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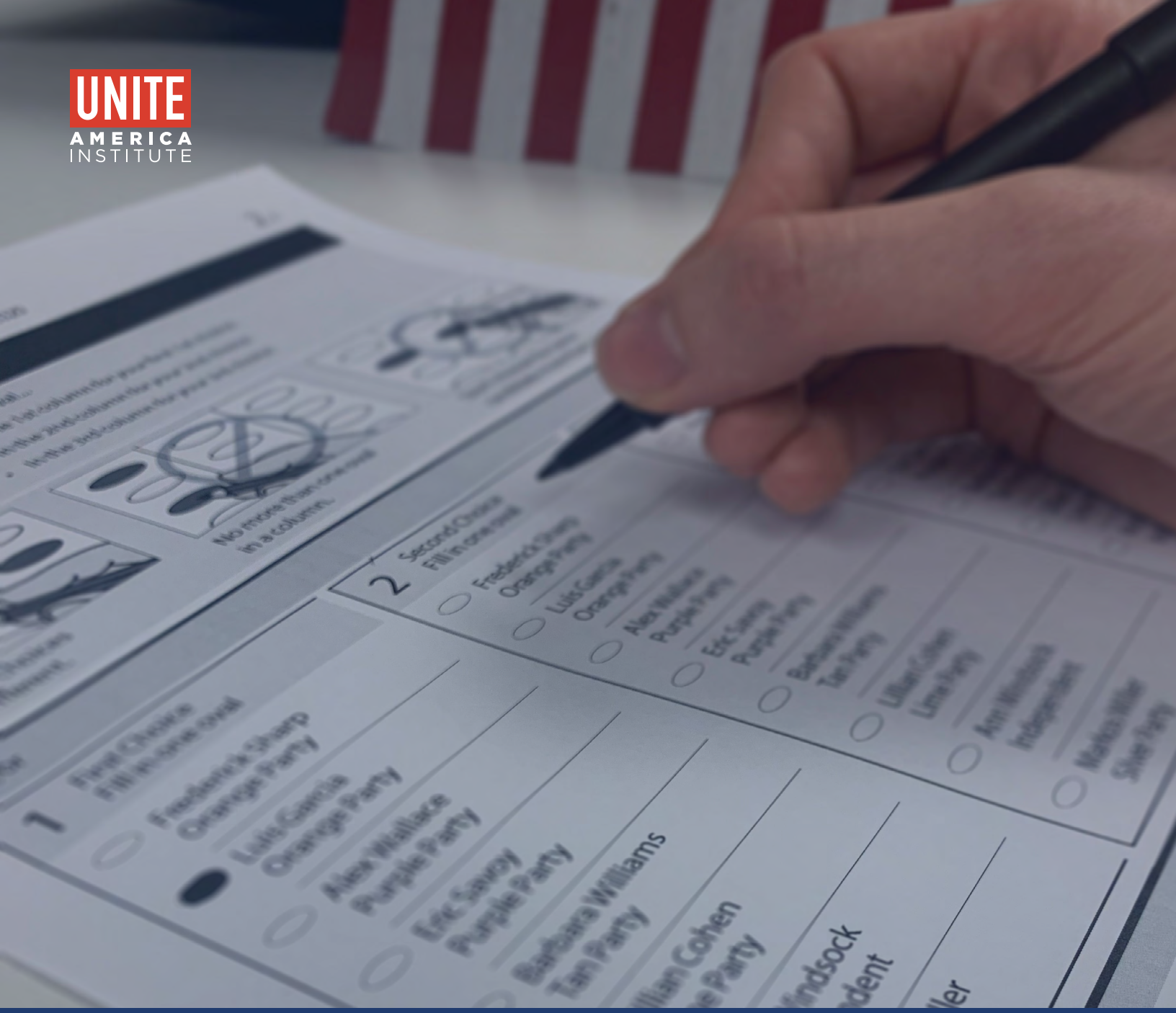


RANKED CHOICE VOTING

The Solution to the Presidential Primary Predicament

Unite America Institute

June 2020

Introduction

Presidential primaries are often the subject of deserved criticism: the process is long, confusing, divisive, varies by state and — most of all — may not produce outcomes that truly reflect the will of the people.

Voting in two of the smallest and least diverse states, Iowa and New Hampshire, sets the stage and candidate momentum for the national contest. Millions of votes are wasted in states with early or absentee voting on candidates that drop out of the race after votes have been cast. In many states, candidates receive delegates disproportionately to the number of votes they receive. For a country that aspires to be the world's leading democracy, we struggle with ensuring all voters' choices are valued equally and that the winners of our elections actually represent the majority.

The 2020 election cycle will be historic for many reasons, the biggest being that a global pandemic interrupted our democratic processes. Before the pandemic put a halt to normal voting processes virtually overnight, glaring issues were already present: votes were wasted, candidates received delegates disproportionately to voter preference, and tabulation processes and technology cracked under pressure. These issues are not unique to 2020. Fortunately, many of these systemic issues this year and years past can be mitigated in the future with a better voting system: ranked choice voting.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ranked choice voting (also referred to as RCV, Instant Runoff Voting, IRV) allows voters to rank candidates on a ballot in order of preference.

Instead of just voting for one candidate, voters identify their favorite candidate, second favorite candidate, third favorite candidate, and so on. In a presidential primary, the candidate with the fewest first round votes is eliminated, and voters who ranked this candidate first then have their votes count for the candidate ranked next on their ballot. This process continues until all remaining candidates have reached a minimum viability threshold (often 15 percent) or until someone has majority support (as in a winner-take-all election).

