

FGA Ranked-Choice Voting in Utah

Ranked-Choice Voting Threatens Election Integrity in Utah



Valid votes are thrown in the trash

In Utah and Salt Lake Counties, **8.9 percent of all votes** cast in the 2021 local races (excluding races with multiple seats) that used ranked-choice voting **were tossed** and didn't count toward the election results.



Voters lose confidence in election results

In Sandy's 2021 mayoral election, **the outcome was decided by just 21 votes out of more than 21,000** ballots cast. In this race, 18.6 percent of the ballots were tossed—representing nearly one in five total ballots cast—in a race determined by 21 votes. Due to the close margin, there was a recount, but confusion over ranked-choice voting led to public uncertainty in the outcome.



Winners lose elections

In the 2021 Vineyard City Council race, the candidate with **the most votes lost** the race for the first seat after three rounds of tabulation.

Background

In 2018, the Utah legislature passed HB 35. This new law established a pilot program, called the Municipal Alternative Voting Methods Pilot Project, through which cities can use ranked-choice voting. The Utah State Legislature then passed HB 75 in 2021, which expanded Utah's ranked-choice voting pilot program and gave more cities the ability to opt in. The project began in January 2019 and runs through January 2026. It only applies to municipal elections held in off years. It gives these municipalities the option of foregoing a primary election.

Under the pilot program, municipalities, generally the city council, vote to determine whether they want to participate. They must notify the lieutenant governor and the city clerk of their decision. The state legislature is not required to approve the municipalities' determinations. (*Utah Code § 20A-4-602.*)

Current Use

In 2019, the cities of Payson and Vineyard were the first to opt to participate in the pilot program and conducted their elections for city council using ranked-choice voting. Twenty-one additional municipalities opted to participate in the pilot program and conducted their 2021 elections using ranked-choice voting.

Those municipalities included:

- South Salt Lake
- Magna
- Bluffdale
- Draper
- Lehi
- Payson
- Riverton
- Springville
- Vineyard
- Goshen
- Newton
- Woodland Hills
- Genola
- Sandy
- Nibley City
- Millcreek
- Moab
- River Heights City
- Cottonwood Heights
- Elk Ridge
- Salt Lake City
- Midvale
- Heber City

The Utah Republican Party uses ranked-choice voting at their caucuses and convention.

The Ranked-Choice Voting Track Record in Utah

“Exhausted ballots” = Votes that are tossed in the trash

Under ranked-choice voting, if voters don't rank every candidate—even those they would absolutely never support—they risk having their vote removed from the final vote count. This is because even if a voter's first choice earned the most votes in the first round, by the second, third, fourth, and subsequent rounds, that candidate—and the voter's ballot—can be eliminated, as if the voter never cast their ballot.



Across Utah, votes are being tossed in the trash because of ranked-choice voting.

2021 UTAH COUNTY:

- In three races, there were a total of 8,004 votes cast. By the final round of tabulation, only 7,833 votes counted toward the election outcome, resulting in **2.1 percent** of votes being thrown out, or 171 tossed votes.
- For the two city mayor races, there were a combined 1,964 votes cast. By the final round of tabulation, only 1,871 votes counted toward the election outcome, resulting in **4.7 percent** of votes being thrown out, or 93 tossed votes.
 - **Elk Ridge Mayor race** - **2.8 percent** of votes were thrown out.
 - **Woodland Hills Mayor** - **8.7 percent** of votes were thrown out.

2021 SALT LAKE COUNTY:

- In 12 races, there were a total of 82,981 votes cast. By the final round of tabulation, only 75,053 votes counted toward the election outcome, resulting in **9.6 percent** of votes being thrown out, or 7,928 tossed votes.
- For the three city mayor races, there were a combined 35,148 votes cast. By the final round of tabulation, only 30,372 votes counted toward the election outcome, resulting in **13.6 percent** of votes being thrown out, or 4,776 tossed votes.
 - **Cottonwood Heights Mayor** - **8.2 percent** of votes were thrown out.
 - **Midvale City Mayor** - **1.0 percent** of votes were thrown out.
 - **Sandy City Mayor** - **18.6 percent** of votes were thrown out.
- For the nine city council races, there were a combined 47,833 votes cast. By the final round of tabulation, only 44,681 votes counted toward the election outcome, resulting in **6.6 percent** of votes being thrown out, or 3,152 tossed votes.

2021 UTAH AND SALT LAKE COUNTIES:

- There were 90,985 votes cast. By the final round of tabulation, only 82,886 votes counted toward the election outcome, resulting in **8.9 percent** of votes being thrown out, or 8,099 tossed votes.

BOTTOM LINE

No Utah vote should be tossed in the trash.