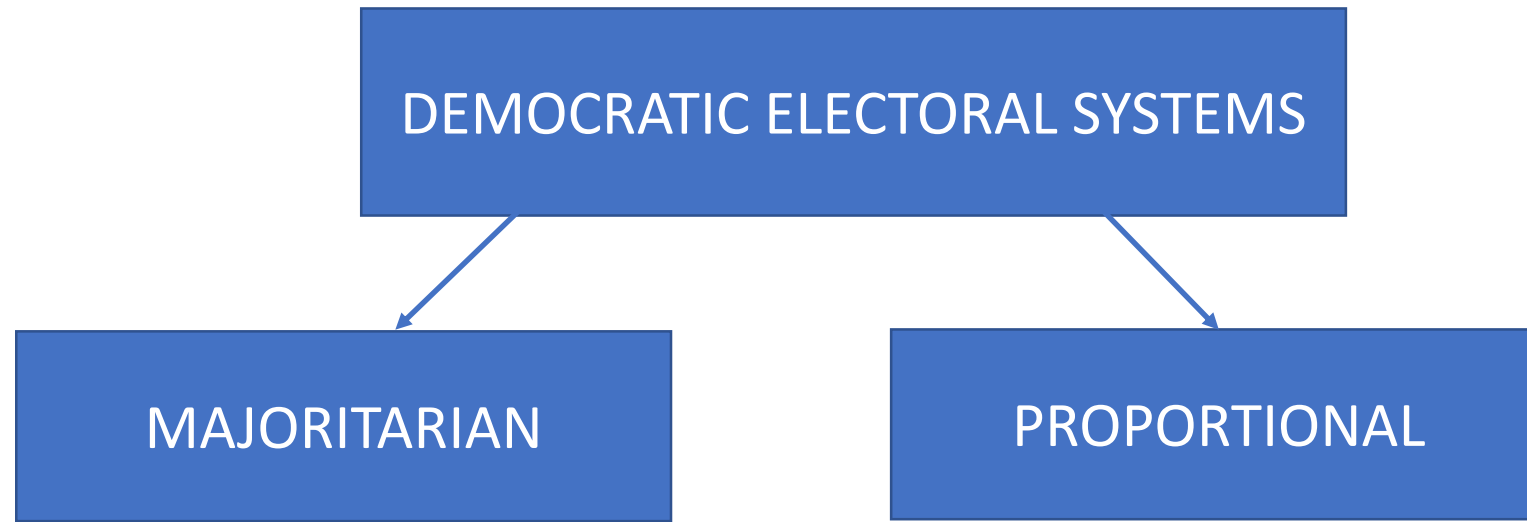# The Rhode Island Electoral System in Comparative Perspective

