4. Potential for Non-Intuitive or “Unfair” Outcomes

In rare cases, RCV can produce mathematically paradoxical results (though studies show these are uncommon outliers).

- The candidate with the most first-place votes can still lose if they lack strong second preferences (e.g., a polarizing frontrunner gets eliminated early).
- It can favor centrists/moderates over those with strong but narrow support, which some see as diluting ideological choices or helping one party (debated as pro-Democrat or anti-extreme).
- Some critics argue it obscures clear issue-based debates, encourages strategic “gaming” of rankings, or doesn't always eliminate spoilers perfectly.

5. Unequal Impact on Certain Groups or Candidates

Research (e.g., from Harvard and others) suggests RCV can disadvantage minority voters or candidates in polarized settings due to higher exhaustion rates in diverse/minority-heavy districts.

- It may require more time/information to rank effectively, benefiting more educated/elites.
- In some implementations, it hasn't consistently boosted diverse representation as hoped, and errors can fall unevenly along socioeconomic lines.

6. Voter Confusion and Lower Trust in Some Cases

Public opinion varies: some voters find RCV confusing or illegitimate if it flips a first-round plurality leader.

- In places new to it, turnout dips or complaints rise initially.

- Critics point to real-world frustrations (e.g., Maine/Alaska voters reporting confusion, or cities repealing it after problematic elections).

These drawbacks aren't universal—many places report smooth adoption with education—but opponents (including some conservative groups and election integrity advocates) argue RCV complicates a system that already works, risks disenfranchising voters, and manufactures winners rather than reflecting clear majorities.

Supporters counter that most issues stem from poor implementation or lack of familiarity, and evidence from long-term users (like Cambridge, MA) shows high satisfaction over time. The debate often boils down to whether the benefits (less vote-wasting, more consensus winners) justify the added complexity.