

## Ranked Choice Voting

A new voting system that allows voters to rank their candidates instead of just voting for one person is gaining more prominence around the country. “Ranked Choice Voting,” sometimes called “Instant Run-off Voting,” is also being adopted in New Mexico. Santa Fe has already held a municipal election using ranked choice voting and Las Cruces will be holding its city election using the new voting method in November 2019.

### What is Ranked Choice Voting?

Ranked choice voting, or instant run-off voting, changes how voters choose their preference for candidates on election day. Instead of voting for one candidate, voters rank their choices in order from top to bottom. Ranked choice voting, according to the election reform nonprofit, FairVote, allows “Voters to rank as many candidates as they want in order of choice. Candidates do best when they attract a strong core of first-choice support while also reaching out for second and even third choices.”<sup>1</sup> Voters can also choose not to rank additional candidates.

Common Cause New Mexico, a proponent of ranked choice voting, explains the method as a way to allow a broader and stronger field of candidates and eliminate vote-splitting. “In ranked choice voting elections, you always get to vote for your favorite candidate. If your favorite candidate gets eliminated, then your vote immediately counts for your next choice. You can vote your conscience without worrying about wasting your vote. The candidate taking office will truly be supported by the majority of voters.”<sup>2</sup>

### VOTING TO SUPPORT A FIELD OF PREFERRED CANDIDATES

Ranked choice voting is different than the current most common way to vote. In most elections, voters have one vote that goes to one candidate and the candidate who has the most votes wins. In this election system, when there are more than two candidates, a candidate can win with 50 percent or less of the majority of the final vote. In ranked choice voting, the winner has a “50 percent – plus one,” majority. Sometimes this winning outcome is determined at the beginning or it is determined by subsequent “rounds” of voting. This is where ranked choice voting can get interesting. If no candidate reaches the 50 percent – plus one threshold, the last-place candidate is removed, and those votes are transferred to the next-ranked candidates. So, there is an “instant run-off.” This eliminates the need for a costly second election, such as those that are often held in the City of Albuquerque mayoral races, because the “instant runoff” calculations are done once the polls are closed and all votes are in. To better understand the process an educational video was created to inform voters in the most recent Santa Fe, New Mexico elections. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOyEfQecV20>

### CALL TO ACTION

- Be informed about ranked choice voting.
- Learn how to make your vote count.
- Share reliable and accurate information with friends, neighbors and co-workers.

<sup>1</sup> FairVote.org. Accessed September 11, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Commoncause.org. Accessed September 11, 2019.

Other definitions may be helpful in describing the new voting method. The League of Women Voters of Maine describes the instant run-off process as occurring when “the candidate with the least support is eliminated. Voters that picked the eliminated candidate as their first choice have their vote counted for

their next choice.”<sup>3</sup> As the City of Las Cruces describes it, “Voters who picked this (eliminated) candidate as their number one now have their second preference vote count.”<sup>4</sup>

Voters do not have to rank all candidates in the race; they can choose only one candidate. However, some cities and counties use voting machines that alert voters when they do not fill out the entire ranking ballot. The voting machines can also inform voters if they leave their ballots blank or if they forget to vote or skip voting in a certain race.

**WHAT CITIES AND STATES USE RANKED CHOICE VOTING?**

According to FairVote, at least 18 cities and one state are currently using some form of ranked choice voting.<sup>5</sup>

- Basalt, Colorado: mayoral races with more than two candidates
- Berkeley, California: mayor, city council, and city auditor
- Cambridge, Massachusetts: city council and school board
- Carbondale, Colorado: mayoral races with more than two candidates
- Las Cruces, New Mexico: mayor, city council, and municipal judge
- Minneapolis, Minnesota: mayor, city council, park board, and 19 other city offices
- Oakland, California: mayor, city council and 16 other offices
- Portland, Maine: mayor
- State of Maine: all congressional and presidential elections and all state and federal primary elections, including presidential primaries starting in 2024
- San Francisco, California: mayor, city attorney, board of supervisors
- San Leandro, California: mayor and city council
- Santa Fe, New Mexico: mayor, city council, and municipal judge
- St. Paul, Minnesota: mayor and city council
- Takoma Park, Maryland: mayor and city council
- Telluride, Colorado: mayoral races with more than two candidates