Adam S. Myers
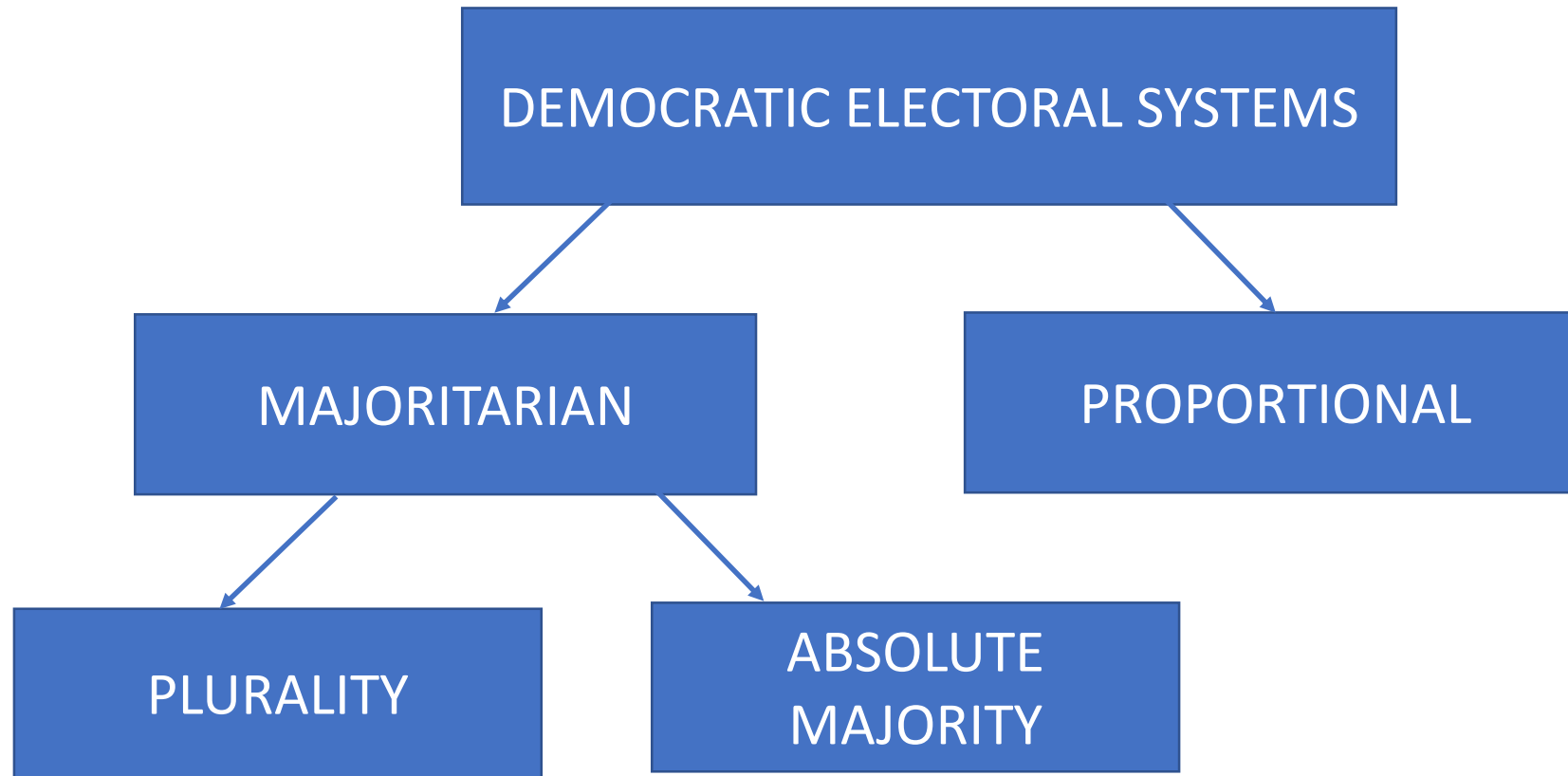
Presentation to the RI Senate Alternative Voting Systems Study Commission
