

Maine Electorate Adopts Instant-Runoff Voting

In November 2016, Maine voters passed Question 5 52% to 48%:

*“Do you want to allow voters to rank their choices¹ of candidates in elections for **U.S. Senate, Congress, Governor, State Senate, and State Representative**, and to have ballots counted at the state level in multiple rounds in which last-place candidates are eliminated until a candidate wins by majority?”*

Maine will embark on this adventure in the 2018 primary and general elections. Maine is the first state to reject plurality voting and adopt instant-runoff voting (IRV) for governor, the state legislature and non-presidential federal elections.²

In plurality voting, when there are more than 2 candidates, the candidate with the most votes (a plurality) wins even though in head-to-head contests between candidates, the winning candidate may have been the electorate’s least favorite candidate.

Maine was ripe for IRV. Since 1986 there have been more than 2 main candidates in every gubernatorial race in Maine. Only in 1998 did the winner receive 50% of the vote.³ The Maine LWV has supported IRV since 2011 and worked with legislators on Question 5’s language.

In IRV, voters rank the candidates 1 for their first choice, 2 for their second choice and so on. If no candidate gets a majority of 1st-choice votes, then the candidate with the least number of 1st-choice votes is eliminated and the top remaining choices on all the ballots are counted.⁴ If a candidate has a majority of the votes in the second round, the candidate wins. If not, the process is repeated until one candidate receives a majority of the votes on the remaining ballots.⁵

The first round of counting ballots will occur locally and be reported to the Secretary of State. Subsequent rounds will be tallied in a central location.

The LWVBC Voting Methods Team looks forward to seeing Maine’s future election results!

For more perspective about Question 5, read The Center for Election Science’s analysis at [https://electology.org/blog/maine%E2%80%99s-ranked-choice-voting-it%E2%80%99s-not-plurality?ct=t\(October_Newsletter_2016\)&mc_cid=ba0f8c5ae4&mc_eid=570b566f08](https://electology.org/blog/maine%E2%80%99s-ranked-choice-voting-it%E2%80%99s-not-plurality?ct=t(October_Newsletter_2016)&mc_cid=ba0f8c5ae4&mc_eid=570b566f08)] The Center's "positive though very cautious assessment" argues that two supporters' claims and two opponents' claims were false.

NOTES

¹ Maine's Question 5 references ranking choices, i.e., **Ranked Choice Voting**. But because **RCV** covers other voting methods, such as the **Bucklin** (aka *Grand Junction*) method, this article refers to the voting method by its more specific name, **IRV**

² Other state executive officers (attorney general, treasurer, secretary of state and state auditor) are chosen by the state legislature.

³ In 2014 LePage won with 48.2% of the vote; 2010 LePage 37.6%; 2006 Baldacci 38.11%; 2002 Baldacci 47.15%; 1998 King 58.61% (King was Independent—plus Republican, Democrat and Green candidates); 1994 King 35.37%; 1990 McKernan 46.7%; 1986 McKernan 39.9%; 1982 Brennan 61.91% (only 2 candidates)

⁴ If a voter only ranked the eliminated candidate and no others, then the ballot is “exhausted” and not counted in subsequent rounds.

⁵ The claim that IRV “elects majority winners” is misleading. See Supportive Claim #2 in the Center for Election Science’s analysis of Question 5.