

## **Measure 117 – Statewide Ranked Choice Voting**

**OFFICIAL TITLE:** Gives voters the option to rank candidates in order of preference; candidate receives majority votes in final round wins.

**REFERRAL:** Measure 117 is a statutory amendment referred to voters by the 2023 Oregon Legislature with a vote of 35 yea (with one excused) in the House and a last day of session vote of 17 yea (with 5 absent) in the Senate. The nay votes were 8 in the Senate (with 5 not voting) and 17 in the House (with 9 not voting).

**ESTIMATE OF FINANCIAL IMPACT:** Measure 117 is estimated to cost the state government approximately \$0.9 million during the 2023-25 biennium. These costs will pay for the Secretary of State’s needed staff and consulting services to begin carrying out the measure. In the 2025-27 biennium, the cost of the measure is estimated to reach \$5.6 million, covering continued staff and consulting services, as well as outreach and IT needs. Local government costs are less known. County clerks currently estimate that the measure will cost \$2.3 million initially. This funding will be used to improve technology, train staff, and test the new system. Every statewide election will cost an additional \$1.8 million for added printing and logistics. Software and maintenance contract costs will cost an additional \$0.4 million per year

**PROBABLE RESULT OF “YES” VOTE:** A “Yes” vote gives voters the option to rank candidates in order of preference for specified federal and statewide offices. It establishes a process for tallying votes in rounds, with the candidate receiving the fewest votes in each round being defeated and votes for the defeated candidate going to the voter’s next-highest-ranked active candidate. A candidate must receive a majority of votes in the final round of voting to win the election.

**PROBABLE RESULT OF “NO” VOTE:** A “No” vote maintains the current voting system. Each voter selects one candidate for federal and statewide offices. The candidate with the most votes wins. A majority of votes is not required for a candidate to win an election.

**BACKGROUND:** Currently the election method Oregon uses to select a single winner restricts voters to selecting only one candidate for a single office. The winner does not need to garner a majority of votes but simply the “most votes,” meaning candidates can win with only 20% or 30% of the vote.

Measure 117 allows an instant runoff, with a majority winner among candidates remaining in the final round, by providing an option to rank more than one candidate, if desired, for statewide and federal offices; write-in candidate(s) are also allowed.

When votes are counted, if no candidate receives a majority of votes (50% plus 1 vote) of voters’ first choices, the votes are tallied in automatic runoffs. The candidate receiving the fewest votes is defeated. Voters who marked that defeated candidate as their first choice will then have their vote automatically counted for their next choice (if they marked one). These automatic rounds continue until a candidate reaches a majority of the votes.

The measure, which would start with elections beginning in 2028, requires that a voter education program be established, involving community-based organizations. As the measure authorizes local governments to adopt the election methods for local offices, the Secretary of State would be required to offer guidance (formal or informal) regarding the method to local government/service jurisdictions and school districts. [See the “proposal section” for offices that are covered under the measure.]

**PROPOSAL:** This measure will change the current voting method for certain statewide offices in Oregon. Instead of a “pick one” election, in which a majority win is not required, it will adopt a method called ranked choice voting. Voters have the option to rank the candidates in their order of preference: 1st choice, 2nd choice, 3rd choice, etc. Voters can still choose just one candidate, if they desire. Only their active choice will count for any round. The final round will require a majority winner.

The change will take effect in 2028 and will be valid for both primaries and general elections. It will not include the Oregon Legislature (Oregon senators or representatives). It will include all elections in which voters throughout the state participate: US President and Vice President, US senators and representatives, Oregon Governor, Oregon Secretary of State, State Treasurer, State Attorney General, and State Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor and Industries.

The measure allows for special rules for electing multiple winners. It authorizes cities or counties to adopt ranked choice voting if they so choose and if not prohibited by their home charter. It includes provisions for culturally-appropriate, community-based education of voters by the Secretary of State.

### **Supporters say:**

1. Measure 117 ensures that the final winner is supported by a majority of Oregonians. Conversely, in our current system a candidate can win with a very small percentage of the vote – meaning most voters voted for someone else. When electing one winner, majority rule is considered a fundamental principle of a democratic republic.
2. Over 50 jurisdictions already use ranked choice voting, and in those places, campaigns tend toward more civility, since it benefits candidates to win additional support for second or further rankings beyond their base. This encourages less mud-slinging, more effort to reach consensus when governing, and more talk of policies rather than personalities.
3. Measure 117 allows voters to “vote their hopes, not their fears” without having to strategize how they vote or worry about wasting their vote – voters can express true preferences, knowing further choices never hurt their favorite candidate, thus avoiding vote splitting and “spoilers.”

4. Measure 117 gives voters more voice and more choices on their ballots, with fewer wasted votes. Measure 117 respects one person, one vote. If no one candidate achieves a majority, it is simply an automatic runoff election.
5. In our current system, your vote matters ONLY if a candidate has to campaign for it. With Measure 117, candidates will need to campaign for all votes. It ensures a more meaningful ballot no matter where you live. Whether an urban Republican or a rural-farming Democrat, your vote will matter more. Ranked choice voting has been used and proven around the world and in over 50 jurisdictions in the United States – including right here in Oregon.

### **Opponents say:**

1. Ranked choice voting is more difficult than our typical “pick one” elections and is only useful if more than two candidates are in a race. It may be easy to choose 1, 2, and 3, but voters may still be confused about the process. Can they pick just one? Can they give two candidates the same rank? What happens if they skip a ranking? And finally, how are the votes counted?
2. All changes to our election system, whether difficult or simple, demand voter education for the public. This means increased cost for election officials to develop and disseminate materials.
3. Views from the far right and far left tend to be overshadowed by the “middle-of-the-road” voter when ranked choice voting is used. Supporters of ranked choice voting tout this as a benefit, but those wishing to promote alternative perspectives and philosophies may see this system as unfairly favoring moderate voters.
4. While most Oregon vendors of ballot-counting machines use equipment that can accommodate ranked choice voting, counties will still be charged implementation costs for software upgrades. Oregon administers elections with machines disconnected from the internet, counts ballots and reports results at the county level, and conducts hand-counted post-election audits. Under Measure 117, counties would struggle to share full results with the Secretary of State to certify the election. Hand counting ballots during audits would also become more complex.
5. The measure does not include some of the most important races within Oregon, namely Oregon state legislators, which include state senators and representatives.

6. Ranked choice voting can disadvantage parties, as when two Republican candidates ran against a Democrat in the 2022 race for US House in Alaska. One Republican candidate urged her supporters not to rank a second candidate, with the result that the Democrat won in a state that historically votes Republican.