This simple change is a direct solution to the three main problems with our antiquated presidential primary process:

THE PROBLEM	RCV AS A SOLUTION
Wasted Votes Votes are wasted when candidates drop out of the race early, especially in states with early voting and vote by mail. When voters complete a ballot before Election Day, they risk voting for a candidate who could withdraw from the race. Yet, under the current system, voters who participate early are unable to express their second or third choice should their ideal candidate drop out of the race ahead of their state's primary date. Votes are also spoiled on candidates who do not meet minimum viability thresholds.	**RCV Values All Ballots** In contrast to voting for one candiate, RCV allows voters to rank multiple candidates in order of preference on the same ballot. Many states permit early voting and all states allow voters to participate absentee/by mail (though their restrictions vary). In either case, if a voter's first choice candidate dropped out before Election Day, their backup preferences can be counted instead. Valuing second and third place preferences helps prevent spoiled ballots and keeps voters enfranchised.
Disparities in Outcomes Candidates can win a significantly higher proportion of delegates in primaries than the vote share they earn, especially in states with winner-take-all delegate appropriation. This can lead to a distorted picture of voter support and discounts the preference of voters who supported candidates that didn't receive any delegates.	**RCV Leads to Fairer Delegate Allocation** In states where delegates are pledged in a more winner-take-all fashion, RCV helps ensure the winner has 50 percent support, lessening the discrepancy between voter preference delegate allocation. In states where a threshold of votes is required to receive delegates, ranked choice voting provides a clearer picture of candidate viability in order to award delegates. Turnout collectively more than doubled in the four party-run primaries that shifted from caucuses to vote-by-mail contests with RCV in 2020.

THE PROBLEM	RCV AS A SOLUTION
Unrepresentative Caucuses When voters only have the option to appear in-person on Election Day, lower turnout and participation ensues. As a result, as a candidate selection mechanism, caucuses are not representative of the eligible electorate and can even disenfranchise voters who can't appear in-person. Further, caucus math is convoluted and election administration is complicated, leading to results which are often delayed, and in the worst cases, inaccurate.	**RCV Makes Voting More Accessible** If in-person caucuses are maintained over primaries, ranked choice voting can be implemented to allow voters to participate early and through absentee voting. RCV would protect voters' rights to a secret ballot and RCV votes would also help leave a paper-trail of accountability in case tabulation technology or election administration is questioned.

Ranked choice voting is gaining traction as a tested solution to problems inherent in our primaries. In 2020, presidential primaries that used RCV experienced double or triple their normal turnout and no voters were spoiled on withdrawn candidates. Policymakers, party leaders, and election officials can, and should, act now to implement RCV as a commonsense, effective, and nonpartisan solution to our presidential primary predicament.

The Problem

i. Wasted Votes

One of the most problematic issues in primaries is the number of ballots that are rendered "spoiled" or "wasted," discounting the preferences of millions of voters. In a number of states, candidates who drop out of the race ahead of the state's primary or fail to reach a viability threshold are still awarded votes and/or delegates, minimizing the influence of voters in these contests. Ballots are "wasted" in presidential primaries in two main ways:

- **Withdrawn Candidates:** Votes are frequently wasted on candidates who drop out of the race, especially in states with earlier primaries that permit early in-person voting and vote by mail. Wasted votes also occur on Election Day, as dropped out candidates still appear on the primary ballot.
- **Candidates Don't Reach a Viability Threshold:** Votes can also be wasted if a candidate does not cross a viability threshold to earn delegates. In Democratic contests, the threshold is 15 percent. Republican contests with proportional allocation set a ceiling as high as 20 percent but states have the flexibility to set a lower qualifying threshold.

Votes wasted on withdrawn candidates or those least viable could make a big difference in delegate allocation, especially if a more competitive candidate falls just short of the 15 percent threshold. Alternatively, if a candidate does reach the viability threshold but is no longer in the race, they may still be awarded delegates, with a slim chance of clinching the nomination.

3,457,745

WASTED VOTES

Travel back to the first few Democratic primary races of 2020: during Super Tuesday, over a million ballots were wasted in 14 states on candidates that had already withdrawn from the race. As of May 2020, over 2 million votes had been cast in the Democratic presidential primaries for candidates who had already withdrawn from the race — that's 8.9 percent of all Democratic primary votes. Including candidates that didn't cross the viability threshold, another 3.3 percent of Democratic primary votes were wasted.[1]

The wasted vote problem was especially pronounced in the state of Washington's March 10th primary, where a full vote by mail system is used. The day before election day, about two-thirds of ballots were returned by mail. Of those returned, 34 percent of ballots were cast for candidates who had withdrawn prior to election day.[2] Washington's vote at home system enfranchises voters and yields higher voter turnout, but voters are disenfranchised when they aren't able to express their second or third choice.

1 For a table of wasted votes in 2020 Democratic Contests, see the Appendix, pg. 16

2 Otis, Deb. "Early votes in Washington were more likely to be wasted", FairVote (April 2020)

Wasted votes are not a problem unique to Democratic primaries, either. In the 2016 Republican primaries, more than half a million GOP votes were wasted[3], especially in states with high military and overseas voter turnout.[4] Many of these wasted votes were cast in states with very close contests: a difference of two to four percent of votes cast could have had an impact on the race. In Arizona, in March of 2016, tens of thousands of GOP voters were enfranchised by early voting, but 95,000 voters (nearly 20 percent of total votes cast) ultimately had their votes spoiled on withdrawn candidates.[5] Other races, such as those in Missouri, Vermont, and Michigan had very close margins of victory;

- **Missouri**: Donald Trump defeated Ted Cruz by 0.2 percent (1,726 votes) while 2 percent of votes cast (18,467) were for one of the seven candidates who had withdrawn from the race.
- **Michigan**: Ted Cruz beat John Kasich by 8,360 votes, though 3.45 percent (45,685 votes) were cast for the nine withdrawn candidates.
- **Vermont**: John Kasich lost by a margin of 1,425 votes as 2,251 votes (3.7 percent) were cast for the five withdrawn candidates.

ii. Disparities Between Voter Preference and Delegate Allocation

Besides the wasted vote issue inherent in our plurality system, the existing primary system allows candidates to be awarded delegates disproportionately to vote totals. This leads to distortion between what voters actually prefer and how delegates are allocated. The distortion can differ dramatically depending on how many candidates are in a race and how many votes are wasted. This problem is especially pronounced in Democratic contests with wasted votes and in Republican winner-take-all primaries. Discrepancies in delegate allocation are more pronounced in elections where more candidates flood the playing field or in races with a narrow margin of victory.

