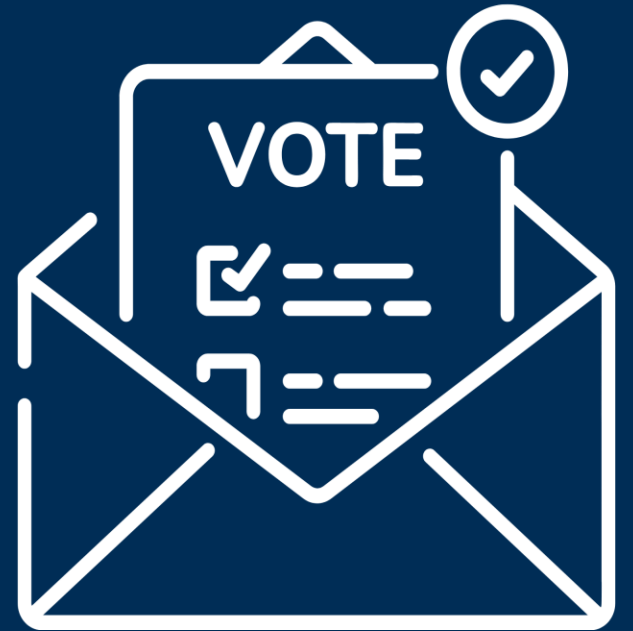


A Policy Proposal for Instant Runoff Elections with Ranked Choice Voting

Sponsored by Denver City Council Members

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What is Ranked Choice Voting with Instant Runoffs?

- Instant Runoffs with Ranked Choice Voting allow voters to rank candidates in order of preference (1st choice, 2nd choice, 3rd choice, etc.) instead of selecting and voting for just 1 candidate.
- If no candidate receives more than 50% of the first-choice votes, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and those ballots are transferred to the voter's next-ranked choice candidate.
- This process repeats until one candidate has received an active majority of the votes and is declared the winner.

	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice
Candidate A	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Candidate B	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Candidate C	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How Does Ranked Choice Voting Work?

- Step 1:** All first choices are tallied. If a candidate receives more than half (50%+1) of the first-choice votes, that candidate wins, like in any other election.
- Step 2:** If there is no majority winner after counting the first-round choices, the race is decided by an “instant runoff.”
- Step 3:** The candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and voters who picked that candidate as their top choice will have their next-ranked candidate counted.
- Step 4:** The process continues until an active majority winner (i.e., a candidate who wins with more than 50% of the ranked votes) is determined.

RANK YOUR
Sample!

1st choice

2nd choice

3rd choice

4th choice

5th choice

SAMPLE 1	1	2	3	4	5
SAMPLE 2	1	2	3	4	5
SAMPLE 3	1	2	3	4	5
SAMPLE 4	1	2	3	4	5
Write-in	1	2	3	4	5

RANK EACH CANDIDATE IN ORDER OF PREFERENCE

Color in the 1 next to your 1st choice, the 2 next to your 2nd choice, and so on.
Fill one bubble per row, one bubble per column.
Don't rank a single candidate more than once.
Note: Ranking 2nd, 3rd, and later choices will not hurt your 1st choice.

Benefits of Instant Runoffs with Ranked Choice Voting

- **Higher Turnout and Engagement:** Some RCV cities experienced a 17% higher turnout in municipal elections, as campaigns contacted more voters. ([Dowling et al., 2024](#))
- **Easy for Young Voters:** Young people tend to vote more in RCV cities, driven by kinder campaigns and outreach. ([Juelich & Coll, 2021](#))
- **Diverse Voter Turnout:** Voters of all races turn out as much or more under RCV than in non-RCV places. ([Dowling et al., 2024](#))
- **Saves Money:** The Denver Clerk and Recorder estimates that Instant Runoffs with Ranked Choice Voting will save the City \$2 million by eliminating runoff elections, which would be redirected into voter education.



How Many Candidates Can Voters Rank?

Up to 6 Candidates (Ranked 1-6)

- At the **Clerk and Recorder's** request, the bill allows voters to rank up to 6 candidates for each elected office.
- No candidate will be left off the ballot, and there is no limit on how many candidates can run for elected office.