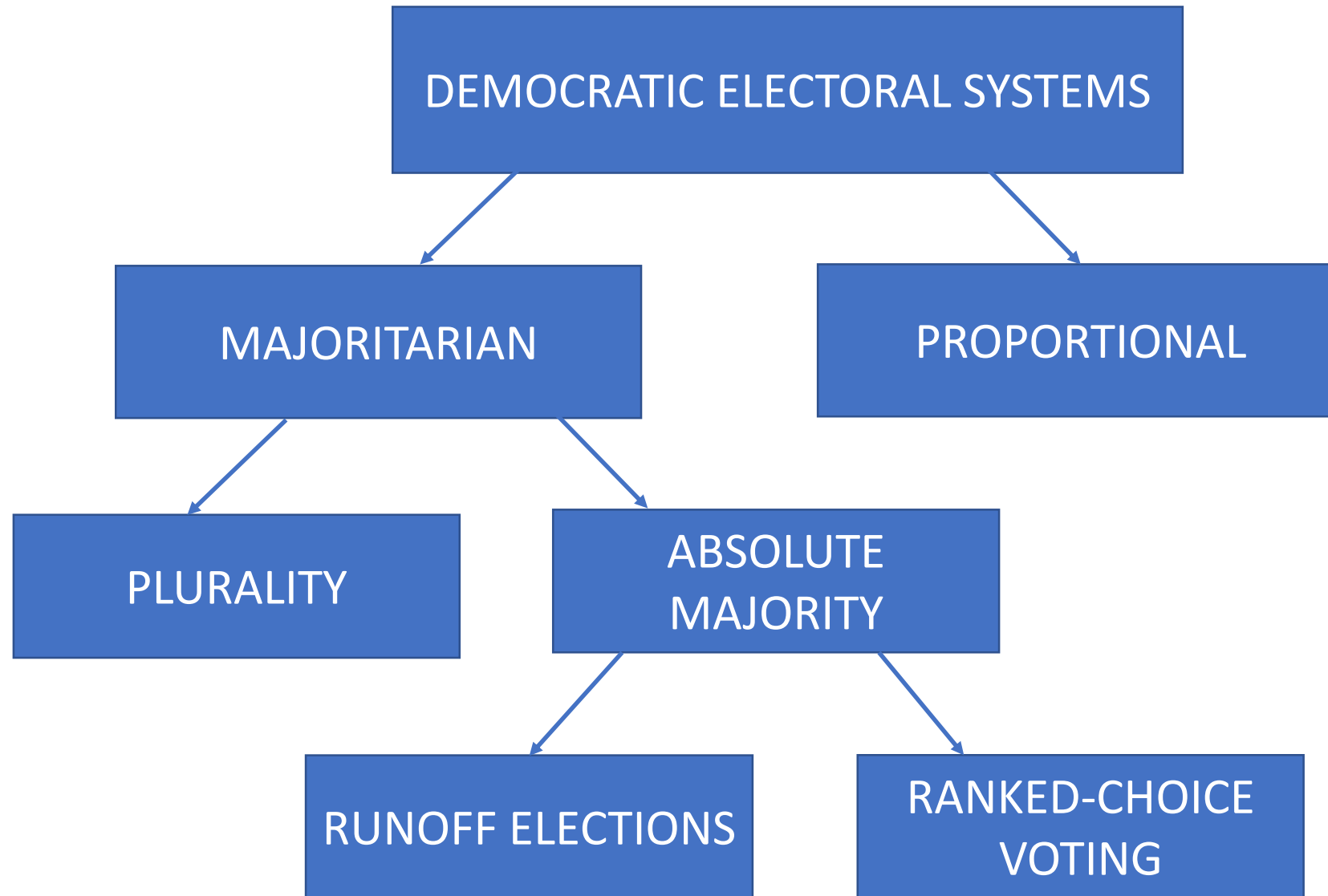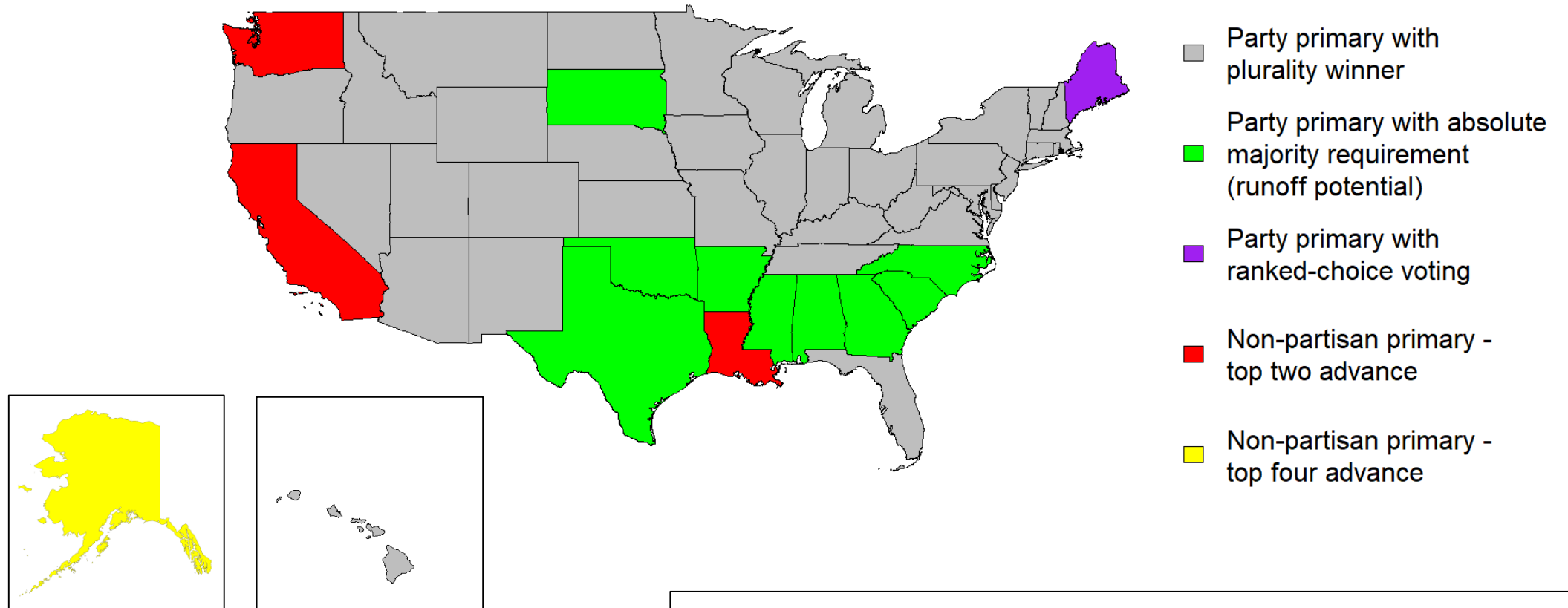
March 1, 2023