The Republican and Democratic parties award their delegates differently. After the initial weeks of voting, Republican primaries tend to be mostly winner-take-all, where the person with the most votes wins all delegates. Democratic primaries are proportional, where candidates receive delegates in proportion to the votes received if they meet the viability threshold. In addition, states could always take the tally down to the final two so that the media could report on who was the state's majority winner.

Ranked choice voting would improve both of these systems. In states where a threshold (e.g. 15 percent) is required to receive delegates, ranked choice voting would allow for more candidates to meet the threshold by eliminating the least viable candidates one by one, reallocating votes to more viable candidates, until all candidates meet the viability threshold. In winner-take-all systems, ranked choice voting guarantees the winner actually has majority support in the final round. In both instances, the reform would lessen discrepancies between voter preferences and delegate allocation.

3 For a table of wasted votes in 2016 Republican Contests, see the Appendix., pg. 17

4 According to federal law, military and overseas voters must be sent ballots at least 45 days before presidential primaries. To combat wasted votes, five states (Arkansas, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and South Carolina) use RCV for their military and overseas voters.

5 Richie, Rob. "Why nearly a fifth of Arizona GOP voters were disenfranchised by early vote - and how to fix it", FairVote (March 2016)

Republican Delegate Allocation

Distortion between voter preference and delegate allocation is especially acute in Republican primary races with winner-take-all elections. For example, in the 2016 South Carolina presidential primary, Donald Trump won all 50 delegates with just 32.4 percent of the vote, though Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz both received around 22 percent of the vote respectively: delegates weren't pledged to reflect the opinions of over 500,000 voters.[6] In the Ohio primary, John Kasich won all 66 delegates with 46.95 percent of the vote, though over 53 percent (or 1,055,074 votes) were for other candidates. After March 15, 2016, when more delegates were awarded in a winner-take-all system, millions of ballots were effectively discounted, even if the winner didn't receive 50 percent of the vote or other candidates had reached viability.

This type of delegate allocation is unfair for several reasons. Full voter preferences aren't expressed when a simple plurality determines how delegates are awarded. It's especially troublesome in races when over half of those that participate in elections don't have a voice in the outcome of pledged delegates; in many races, more people may have voted against the winning candidate than for the winning candidate. The result? Delegates are pledged disproportionately and against voter preference.

Democrat Delegate Allocation

In Democratic contests, there is often a disparity between the percent of votes received and the percent of delegates awarded. Delegate allocation can swing wildly in contents with wasted votes. Allocation is more proportional when more candidates meet the 15 percent threshold. If a large volume of votes are wasted on candidates who drop out of the race or don't meet viability (as is frequently the case in early states), winners can reap significant delegate gains; in at least 14 states in 2020, where a combined 1,263 delegates were at stake, the margin of victory between the first and second place candidate was smaller than the percentage of total wasted votes on candidates who had already dropped out of the race. If votes hadn't been wasted, the election winner and/or delegate allocations may have changed.

iii. Outdated Caucuses

Caucuses are controversial and serve to further complicate presidential delegate appropriation. In a traditional caucus, voters gather with others from their precinct and show their support for candidates by dividing into groups. Usually, candidates must receive 15 percent of their party's votes in the final round to be eligible to win delegates. If an individual supports a candidate that did not reach viability, they can "realign" by joining another candidate's group, persuading other voters from non-viable groups to join them, or stay undecided and sit out. After the second count, every candidate that reaches viability receives at least one delegate, and more delegates are allocated to the winning candidate using a mathematical formula. Caucuses are the subject of criticism for several reasons:

- **No Majority Support:** Just like in primaries, the proportion of votes won to delegates received is not always equal. In some cases, candidates can win a majority of delegates even if they've received fewer first round votes than another candidate.
- **Low Turnout:** Requiring people to show up at the same time and same place for a time-intensive process disenfranchises voters and decreases

6 "Popular Vote in Presidential Nominating Contests", FairVote (2016)

turnout. Generally, turnout in caucuses is significantly lower than other primary systems and is not representative of the voters at large. In the 2016 election, the average turnout in caucuses was 9.9 percent compared to 32.4 percent in states with primaries.[7] Usually, the most party-committed and faithful turnout to caucus, which typically means the more ideologically extreme voters.

- **No Paper Trail:** Voting with your feet to indicate candidate support makes it hard to create a paper trail for counting ballots without things going awry. Verifying votes and results is essential to election transparency and integrity.
- **No Secret Ballot:** Convening in groups to show support for a candidate goes against the right to a secret ballot, an essential tenet of free and fair elections.

Although fewer states used caucuses in 2020 than previous years, Democratic parties in three states and Republican parties in five states still use them to allocate delegates. Compared to 2016, both parties are using fewer caucuses in favor of primaries. In 2016, Democratic parties in 14 states used caucuses: in 2020, 11 of those states have opted for primaries, leaving Iowa, Nevada, and Wyoming with traditional caucuses.[8] Republican parties in thirteen states held caucuses in 2016, while five used them in 2020: Hawaii, Iowa, Kentucky, North Dakota, and Wyoming.