Peer City Analysis on Number of Candidate Rankings

- **Oakland, CA:** Rank up to 5
- **St. Paul, MN:** Rank up to 3
- **Minneapolis, MN:** Rank up to 3
- **San Francisco, CA:** Rank up to 10
- **NYC, NY:** Rank up to 5
- **Boulder, CO:** Rank **all** candidates
- **Cambridge, MA:** Rank up to 15



What Happens After Election Day?

Election Night Reporting and Counting

- All first-choice voters are counted and reported.
- In non-competitive races, the winner may be presumed on election night, although certification is a necessary step before a formal victory.

Posting Election Night Reporting and Counting

- Conduct round-by-round reporting on early results and update as ballots are received.
- Roughly 10 days after election night, all ballots will be tabulated.



What Are Risk-Limiting Audits (RLA)?

- Risk-limiting audits are the gold standard mechanism that Denver and Colorado use to test for statistical confidence in election results, which has been in use since 2009.
- In Colorado, the "risk limit" is often 3% or less, meaning that if an audit is successful, there is less than a 3% chance that a wrong outcome would have gone undetected during the audit. If the RLA shows no discrepancies, the election is certified by the canvass board. If differences are found, more ballots must be audited and counted.

Risk-Limiting Audits (RLAs) in Ranked Choice Voting and Instant Runoffs

Single-Winner Races: RLAs are common in ranked choice voting for single-winner races.

- For example, a successful RLA was conducted for the first time in a Colorado ranked-choice voting race during the most recent Boulder Mayoral election.

Multi-Winner Races: RLA for multi-winner races cannot be fully implemented in ranked choice voting because the necessary tools, math, and technology are still developing. Denver could opt for a less rigorous audit for multi-winner races or move to all single-winner races.

Peer City Analysis: New York City

- **Record Voter Turnout:** The 2025 NYC Ranked Choice Voting had a record turnout with 1,026,783 Democrats voting, the highest mayoral primary since 1989 and 9% higher than 2021. ([Politico](#))
- **25% Increase in New Early Voters:** The 2025 primary saw a 25% increase in new early voters. ([Gothamist](#))
- **3 Rounds to Declare a Winner:** The mayoral nominee secured an active majority after three rounds of counting. ([City & State New York](#))
- **Simple and Easy:** Exit polls found 96% of voters say ranked choice voting is simple, and 76% of voters want to keep it. ([Fair Vote](#))
- **More Positive Campaigns:** Joint campaign events and cross-candidate endorsements led voters to report more positive campaigns. ([The Guardian](#))



Peer City Analysis: St. Paul and Minneapolis



In 2009, Minneapolis adopted ranked choice voting (RCV) for municipal elections, with St. Paul following in 2011 for mayor and City Council races.

- **10% Increase in Voter Turnout:** Ranked choice voting in the Twin Cities led to a nearly 10-point rise in voter turnout, notably in high-poverty areas. ([Minnesota Reformer](#))
- **More Diversity on City Council:** Minneapolis now has a majority council of women and people of color ([Minneapolis City Council](#)). St Paul elected the nation's first all-female, majority BIPOC council in 2024 ([AP News](#)).
- **Increase in Positive Campaigns:** Voters said local races were more civil and issue-focused, resulting in more positive campaigns. ([Sightline Institute](#))

Supporters of Instant Runoffs with Ranked Choice Voting

- [Common Cause Colorado](#)
- [Colorado Black Women for Political Action](#)
- [League of Women Voters Colorado](#)
- [New Era Colorado](#)
- [Veterans For All Voters](#)
- [Fair Vote](#)
- [Colorado Working Families Party](#)
- [Mi Familia Vota](#)



Timeline for Instant Runoffs with Ranked Choice Voting

- **May 28, 2024:** Budget and Policy Committee Presentation
- **May 27, 2025:** Budget and Policy Committee Presentation
- **July 15, 2025:** Finance and Governance Public Hearing
- **July 21, 2025:** Proposed First Reading at City Council
- **August 4, 2025:** Proposed First Reading at City Council
- **November 4, 2025:** Charter Amendment Election
- **2027 Municipal Election:** If approved by Denver voters, Instant Runoffs with Ranked Choice Voting would begin in the 2027 municipal elections.



Questions and Discussion