Other cities in Florida, Massachusetts, Michigan, Oregon, and Tennessee have passed rank choice voting measures and are awaiting implementation. In November 2019, St. Louis Park, MN, Eastpointe, MI, and Payson and Vineyard, UT will also use this method. The method is also used in party primaries in at least three states. The method is likely to be used in Democratic Party primaries for president in at least four states. Five southern states allow overseas voters to cast ranked choice voting ballots when holding primary or general runoff elections for Congress.

	1 <sup>st</sup> Choice	2 <sup>nd</sup> Choice	3 <sup>rd</sup> Choice	4 <sup>th</sup> Choice	5 <sup>th</sup> Choice
Betty Bear	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Felix Fox	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Lucinda Lizard	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Roberto Rabbit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Diego Deer	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Ranked Choice Example – Source: Vote Different Santa Fe<sup>6</sup>**

<sup>3</sup> League of Women Voters of Maine Education Fund. “Ranked Choice Voting Basics.” June 2016.  
<sup>4</sup> “A New Way to Vote is Coming to Las Cruces.” City of Las Cruces. Voter Education Flyer.  
<sup>5</sup> FairVote.org. “Where Ranked Choice Voting Is Used.” Accessed September 11, 2019.  
<sup>6</sup> Source: Vote Different Santa Fe, <http://votedifferentsantafe.com>

## Why Use Ranked Choice Voting?

There are numerous reasons that ranked choice voting has been adopted across the country. This report will cover the complete pluses and minuses of the voting method in another section, but one benefit often cited by supporters of ranked choice is saving money. Ranked choice voting saves states, cities, and counties funds by eliminating the need for runoff elections.

In Texas, the City of Houston paid \$1.8 million for a runoff election in 2015. Potential savings could grow higher. According to the nonprofit consulting group January Advisors, “The City of Houston can save more than \$5 million over the next three elections.”<sup>7</sup> Ranked choice could also replace special elections, creating additional savings because the choices are calculated using an agreed upon calculation that is pre-programmed into election computers.

Savings is not the only rationale. Perhaps ranking choices could encourage candidates to be nicer to one another? FairVote has funded independent research into whether voters would be more civil with ranked choice voting. They provided grants to professors from the University of Iowa and Western Washington University who asked voters after ranked choice elections if this was the case. Seven cities with RCV and 13 control cities without it were examined in 2013 and 2014. The study found that a representative sample of 2,400 RCV voters generally believed that their campaigns were more positive in tone than the 2,400 non-RCV voters experiences in their cities.<sup>8</sup>

“In the ranked choice voting cities of Berkeley, Oakland, San Francisco and San Leandro, only 53 percent of respondents remembered candidates criticizing each other, compared to 65 percent in plurality cities. Similarly, more respondents in cities using ranked choice voting (17 percent) reported reduced negativity in local election campaigns than in cities without ranked choice voting (12 percent).”<sup>9</sup>

Another reason to support ranked choice voting is that the voters can be assured that the elected person is supported by a majority of voters. Plus, more candidates can compete, reducing the so-called “spoiler effect.”. So-called “spoiler candidates” would be less likely to run. As the Maine League of Women Voters explains, “Ranked choice voting allows voters to support their favorite candidate without worrying that they might ‘throw their vote away,’ or worse, split their votes with like-minded voters and unintentionally help elect the candidate they like the least.”<sup>10</sup>

### RCV IN SANTA FE

Many voters in Santa Fe had already seized on this rationale and decided to allow ranked choice voting in their municipal elections. In 2008, 65 percent of voters in the city supported a change to the Santa Fe charter to allow ranked choice voting. Since then, the charter required the city to install the needed software and voting equipment to make ranked choice voting a reality, as long as the changes could be made at a “reasonable price.”