Despite their issues, caucuses solve a real problem in American politics by giving voters the opportunity to express a second choice if their first choice does not meet a minimum threshold of support. Voters can "re-align," with a new candidate, instead of being disenfranchised and having their vote not count. However, public opinion polling suggests most voters think the problems outweigh the benefits. In a 2016 poll about the electoral process, 81 percent of voters found primaries a more fair way to select nominees, where just 17 percent found caucuses to be more fair.[9] What's more concerning, 40 percent of adults had hardly any confidence in their party's nominating process.[10]

The 2020 Democratic Iowa Caucus was a fiasco: no clear winner could be determined following technology and tabulation snafus.[11] Caucuses in over a thousand different precincts were operating under new, complicated rules. Confusing matters further, a newly created mobile app designed to report back results to the state party malfunctioned, delaying the count by weeks. The Associated Press was "unable to declare a winner" given that two of the front runners were separated by a fraction of a percentage point.

7 Stein, Jeff. "The real obstacle to voter turnout in Democratic primaries; caucuses", Vox (May 2016)

8 Zoch, Amanda. "Elections 2020: Shifting from caucuses to primaries", NCSL (February 2020)

7 Epstein, Reid. "How the Iowa caucuses became an Epic Fiasco for Democrats", New York Times (February 2020)

8 NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. The Frustrated Public: Views of the 2016 Campaign, the Parties, and the Electoral Process, Associated Press (May 2016)

9 Verlee, Megan. "Americans don't like caucuses, but replacing them with primaries isn't easy", NPR (June 2016)

The Solution

i. Ranked Choice Voting in Practice

Ranked-choice voting (also referred to as instant run-off voting) allows voters to rank candidates in order of preference. Voters can rank as many or as few candidates as they wish, though ranking more candidates ensures that their vote will help elect someone they prefer.

Ranked choice ballots are counted in rounds. After the first round, the candidate finishing in last place with the fewest first choices is eliminated and voters who picked that candidate as their first choice will have their next choice vote counted. The process continues until all remaining candidates have received the minimum threshold of viability, or in the case of a winner-take-all system, until a candidate has earned 50 percent support.

ii. How Ranked Choice Voting Solves our Primary Woes

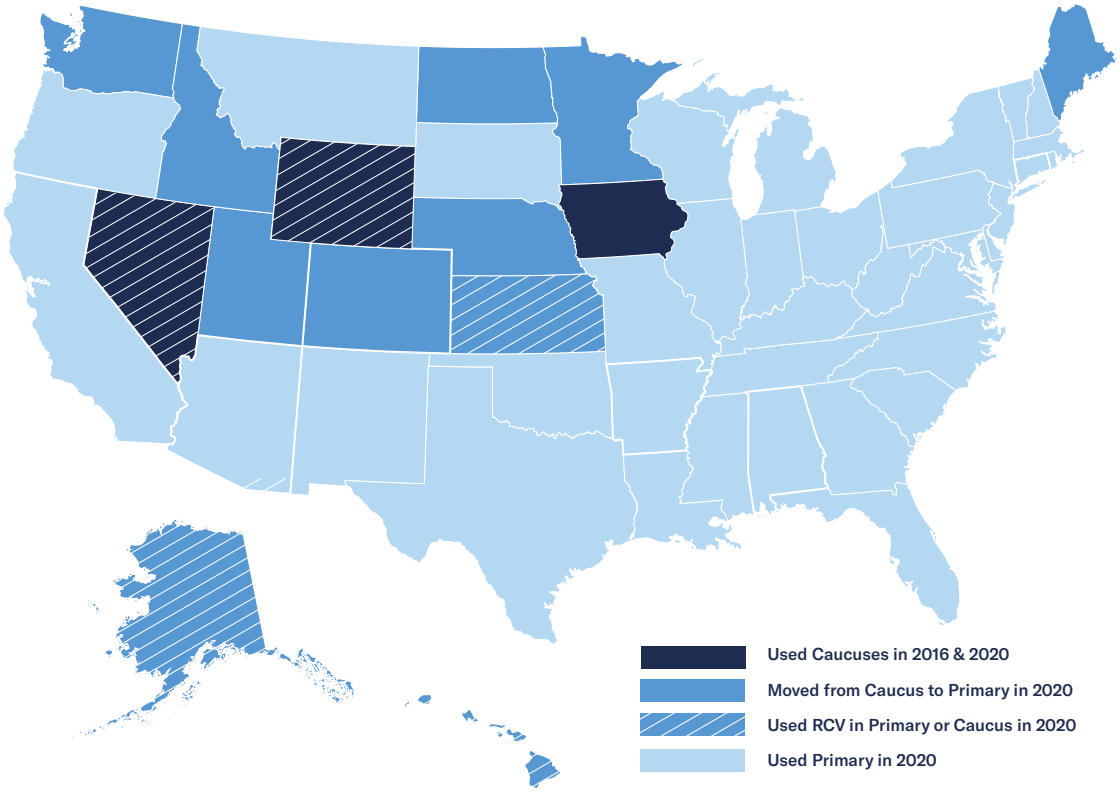
Ranked choice voting is a tested solution to our primary problems. In 2020, several states used ranked choice voting in their Democratic presidential primary contests (Alaska, Hawaii, and Kansas) and it was used in lieu of Wyoming's caucus and for early voting in Nevada's caucus. States are moving in this direction because it makes elections more convenient, accessible, fair, and solves the problems inherent in our current primary contests:

- **No Votes Wasted:** In a ranked choice voting system, virtually no votes are wasted when a candidate drops out of the race, since second, third, and fourth place preferences can be expressed on the same ballot. Ranked choice voting also helps solve wasted votes in states that allow vote by mail and early voting: if a candidate drops out of the race before election day, any ballot that expressed additional ranked preferences would not be spoiled.
- **Values Voter Preference:** Ranked choice voting lessens distortion between what people prefer and how delegates are allocated by giving voters a second and third choice in elections if their top choice drops out or doesn't meet baseline viability. With these preferences taken into account, election administrators can determine which candidate has a true majority (50 percent) support from all voters. In Democratic and Republican primaries with proportional representation, the system will also produce more candidates reaching the 15 percent threshold. In Republican winner-take-all primaries, RCV guarantees the winner has majority support. With more preferences captured, the system helps parties fairly assign delegates that better match the preferences of all voters.
- **Caucus Modernization:** Caucus systems should be praised for allowing voters a backup choice if their first choice candidate doesn't meet viability. Ranked choice voting is a better system because it allows voters to rank all candidates, makes voting more accessible, and leaves a paper-trail for accountability. If states wish to maintain in-person caucuses, they should complement them with ranked choice voting for early voters.

