FACT SHEET

The Case for Majority Winners

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Rainey Center

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A fundamental principle of America's representative democracy is that elected officials should reflect the will of the majority of the electorate, not just a narrow faction.

Requiring candidates to win with a majority (50% + 1)—rather than a mere plurality—ensures that public officeholders have broad support from the voters they serve.

This system fosters more inclusive and representative elections, encouraging candidates to reach beyond their base and build winning coalitions. It also discourages polarizing figures who may dominate primaries but struggle in general elections—a crucial benefit as more Americans identify as independents and express frustration with the limitations of the two-party system.

For conservatives focused on better governance, majority winners are more likely to represent diverse constituencies, build consensus, and perform well in general elections, strengthening democratic institutions.

Majority Support Reflects True Legitimacy

A candidate who secures a majority of votes—whether through a runoff or ranked-choice voting (RCV)—can legitimately claim to represent the collective will of the voters. Plurality winners, on the other hand, may ascend to office with only a fraction of support, leaving large portions of the electorate unrepresented or dissatisfied.

Discouraging Polarization and Extremism

In a plurality system, candidates can win simply by catering to a narrow, but highly motivated, base of voters, often leading to more polarized candidates who are less competitive in general elections. A majority system encourages candidates to appeal to a broader spectrum of the electorate to secure enough votes to reach the majority threshold.

Increased Accountability

When candidates must earn a majority, they are more likely to remain responsive and accountable to a wider range of constituents, knowing that their political survival depends on broad support. This contrasts with plurality systems where candidates might focus on small factions or interest groups, reducing their accountability to the broader electorate.

Reduction of the "Spoiler" Effect

Plurality voting often leads to the "spoiler" phenomenon, where multiple candidates split votes, potentially allowing a less popular candidate to win. In majority systems, voters can express their preferences more fully, knowing their votes will not be wasted, which encourages greater participation and strengthens the overall democratic process.

Improved Voter Engagement and Confidence

When voters see that their votes contribute to a clear, majority-based outcome, it enhances their confidence in the system. They are less likely to feel alienated or disillusioned by a process where candidates can win with only a small, sometimes unrepresentative, slice of support.

The Case for Ranked Choice Voting

Both second-round runoff elections and ranked-choice voting (RCV) are designed to ensure that winning candidates have the support of a majority of voters, addressing a key limitation of simple plurality systems and boosting the legitimacy of the elected representative. Both methods reduce the likelihood of a candidate winning with only a narrow plurality, but RCV is often considered more cost-effective.

Conservatives Can Vote their Consciences

RCV gives conservatives the freedom to vote their conscience without having to worry about "splitting the vote" or other tactical concerns. That means Republicans can vote for the candidate or candidates they prefer.

Gives Voters More Choices

RCV elections incentivize more candidates to run and to stay in the race, allowing voters to choose candidates who answer to them.

Empowers the Grassroots

RCV empowers the grassroots over the establishment and party insiders. Unlike plurality elections, where the establishment pushes out underfunded candidates and political outsiders by labeling them "spoilers," RCV elections reward competition, strengthening the party and allowing fresh voices to be heard.

Brings Conservative Issues into Campaigns

RCV rewards issue-based campaigning. All candidates in the race must reach out to conservatives as part of their coalition of supporters. Conservatives are never forced to rank or support a candidate they do not want.

Ensures the Right to Vote for Our Overseas Military

In primaries and run-off elections, voters serving overseas must submit their ballots long before Election Day to ensure they are counted. That often means candidates they support drop out after their ballots are cast, or new information that affects the chances of their top choice comes to light. For this reason, six southern states use ranked ballots for overseas military voters.

Encourages Majority Support

RCV ensures that the winning candidate has broad appeal by requiring them to obtain a majority of votes, rather than just a plurality. This avoids unrepresentative plurality wins in crowded primary fields and ensures the most-competitive advances to the general election.

Strengthens the Party

RCV encourages candidates to appeal not just to their base but also to single-issue voters, conservatives, libertarians, moderates, and independents. This helps Republicans expand their appeal beyond their core supporters, attracting a broader coalition of voters.

Improves Candidate Quality

By rewarding candidates who can build broad coalitions, RCV encourages nominating candidates seen as capable leaders across different factions within the party, leading to stronger general election candidates.

Reduces Spoiler Effect

In races where a third-party Libertarian candidate runs, RCV allows voters to support that candidate without inadvertently helping elect a less preferred candidate, ensuring conservative votes are not wasted.

Aligns with Federalism

RCV empowers states and localities to tailor their electoral processes to the needs and preferences of their residents, fitting with the conservative principle of federalism and the role of states as “laboratories of democracy.”

Fiscally Responsible

RCV eliminates the need for costly runoff elections, saving taxpayers money and streamlining the election process.



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