Nine years later, in 2017, the city hesitated to implement the necessary changes, citing cost and resources as the reason for the delay. The cost of the software had dwindled to \$40,000 allowing voting machines to handle ranked choice voting. However, in July of 2017, the Santa Fe City Council voted for another delay in order to test the software and educate voters. Then the Secretary of State’s office approved the software in September that year. Also, that month, to spur a decision before the 2018 election, FairVote New Mexico filed a lawsuit with the New Mexico Supreme Court to encourage city councilors to follow the

*“I moderated the first ranked choice voting mayoral race candidate forum and city council candidate forum in Santa Fe for the League of Women Voters. The tone was better than past forums. All five candidates played nice and asked people to consider them for their second choice if they weren’t going to be the first choice.”*

**-Judy Williams, Outgoing President, League of Women Voters**

<sup>7</sup> Reichman, Jeff. “Ranked Choice Voting Could Save Millions of Dollars for Texas Cities.” January Advisors. February 5, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> “The Ranked Choice Voting Civility Project.” FairVote.org. Accessed September 12, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> John, Sarah and Caroline Tolbert. “Socioeconomic and Demographic Perspectives on Ranked Choice Voting in the Bay Area.” April 2015. FairVote: The Center for Voting and Democracy.

<sup>10</sup> Melanson, Finn. “Ranked Choice Voting Basics.” League of Women Voters of Maine Education Fund.

charter and allow ranked choice voting. A legal battle ensued between the city and the supporters of ranked choice voting. District Judge David Thomson ruled to deny the city's petition in November of 2017.

Then the City of Santa Fe filed another petition in order for the New Mexico Supreme Court to examine whether ranked choice voting was in accord with the state's constitution. The high court in January 2018, voted unanimously and "rejected the city government petition seeking to overturn Thomson's ruling that Santa Fe had to implement ranked choice voting," according to the *Albuquerque Journal*.<sup>11</sup> The state's Supreme Court gave no explanation or comment for the ruling and offered no constitutional guidance or clarification. The lack of specificity from the New Mexico Supreme Court did not delay implementation of ranked choice voting for Santa Fe.

This decision meant that, finally, in March 2018, Santa Fe voters went to the polls using ranked choice voting in the city's municipal election. Mayoral candidate Alan Webber won with 66 percent of the final "instant runoff" after receiving 39 percent in the first round with four opponents.<sup>12</sup> One of the city council races also had an instant runoff. In an exit poll conducted by Fair Vote in consultation with University of New Mexico Professor Lonna Atkeson following the March 6, 2018 elections, ninety-four percent of respondents said they were satisfied with their voting experience, while only four percent of respondents said they were unsatisfied. Seventy-one percent said they support using ranked choice voting in future elections, and nearly nine-in-ten voters reported ranking more than one candidate. Voter turnout was the highest it's been in the last four mayoral elections since 2006.<sup>13</sup> Voter turnout was also higher compared to the previous municipal election, the pro-ranked choice voting nonprofit said.

### RCV IN LAS CRUCES



Las Cruces also adopted ranked choice voting with a unanimous city council vote in June 2018. Their first election using the new method will be November 5, 2019. Dona Ana County Clerk Amanda Lopez Askin said "voters in the city wanting to rank their ballot should go into the voting booth thinking not only about their first choice for the seat, but 'who is the next person I could live with?'"<sup>14</sup>

The City of Las Cruces will be electing its mayor, three city council positions, and the presiding municipal judge. Election planners have said that avoiding the cost of a runoff election is the number one benefit. Officials also cited more transparent dialogue between candidates and allowing campaigns to reach more voters as advantages of ranked choice voting.