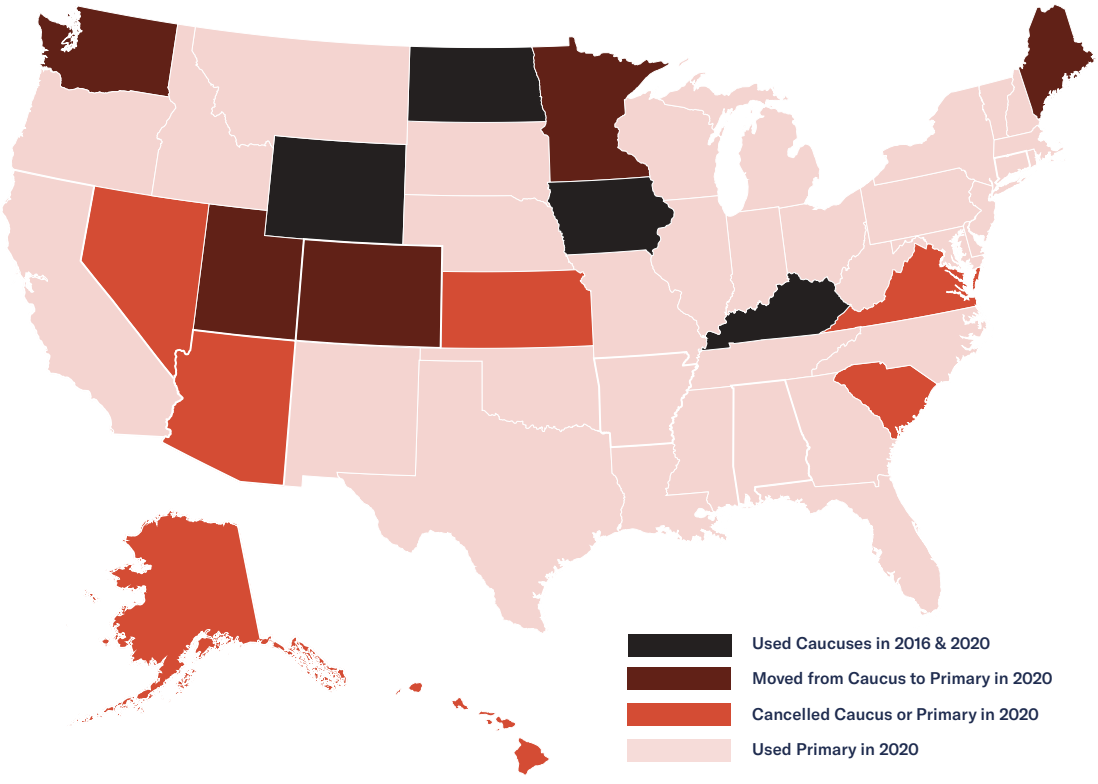
iii. RCV in 2020 Presidential Primaries

Using ranked choice voting in presidential primaries is gaining traction. State parties that used the new system in 2020 have seen productive results, especially when it comes to participation. Voter turnout in presidential primaries has long been

Presidential Democratic Caucuses and Primaries



Presidential Republican Caucuses and Primaries



a problem. In 2016, 71.5 percent of eligible voters failed to vote in their state's presidential primary or caucus. Even that low participation rate was close to setting a participation record.[12] The following examples demonstrate that ranked choice voting proves to be a powerful solution in boosting turnout, eliminating wasted votes, and running fair, efficient elections:

- **Nevada** Democrats utilized RCV for early caucus voters in 2020, which allowed the state to hold the first-ever presidential caucus with early voting. The number of 2020 early voters alone in Nevada nearly dwarfed total turnout in 2016 and 2008.[13] RCV allowed Nevada to preserve their caucus tradition while expanding the electorate with early voting for anyone who couldn't participate in-person on election day.
- **Alaska** Democrats switched from a caucus in 2016 to a primary with RCV in 2020, and held their election entirely vote at home. Turnout nearly doubled compared to caucus-goers in 2016, which is significant given that the election was held successfully amidst a global pandemic.[14] More than 99.8 of voters cast valid ballots, and more than nine in ten voters whose first choice was not viable ended up ranking a viable candidate as a backup choice.
- **Wyoming** Democrats' primary saw turnout more than double from the state's 2016 caucus. Party officials canceled in-person voting due to coronavirus, but were able to successfully pivot to mail-in voting with RCV by extending absentee deadlines.[15]
- **Kansas** Democrats' primary turnout tripled and set a record for primary participation even though the state was on lock-down due to coronavirus. Votes for candidates who are no longer in the race were redistributed over the course of four rounds of counting.[16]
- **Hawaii** ran their primary entirely by mail due to coronavirus, with an extended timeline for voters to request and return ballots. Voter turnout set a new record.
- **Utah** cancelled their in-person county and state caucus-conventions due to limitations on large meetings in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. As an alternative to their normal in-person caucus convention, both parties utilized ranked choice voting to indicate their approval of candidates in the first-ever virtual convention.[17]

iv. Challenges & Opportunities

There are several considerations involved with implementing ranked choice voting in presidential primaries, with three macro challenges and opportunities for policymakers:

Challenge #1: Administrative Changes

A change to the presidential primary voting system would require significant adaptations to election administration. Election officials would need to consider changes to ballot design, programming election systems, testing systems, training poll workers, certifying election results, conducting post-election audits, conducting recounts, and more.

