



**A Better Way for Rhode Islanders to Vote**

# R.I.'s Election System is Broken

- Candidates in R.I. often win with well under 50% of the vote
- Less than 20% of voters participate in September primaries –
  - This means a small fraction of the electorate picks candidates that voters will chose from in November
- In the last 20 years: 45% of General Assembly seats are uncontested in November general elections
- 2018 + 2020: Only 4.5% of General Assembly November general elections were competitive
  - Margin of victory under 5%

# Primary Overview




## Why Primaries?


- Primaries were proposed by reformers over 100 years ago to limit the power of party bosses in choosing candidates.

## Different Kinds of Primaries

- Closed: Only registered members of a party can participate - 15 states
- Open: Any registered voter can vote in any party primary - 19 states
- Hybrid: Including “semi-closed”, like R.I. – 16 states

# Different Kinds of Primaries

	 Democratic voter	 Republican voter	 Other
<b>Democratic Closed Primary</b>	✓	✗	✗
<b>Republican Closed Primary</b>	✗	✓	✗
<b>Democratic Semi-open Primary</b>	✓	✗	✓
<b>Republican Semi-open Primary</b>	✗	✓	✓
<b>Open Primary</b>	✓	✓	✓

✓ eligible to vote  
 ✗ ineligible to vote  
 Other: unaffiliated, "Independent" in Rhode Island

# Change – How People are Voting

New approaches to elections are emerging across the country

- **Designed to increase participation and encourage candidates to seek broad support, i.e., a majority**
- Ranked Choice Voting
- “Top Two” primary
  - California, Washington, Nebraska
- Alaska
  - Top 4 Ranked Choice

# Change – How People are Voting

## Ranked Choice Voting

53 cities (including New York City), one county, and two states (Maine and Alaska) use some form of ranked choice voting (RCV).

### How ranked-choice voting works

There are four or more candidates running for office.



At the ballot box, voters rank the candidates in order of preference.



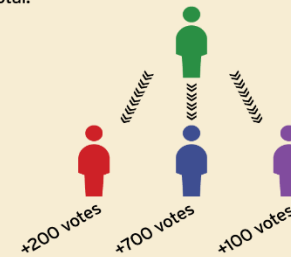
Voters' first choices are counted. If one candidate has a majority of votes, he or she wins. The count is finished. »»



If no one gets 50% or more of the votes, the last-place candidate, Green, is eliminated.