The voting method in Las Cruces will also rely on software algorithms that allow an election night tally of the RCV ballots. The voter databases will allow ballots to be "printed on demand," instead of pre-printing ballots (a reform Las Cruces is using for non-rank choice voting as well).<sup>15</sup> Election administrators do have to wait for all precincts to report before they can state the vote total which is calculated by the computers. Then, if necessary, they can establish an instant run-off. Like the ranked choice election in Santa Fe, voters in Las Cruces will be able to change choices on the ballots and fix mistakes through the voting machines.

### ALBUQUERQUE

It appears voters in Albuquerque will have to wait, perhaps several years, before they see ranked choice voting come to the Duke City. Albuquerque currently requires separate run-off elections if the mayoral candidates running the first time do not get at least 50 percent of the vote. In April of 2019, three city councilors introduced an ordinance to bring ranked choice to the November municipal election. The proposal was amended more than once and ultimately failed when opposing councilors determined that voting for it was a conflict of interest since council members were voting on an election in which they were also running.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Last, T.S. and Mark Oswald. January 9, 2018. Supreme Court Clears Way for Ranked-choice Voting in Santa Fe." *Albuquerque Journal*.

<sup>12</sup> Richie, Rob. July 12, 2018. "Ranked Choice Voting Draws Historic Voter Turnout in 2018 Midterms." *Independent Voter News*.

<sup>13</sup> Robinson, Rich. "Exit Survey Analysis Finds Santa Fe Voters Strongly Support Ranked Choice Voting, Have High Confidence in City Elections." *FairVote.org*. March 15, 2018

<sup>14</sup> Alba Soular, Diana. "Ranked Choice Voting among myriad Election Day changes in 2019." *Las Cruces Sun-News*. September 1, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>16</sup> Lyman, Andy. "Ranked Choice Voting Off the Table This Year for ABQ." August 6, 2019. *New Mexico Political Report*.

In August of 2019, the council defeated a measure that would have sent ranked choice voting to a referendum. The body voted it down 8-1 when supporters said that educating voters about the new system would be difficult under this short timeline. Even if the proposal had passed, voters would not have seen ranked choice come into play until 2021. It is not clear when it will be re-introduced.

#### INTERSECTION WITH THE LOCAL ELECTION ACT AND OTHER LEGISLATION

In 2018, the state legislature passed House Bill 98, the Local Election Act, which included multiple reforms. Ranked choice voting was one of the reforms addressed in the Act. One of the main reasons for the bill was to encourage higher voter turnout. Before the reforms, numerous local elections in the state happened at different times of the year. This made it difficult for citizens to anticipate the timing of elections. The election day for these nonpartisan races, ranging from the mayor's office to conservation districts, zoning districts and sanitation districts, will now be on the first Tuesday of November in odd years. Municipal governments are able to decide whether to opt in or opt out of the November elections. Special elections at the local level held outside of dates permitted by law are now required to be conducted by mail.

More cities may also opt in to ranked choice voting. "The law says certain cities — home rule municipalities with runoff elections — can opt in to ranked-choice voting for half the cost of holding a runoff. There are only a handful of home rule municipalities, including Rio Rancho, Alamogordo, Clovis and Gallup," the Santa Fe New Mexican said in 2018.<sup>17</sup>

To further pave the way for ranked choice voting, the Local Election Act repealed New Mexico statutes on municipal elections requiring plurality voting. The statute used to read, "The candidate who receives a plurality of the votes cast for a designated office and term and who is qualified to hold office shall be elected to the office for the term designated."<sup>18</sup> It also eliminated language that requiring that the "highest number of votes cast by qualified electors of the district shall be declared to be elected."<sup>19</sup>

In 2019, the state legislature passed other election reforms. HB 407, the Election Laws 50-Year Tune-Up, was signed into law by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham. The legislation enacted several amendments to New Mexico election laws. Most changes were procedural, addressing changes in election technology and related matters. As "enabling legislation," the Election Laws 50-Year Tune-Up also allowed for ranked choice voting.