12 Desilver, Drew. "Turnout was high in the 2016 primary season, but just short of 2008 record", Pew Research Center (June 2016)
13 Ginsburg, Adam. "More than 70,000 Nevada caucus votes cast with ranked choice voting ballots", FairVote (February 2020)
14 Linton, Caroline. "Alaska Democrats say they received almost double the ballots than in 2016 vote -by-mail primary", CBS News (April 2020)
15 Coulter, Tom. "Biden wins Wyoming Democratic caucus as party sees record turnout", Wyoming Tribune Eagle (April 2020)
16 Smith, Sherman. "Biden wins Kansas primary with 76.9% of votes as Democrats triple turnout", The Topeka Capital-Journal (May 2020)
17 Davidson, Lee. "Utah's in-person caucus-convention system is a casualty of the coronavirus", The Salt Lake Tribune (March 2020)

Opportunity: Given that many states have shifted from caucuses to primaries, change is already being confronted by many states. Educational materials and best practices can be shared and scaled from states and cities that already use RCV in their elections.

Challenge #2: Tabulation Technology

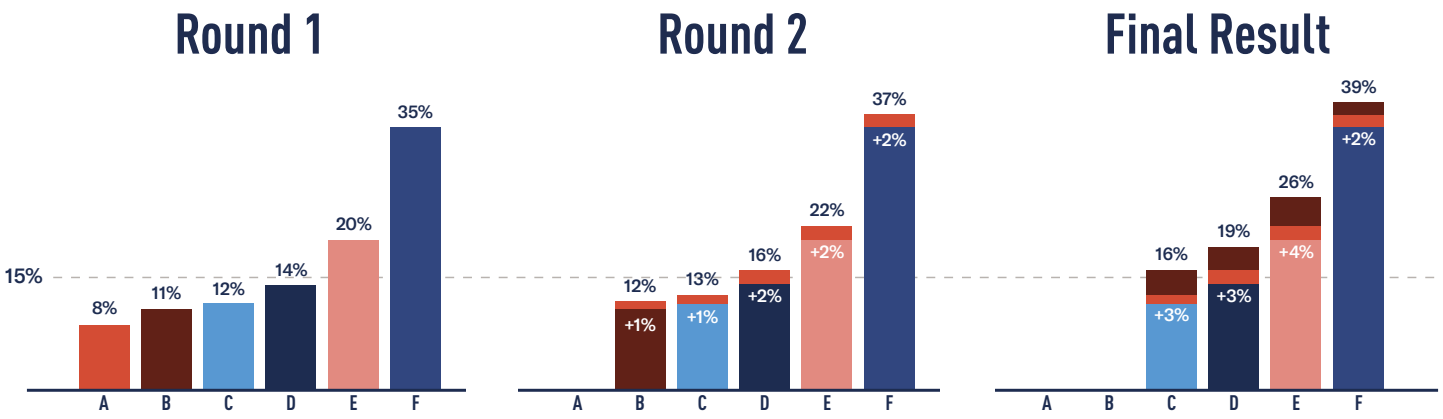
Voting technology is critical in helping to expedite tabulation and create more efficient and secure processes. States vary in their tabulation equipment and technology. Some may need to upgrade existing infrastructure or procure new resources to design and tabulate a ranked choice ballot.

Opportunity: Any change to a system is going to require a cost. For some states, updating equipment is already on the radar. There is precedent for federal funding when it comes to states upgrading to more secure systems. Additionally, tools such as the Universal RCV Tabulator, a federal tested open-source software, exist to tally election results using a converted cast vote record.[18]

Challenge #3: Voter and Candidate Education

Voter and candidate education, along with media awareness, are important components of implementing ranked choice voting. Voters should understand their options when reading and executing a ranked choice ballot. Candidates also need to understand the system so they can adjust their campaign tactics to seek second and third place votes. The media, once educated, can aid both audiences by spreading awareness about changes to voting processes and promoting resources.

Opportunity: Robust educational resources exist from experienced jurisdictions. Exit polling can be conducted in order to evaluate voter experience and improve education. Plus, in states that have implemented ranked choice voting, voters are in support of the process. In a 2018 exit survey of Maine voters, only one-in-ten voters said ranking a ballot was "somewhat hard" or "very hard"; 60.9 percent favored expanding RCV for other elections.[19]



18 Universal RCV Tabulator (URCVT), Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center

19 Robinson, Rich. "Large majority of Maine voters want to keep ranked choice voting and find it easy", FairVote (November 2018)

Conclusion

Representative outcomes of elections depend on ensuring all voters' voices are heard. Yet many of the contests in the last two presidential primary contests resulted in wasted votes and disparities between voter support and delegate allocation.

Unequal representation and spoiled ballots are real threats to our democracy, affecting Democrats, Republicans, and independents alike. Without reform, these issues will persist for cycles to come.

Ranked choice voting is an efficient, powerful solution to the problem and affords voters the choice and influence they deserve. Implementation in states that use RCV for presidential primaries has proven to be hugely successful in both boosting turnout and eliminating wasted votes. It also helps election administrators determine a clear winner, eliminating confusion and delays from races that are "too close to call."

Reformers considering ranked choice voting in presidential primary elections can and should act now. Successful implementation by the 2024 cycle depends on new legislation, new election administration, changes to tabulation methods, and voter and candidate education. Laying the groundwork now will not only ensure fair elections for decades to come, but will help elect leaders with true support from voters.

Appendix

i. Merits of Ranked Choice Voting

In addition to solving problems addressed above, ranked choice voting has many proven benefits in elections at the local and statewide level:

Produces Fair Elections

Many of our current elections promote candidates to office without ever receiving true majority (50 percent) support. Put a different way, many times more people voted against the winning candidate than for the winning candidate. Winners in a ranked-choice system are ultimately much more likely to represent what a majority of voters actually prefer, creating fair outcomes.