CLASSIFYING DEMOCRATIC ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

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ELECTORAL PROCESS BY STATE: PRIMARY ELECTIONS

Party primary with plurality winner

Party primary with absolute majority requirement (runoff potential)

Party primary with ranked-choice voting

Non-partisan primary - top two advance

Non-partisan primary - top four advance

NOTE: IN SOME STATES, THE ELECTORAL PROCESS VARIES BY OFFICE. THE MAP ABOVE SHOWS THE PROCESS FOR CONGRESSIONAL RACES.

ELECTORAL PROCESS BY STATE: GENERAL ELECTIONS
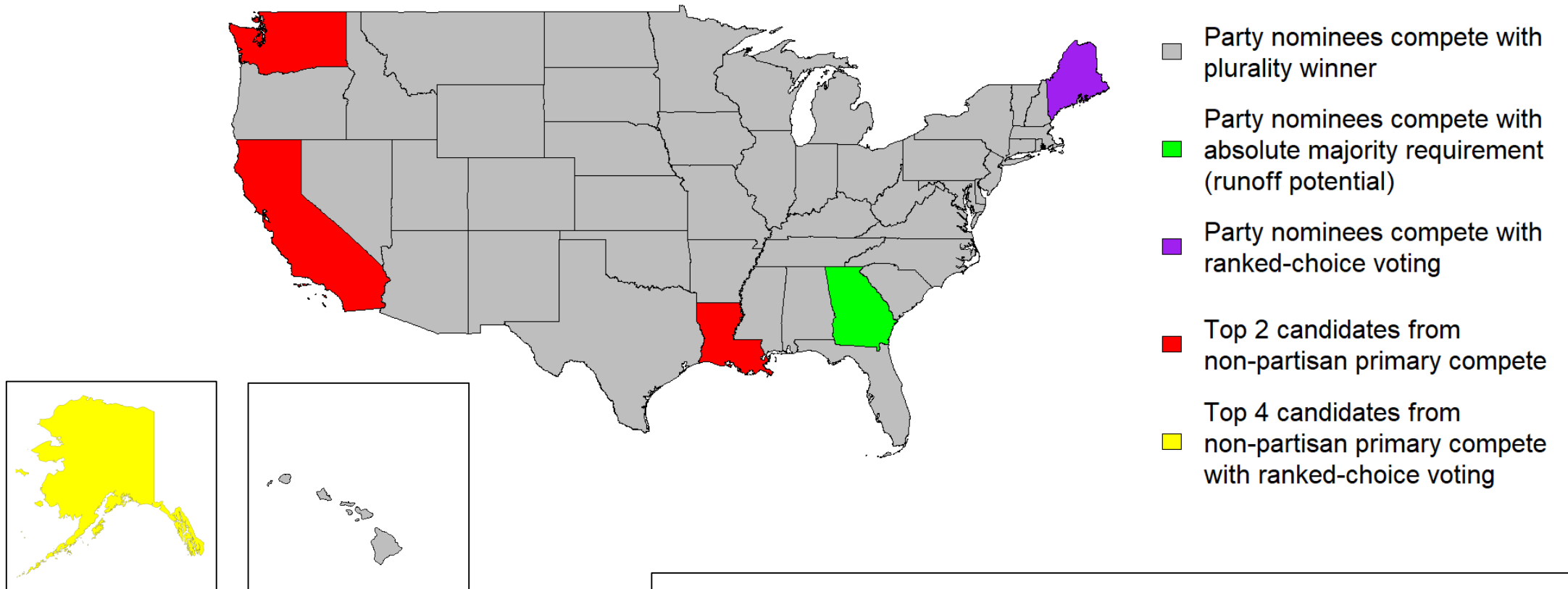
Party nominees compete with plurality winner

Party nominees compete with absolute majority requirement (runoff potential)

Party nominees compete with ranked-choice voting

Top 2 candidates from non-partisan primary compete

Top 4 candidates from non-partisan primary compete with ranked-choice voting

NOTE: IN SOME STATES, THE ELECTORAL PROCESS VARIES BY OFFICE. THE MAP ABOVE SHOWS THE PROCESS FOR CONGRESSIONAL RACES.

WHAT COMPARING ACROSS STATES TELLS US ABOUT RHODE ISLAND'S ELECTORAL SYSTEM

- Rhode Island's current electoral system is very much in line with those of other states.

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- What is unusual about Rhode Island elections is not our electoral system, but rather the way our electoral system interacts with our party system.

OPTIONS FOR RHODE ISLAND BASED ON WHAT OTHER STATES HAVE DONE

- **The Georgia Model**
  - Party primaries and general elections with absolute majority requirement and runoff potential.

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  - Non-partisan primaries followed by top-two general elections

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  - Party primaries and general elections with ranked-choice voting

- The California Model
  - Non-partisan primaries followed by top-two general elections

- **The Alaska Model**
  - Non-partisan primaries followed by top-four general elections with ranked-choice voting

ADDITIONAL OPTIONS BASED ON WHAT SOME MUNICIPALITIES HAVE DONE

• Single transferable vote

(Cambridge, MA)

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(Cambridge, MA)

- Approval voting plus top-two runoff

(St. Louis, MO)

Issues to Consider in Assessing Voting Systems

Implications for turnout

Voter understanding of the process

Socioeconomic differences in use of new voting methods

Voter faith in the process

Implications for candidate strategy and outcomes in government

Cost of adopting new voting systems

THANK YOU!