Since the Local Election Act provided updates to the Election Laws 50-Year Tune-Up, and the New Mexico Secretary of State's office governs all elections, the time was ripe for that office to issue guidance on ranked choice voting. The Secretary of State's Office issued a rule called Title 1, Chapter 10, Part 14, that governed ranked choice voting and "top-two runoff elections." The rule defined several terms that are common to ranked choice. It made provisions and gave specific guidance on the ballot, vote tabulation for winners and results and the instant run-off. The rule pertains to municipal and county elections and not state elections (as opposed to Maine that allows ranked choice voting at the local, state, federal and presidential level).

In July of 2019, the Secretary of State's Office held public hearings on the rule changes in Santa Fe, Albuquerque and Las Cruces. The office also allowed municipalities, groups and individuals a chance to give their input in writing as a form of "public comment." The City of Albuquerque, the City of Gallup and Lincoln County offered feedback. Gallup opposed the rule. Albuquerque wanted to limit the voting choices to three. Lincoln County made a point about ethical conduct in these types of elections.

Election reforms that reduce polarization offer potential.

Meanwhile, so few Americans feel represented by a major party that the total number of voters who consider themselves to be independents now nearly equals that of voters who claim a party affiliation. Gallup's January 2018 polling shows that 44 percent of Americans now identify as independents, with just 22 percent identifying as Republicans and 32 percent as Democrats, according to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace on March 12, 2018.

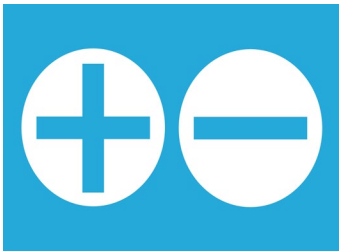
<sup>17</sup> Oxford, Andrew. "N.M. voters to see impact of Local Election Act." *Santa Fe New Mexican*. August 4, 2018.

<sup>18</sup> New Mexico Statutes Chapter 3. Municipalities 3-8-32.

<sup>19</sup> New Mexico Statutes Chapter 73. Special Districts 73-6-19.



Due to the New Mexico Supreme Court’s lack of a written opinion on its 9-0 ruling against the City of Santa Fe’s petition in January 2018, constitutional guidance on ranked choice voting has been sparse. The New Mexico Constitution refers to what can be interpreted to mean plurality voting although others argue it is also true of ranked choice voting. “...The person who receives the highest number of votes for any office...shall be declared elected to that office.”<sup>20</sup> The U.S. Constitution does not specify any specific election methods, which is why states use a mix of plurality voting, runoff elections, and ranked choice voting. The Twelfth Amendment, when referring to the Electoral College, says, “The person having the greatest number of votes for President, shall be President, if such number be the majority of the whole number of the electors appointed; and if no person have such majority, then from the persons having the highest numbers not exceeding three on the list of those voted for as President, the House of Representatives shall choose immediately, by ballot, the President.”



### PROS, CONS, AND BEST PRACTICES

We have examined some of the pluses and minuses for ranked choice voting in a previous section. To summarize, avoiding run-off elections saves cities money. Candidate civility with less negativity is another advantage. Voters may also receive satisfaction that a candidate with “50 percent plus one” wins the election rather than a candidate that wins the most votes, or a plurality of the votes. Other pros and cons of ranked choice voting are apparent.