Addresses the "Spoiler Effect"

The "spoiler effect" occurs when a third candidate appears to have drawn support away from a candidate who is preferred by most voters. RCV combats against our current zero-sum system by increasing competition and mitigating the "spoiler effect" for independent, third party and non-establishment candidates.

Promotes Civil Campaigns

Voters are used to campaigns where candidates attack one another, vying for a winner-take-all victory. Candidates succeed in a ranked choice voting model not only when they attract a strong base of support, but when they connect with voters for their second or third place support. There is less incentive to negatively campaign against opponents if candidates need support from the entire electorate. In multiple studies of elections that utilize RCV, voters and candidates alike report less negative campaigning.[20]

Boosts Turnout

Voter turnout in municipal and statewide elections is often low compared to presidential primaries or the general election. RCV increases participation by combining two rounds of voting into one efficient, decisive election.

Reduces Costs

Run-off elections are costly, inefficient and usually experience lower turnout. RCV systems save taxpayer dollars by creating automatic run-off elections when the leading candidate earns less than 50 percent of the vote. Data from municipal elections suggests RCV has saved cities and taxpayers millions of dollars.

Allows for Instant Run-Offs in the Midst of National Emergencies

Hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and pandemics are unpredictable. Implementing a RCV system along with measures such as no-excuse absentee voting allows voters to express their full preference while keeping voters and election officials safe. It also helps parties continue to conduct caucuses and nominating conventions at times when such gatherings might be restricted.

Enfranchises Military and Overseas Voters

Five states use RCV for military and overseas voters. The system enfranchises these voters by allowing them to cast their runoff preferences without having to request a second mailed ballot for runoff elections.

ii. The Status of Ranked Choice Voting

Ranked-choice voting is not a newly trending phenomena. Over a hundred years ago, in the presidential election of 1912, versions of ranked choice voting were adopted in Florida, Indiana,

20 Campaign Civility: Ranked Choice Voting and Civil Campaigning, FairVote

Maryland, and Minnesota.[21] In recent years, RCV has gained more momentum amongst cities and states as a proven, cost-effective, fair method to conduct elections.

Cities

Currently, 18 cities have implemented multi-and/or single-winner RCV for mayor, city council, school board, or other municipal contests. Six others will soon conduct their first elections with RCV.

States

Maine is the only state that uses RCV in primary and general elections for congressional representatives. They will also use it for the presidential election in November 2020.

Five states — Arkansas, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and South Carolina — and the city of Springfield, Illinois, use RCV for their military and overseas voters.

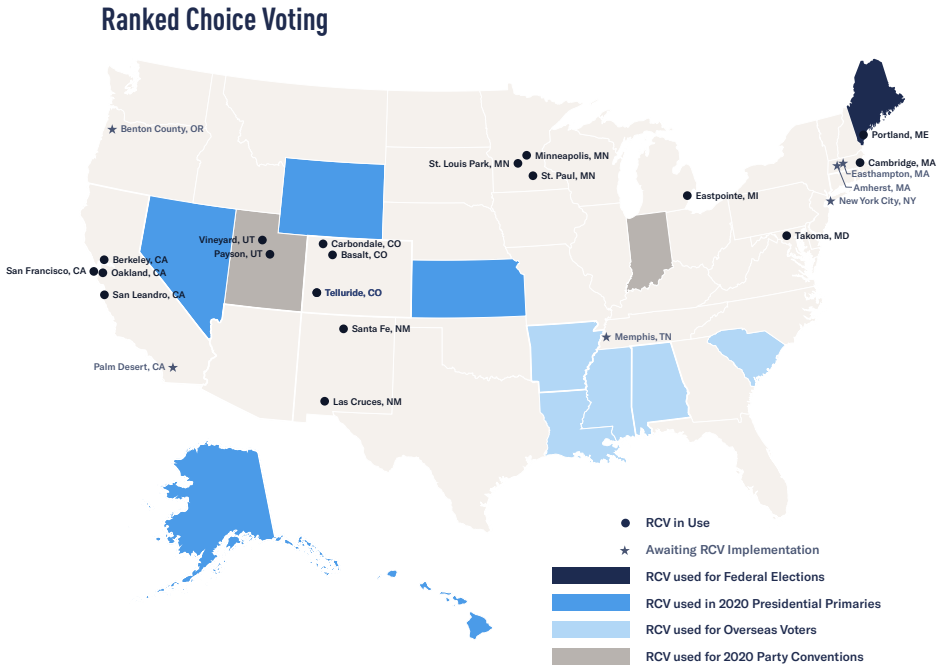
In 2018, Utah passed a bill to allow municipalities to pilot ranked choice voting. The bill passed with overwhelming majorities in both the house and senate and will allow municipal elections to pilot RCV from 2019 through 2026. In 2020, a similar bill passed in Virginia with bipartisan support.

Countries

Several other countries use RCV for local and national races, including Australia, Fiji, Malta, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of Ireland, Scotland, and the United Kingdom.

Upcoming Opportunities

Voters in Massachusetts and Alaska will have the opportunity to support ranked choice voting in their state through ballot measures. Massachusetts's proposed measure would bring RCV to most primary and general elections in the state starting in 2022. Alaska's proposed measure, would implement RCV and top-four nonpartisan primaries. Both measures will likely be on the November 2020 ballot for voter approval.



21 http://archive.fairvote.org/irv/vt_lite/history.htm

iii. Wasted Votes in the Last Two Presidential Primary Contests

2020 Democratic Contests with Wasted Votes

Highlighted states indicate the margin of victory was less than the share of wasted votes.