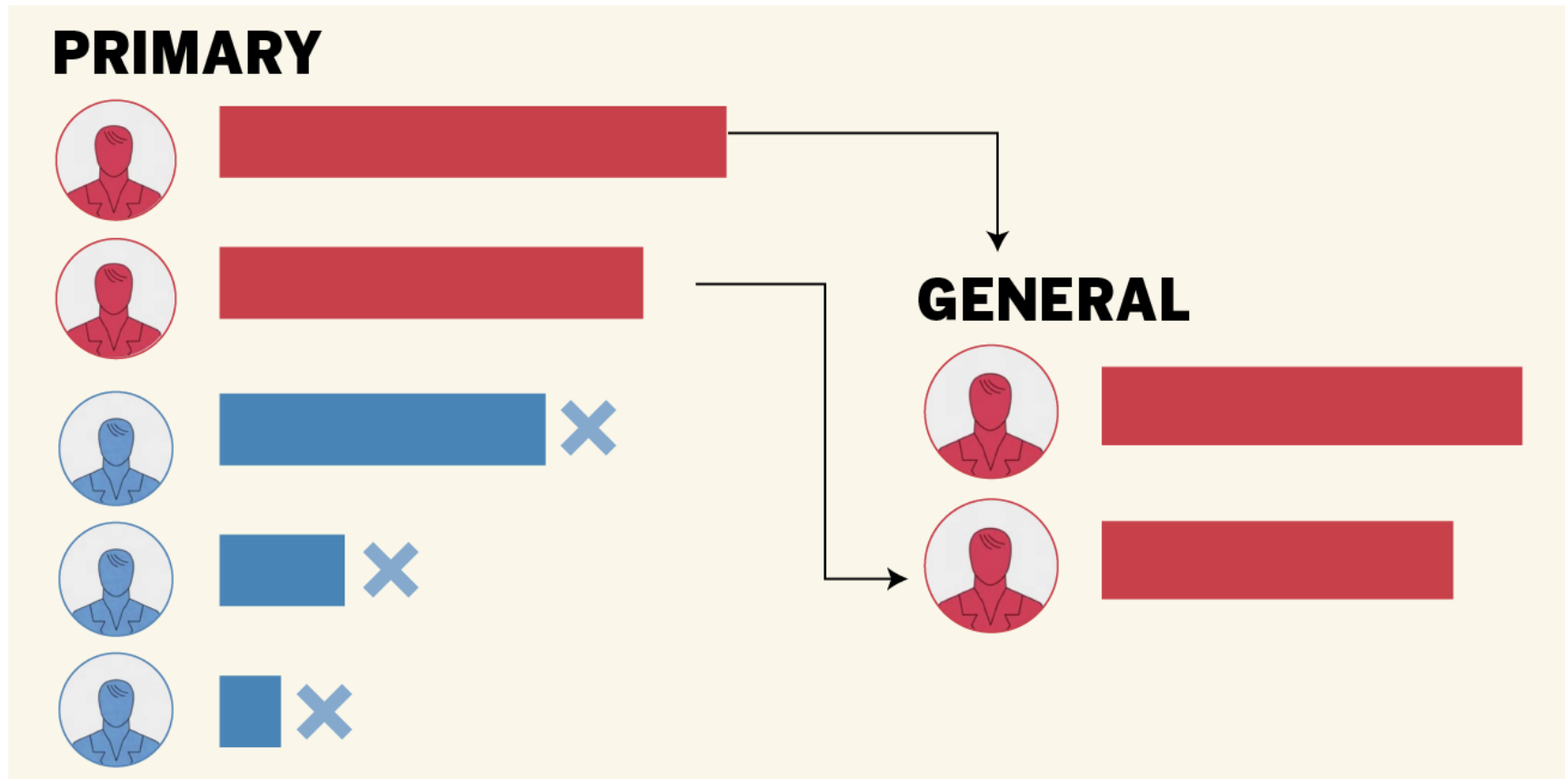
Green's votes are redistributed to his voters' next choices. For instance, if 1,000 voters named Green their first choice, and 200 had Red as their second choice, 700 had Blue, and 100 had Purple those candidates would have those votes added to their total.



The total is tallied. The candidate with the majority of votes wins. If there is still no candidate with a majority, the last two steps are repeated until someone has the majority (50% + 1). In this case, Red is eliminated and her votes are distributed as above.

# Change – How People are Voting

## Non-Partisan “Top Two” Primary (California)



# Change – How People are Voting

## Alaska: Top 4 Ranked Choice

### ■ U.S. House

#### First round

Candidate	Votes	Pct.
■ Mary Peltola * DEM	128,329	48.8%
■ Sarah Palin GOP	67,732	25.7
■ Nick Begich GOP	61,431	23.3
■ Chris Bye LIB	4,560	1.7
Total Write-Ins OTH	1,096	0.4

We estimate around all votes cast have been counted.

\* Incumbent

#### Final round

Candidate	Votes	Pct.
✓ <b>Mary Peltola * DEM</b>	<b>136,893</b>	<b>54.9%</b>
■ Sarah Palin GOP	112,255	45.1

We estimate around all votes cast have been counted.

\* Incumbent



# Key Questions

- What is the impact of primary reform on voter turnout and participation?
- Will primary reform generate more contested and competitive primary elections?
- Will primary reform encourage candidates focused on addressing and solving problems?
- Will primary reform enhance voter trust, and does it reflect what voters want?

# Summary

- Rhode Island's election system is flawed.
- Many jurisdictions across the country are implementing new ways to improve their elections.
- Recommendation: Rhode Island explore ways to improve participation and competitiveness.