#### PROS OF RANKED CHOICE VOTING:

- The candidate taking office will truly be supported by the majority of voters who have selected the full range of preferences.
- Evidence of higher voter turnout exists. In Santa Fe, over 20,000 people voted in 2018 with ranked choice voting, versus only 17,022 votes in a previous election without ranked choice voting.<sup>21</sup> In San Francisco, in 2018, turnout was nearly 53 percent in the general mayoral election, and more city voters cast RCVballots for mayor than non-RCV ballots for governors and U.S. Senate.<sup>22</sup> The 2018 Maine primary had the most Democrats in Maine’s primary history. While there are specific examples of increases in voter turn-out, greater independent research on voter engagement trends with rank choice voting is warranted.
- Voters only have to visit the polling location once per election.
- Fewer run-off elections could encourage more voters to participate in the single RCV election.
- Ranked choice voting encourages more candidates to run without fear of “split-votes.”
- Sometimes these additional candidates come from more diverse backgrounds with novel views and ideas.
- The use of RCV could decrease the use of outside money or outside political action committees to finance negative campaigning, since such ads are less useful in a RCV elections. If candidates want to be a voter’s second or third choice, they are less likely to go negative and risk alienating their opponent’s supporters.
- So far, in informal exit polling and preliminary surveys, voters have showed general understanding and greater likability for the new method.<sup>23</sup>
- The use of RCV increases the chances of “long shot candidates” to be taken seriously.

#### CONS OF RANKED CHOICE VOTING:

- Some voters may prefer traditional voting methods, experience voter fatigue, and don’t check the full range of candidates that they could select.
- Some voters may be confused by the new system.
- Software and voter databases can malfunction. This possibility is not unique to ranked choice voting. This possibility exists in any type of computer-supported election and can be corrected on election day, but increased ballot complexity increases the potential of a problem, albeit one that would not interfere with ballot tabulation.
- Chance of ballot errors exists, although this is true for traditional voting methods too.
- Like other election processes, incumbents may have more of an electoral advantage because these candidates are better known and are more likely to experience an advantage of name recognition even when they are not a first choice. The real recognition advantage takes place with 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> choices

<sup>20</sup> New Mexico Constitution, Section 5. Election by ballot; plurality elects candidate. Subsection B.

<sup>21</sup> Richie, Rob. “Ranked Choice Voting Draws Historic Voter Turnout in 2018 Midterms. IVN News. July 12, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> CampaignLegal.org. “Eight Ways Ranked Choice Voting Can Improve Voting and Elections.” August 17, 2018.

because better known candidates may be likely to receive a ranking on a voter's ballot even when they are not the first choice.

- Incumbents may be able to raise more money because they have greater name recognition and an established donor base to build upon which decreases the extent to which lower funding is an advantage in ranked choice voting.
- Academic research on ranked choice voting is limited, although some formal studies have been conducted. A recent study at San Francisco State University found that ranked choice voting does not reduce polarized voting.<sup>24</sup>
- Educating voters on ranked choice voting takes time and money.
- More debates could be needed in order to grant a large number of candidates equal say in public forums.
- The use of RCV could lead to suppressed turnout for under-represented groups if they do not understand the new voting method.<sup>25</sup>
- In races where a candidate wins after trailing first choices, some losing candidates and backers of those candidates may be less likely to accept the fairness of the results, especially in early elections with the RCV system.
- Winners in RCV elections always win a majority of the final "instant runoff." As with traditional runoff elections, the winning number of votes might not represent a majority of votes counted in the first round.

### BEST PRACTICES

The Center for Civic Design, a nonprofit focused on how to improve interactions between government and citizens, collaborated with FairVote and the Ranked Choice Voting Research Center on a project to recommend best practices for conducting a ranked choice election.<sup>26</sup> They are summarized below:

- Give voters all they need to prepare to vote.
- Fully explain the benefits.
- Answer all potential voters' questions.
- Show how the counting process works.
- Present everything in clear, succinct language.
- Use icons and infographics intentionally.
- Make election results as transparent as possible.
- Show the winner early, before explaining voter process.
- Describe what happens in each round.
- Show all rounds in counting.
- Make it easy for everyone to see the number of votes that are moved to each candidate.
- Make the ballot easy to read with clear instructions on how to rank candidates.
- Display one contest per page on a digital ballot. (Such ballots are not currently used in New Mexico.)
- Fit as many candidates as possible on a digital ballot (Such ballots are not currently used in New Mexico.)
- Create a review screen so voters can see who they voted for.