State	Primary/ Caucus	Date	Delegates At Stake	# Of Withdrawn Candidates	# Of Wasted Votes On Dropped Out Candidates	# Of Wasted Votes Under Delegate Threshold	Share Of Wasted Votes	Margin Of Victory
SC	Primary	Feb. 29	54	5	3,061	164,276	31.66%	28.50%
NH	Primary	Feb. 11	24	7	723	88,322	30.02%	1.30%
VT	Primary	March 3	16	7	6,867	36,009	27.17%	28.80%
WA	Primary	March 10	89	10	376,206	13,199	25.00%	1.40%
NV	Caucus	Feb. 22	36	3	93	23,598	23.33%	41.70%
CO	Primary	March 3	67	5	9,863	11,876	22.80%	12.30%
AZ	Primary	March 10	67	12	129,322	2,934	22.51%	11.50%
OK	Primary	March 3	37	9	21,498	45,782	22.10%	13.20%
AR	Primary	March 3	31	13	22,084	24,476	20.37%	18.10%
AL	Primary	March 3	52	9	7,938	79,635	19.37%	46.80%
MA	Primary	March 3	91	10	73,962	180,517	18.21%	6.90%
ME	Primary	March 3	24	7	8,582	25,972	17.25%	1.20%
FL	Primary	March 17	219	13	255,764	8,711	15.21%	39.20%
UT	Primary	March 3	29	8	28,555	1,702	13.73%	17.70%
VA	Primary	March 3	99	9	30,481	141,063	12.94%	30.10%
CA	Primary	March 3	415	11	603,920	14,004	10.96%	7.50%
OH	Primary	April 28	136	8	94,255	0	10.95%	69.20%
MI	Primary	March 10	125	12	141,379	9,461	9.51%	16.50%
NC	Primary	March 3	110	11	118,153	6,649	9.44%	18.90%
TX	Primary	March 3	228	10	186,383	8,695	9.40%	4.50%
MN	Primary	March 3	75	10	52,566	67,184	9.02%	8.70%
ID	Primary	March 10	20	12	8,379	868	8.57%	6.40%
TN	Primary	March 3	64	10	35,075	2,929	7.25%	16.70%
ND	Caucus	March 10	14	9	900	89	6.86%	13.50%
WI	Primary	April 7	84	10	45,337	3,918	5.32%	31.10%
IL	Primary	March 17	155	9	66,882	9,118	4.85%	22.90%
MO	Primary	March 10	68	12	26,820	4,879	4.77%	25.50%
MS	Primary	March 10	36	7	10,047	989	4.09%	66.30%
IA	Caucus	Feb. 4	41	0	0	3,825	2.22%	1.40%
				Total	**2,365,095**	**980,680**	*Source: Adapted from FairVote*	

2016 Republican Contests with Wasted Votes

Highlighted states indicate the margin of victory was less than the share of wasted votes.

State	Primary/ Caucus	Date	Delegates At Stake	# Of Withdrawn Candidates	# Of Wasted Votes	Share Of Wasted Votes	Margin Of Victory
AZ	Primary	March 22	58	10	98,794	15.84%	18.35%
MD	Primary	April 26	38	8	17,016	3.71%	30.88%
VT	Primary	March 1	16	5	2,266	3.69%	2.35%
MI	Primary	March 8	59	9	45,693	3.45%	11.87%
FL	Primary	March 15	99	9	78,407	3.32%	18.68%
ID	Primary	March 8	32	8	6,870	3.09%	17.33%
DE	Primary	April 26	16	3	2,085	2.98%	40.42%
LA	Primary	March 5	46	8	8,980	2.98%	3.62%
MS	Primary	March 8	40	9	10,567	2.54%	11.12%
IN	Primary	May 3	57	6	28,135	2.53%	16.63%
IL	Primary	March 15	69	7	36,250	2.50%	8.57%
AR	Primary	March 1	40	8	10,100	2.46%	2.29%
WI	Primary	April 5	42	9	26,136	2.35%	13.18%
PA	Primary	April 26	71	3	36,373	2.28%	34.94%
MA	Primary	March 1	42	8	13,737	2.16%	31.11%
TX	Primary	March 1	155	7	60,053	2.12%	17.01%
NC	Primary	March 15	72	8	23,849	2.07%	3.47%
TN	Primary	March 1	58	9	17,714	2.07%	14.23%
MO	Primary	March 15	52	7	18,547	1.97%	0.21%
OH	Primary	March 15	66	6	30,552	1.54%	11.08%
KY	Caucus	March 5	46	7	3,462	1.51%	4.30%
OK	Primary	March 1	43	7	6,819	1.48%	6.05%
ME	Caucus	March 5	23	6	245	1.32%	13.31%
GA	Primary	March 1	76	8	17,056	1.32%	14.36%
AL	Primary	March 1	50	7	10,623	1.24%	22.33%
VA	Primary	March 1	49	8	11,532	1.12%	2.10%
HI	Caucus	March 8	19	2	149	0.95%	11.13%
NH	Primary	Feb. 9	23	6	3,509	0.90%	19.51%
KS	Caucus	March 5	40	3	621	0.85%	24.81%
CT	Primary	April 26	28	1	1,733	0.81%	29.51%
RI	Primary	April 26	19	1	382	0.62%	39.37%
NV	Caucus	Feb. 23	30	6	338	0.45%	22.06%
SC	Primary	Feb. 20	50	6	2,786	0.37%	9.99%
				Total	**631,379**	*Source: Adapted from FairVote*	

About

The Unite America Institute is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that conducts research and provides analysis on the root causes, effects, and potential solutions to political polarization and partisanship.

The Institute is particularly focused on exploring how non-partisan election reforms — including vote at home, independent redistricting commissions, ranked choice voting, and nonpartisan primaries — increase participation, accountability, and competition in the political system.

This report was written by Policy Manager Beth Hladick with assistance from Deputy Director for Reforms & Partnerships Tyler Fisher and editing by Sr. Communications Manager Brett Maney. Our research was informed by many practitioners working in the field, and we are grateful for the research and data from experts at FairVote and the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center. We are especially thankful for the comments and suggestions provided by Rob Richie.