The Center for Civic Design has taken a national perspective on best practices for ranked choice voting. Ongoing research about the use of ranked choice voting in New Mexico is warranted to understand the impacts in New Mexico communities. For example, while some research suggests using infographics sparingly, the use of animated graphics proved effective in Santa Fe. Furthermore, door knocking and voter education about the process was a productive strategy in Santa Fe. There was a two-tiered effort used the City Clerk's office to implement the changes to the voting process and the City's Public Information office was responsible for supporting voter education. According to the City of Santa Fe's Public Information office and Clerk's office, "Out of more than 20,000, only 52 ballots had a critical overvote error in the first round, so more than 99% of ballots were valid in that round. Less than 4% of ballots had become exhausted by the final round. These are strong indicators that Santa Fe voters understood ranked choice voting and were not deterred from participating by the change in systems."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> McDaniel, Jason. 2018. "Does More Choice Lead to Reduced Racially Polarized Voting? Assessing the Impact of Ranked Choice Voting in Mayoral Elections." *California Journal of Politics and Policy*. Volume 10, Issue 2.

<sup>25</sup> January Advisors. "The Good and Bad of Ranked Choice Voting." Accessed September 17, 2019.

<sup>26</sup> Center for Civic Design. "Design Principles for Ranked Choice Voting." Accessed September 17, 2019.

<sup>27</sup> City of Santa Fe. Matt Ross, Public Information; Yolanda Vigil, City Clerk. "2018 Municipal Election After Action Review." Memo to mayor, city manager, city attorney, and members of governing body. March 23, 2018.

## Conclusion

Ranked choice voting has multiplied around the country at considerable speed. Traditional barriers to its implementation from outmoded voting equipment and software are quickly being removed. The genie is now out of the bottle. It appears to have the will of the people in many cities. In Maine, the voters have spoken in two statewide ballot measures in 2016 and 2018 and ranked choice is a reality in numerous elections, including the presidential election in 2020. In New Mexico, Santa Fe reported a successful election using ranked choice voting in 2018. Las Cruces will try it in November 2019 while Albuquerque has opted to delay considering the new method for now. New Mexico legislators have passed two enabling bills that were signed into law to permit ranked choice voting at the local level of government. The Secretary of State allowed public comment, input and feedback for new ranked choice voting rules. The New Mexico Supreme Court paved the way for ranked choice voting. There are numerous considerations for ranked choice voting – the top benefits being greater voter buy-in and avoiding expensive run-off elections that may keep voter turnout low. The main disadvantage is voters becoming confused by the new method which can be addressed through well-implemented voter education. Elections, while taken for granted in this day and age, were a revolutionary innovation at the founding of our country. In this modern era, voting practices continue to evolve – requiring the citizenry to actively engage, take their voting responsibilities seriously, and continually assess our processes to ensure fairness and trust in elections.

**Why We Wrote This Brief:** New Mexico First is committed to good governance as one of our policy pillars.

Free and fair elections are critical to a healthy democracy. A growing number of New Mexico communities are working to find electoral practices that engage voters; use local resources effectively; and create greater satisfaction with electoral outcomes. With change comes the need for fair and accurate voter education. This policy brief is intended to be a voter education tool.

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### WHAT IS NEW MEXICO FIRST?

New Mexico First, a **statewide public policy organization**, engages people in critical issues facing their state and communities through consensus-building processes that include diverse points of view. The nonpartisan, nonprofit group produces comprehensive policy reports – primarily on education, natural resources, ethics in government, health and the economy. These analyses inform policy discussions, legislative options and student learning. The backgrounders also provide the foundation for New Mexico First's unique town halls that convene people to develop proposals to improve the state. The reports are available at [nmfirst.org](http://nmfirst.org). The organization was co-founded in 1986 by retired U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman (D) and the late Senator Pete Domenici (R).



### CONTACT US

nmfirst.org  
info@nmfirst.org  
505.225.2140

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