



THE COLORADO SUN

EXPLAINER: ELECTION 2024

Proposition 131: Colorado would move to all-candidate primaries followed by ranked choice general elections

The measure would change most of the state's primaries so candidates from all parties run against each other, with the top four vote-getters advancing to a ranked choice voting general election



Jesse Paul

3:45 AM MDT on Oct 2, 2024



A voting sign outside a polling station Nov. 7, 2023, at Christ Church United Methodist in Denver. (Olivia Sun, The Colorado Sun via Report for America)

The Unaffiliated

All politics, no agenda.

Colorado voters will decide Nov. 5 whether to make major changes to how many candidates are elected in the state.

Proposition 131 would transform most of the state's primaries so candidates from all parties run against each other, with the top four vote-getters advancing to a ranked choice voting general election.

Here's what you need to know about the initiative, as well as who is supporting and opposing it.

How would it work?

The measure, which requires a simple majority of voter support to pass, would change most of Colorado's primaries so candidates from all parties run against each other, rather than Democrats and Republicans nominating one candidate each as they do now. The top four vote-getters in the primary — which could be all Democrats or Republicans or a mix of

major and third-party candidates and independents — would advance to a ranked choice voting general election.

In ranked choice voting elections, voters rank candidates in order of preference.

Here is an example of what the ballot looked like in Boulder last year when it used ranked choice voting in its mayoral election:

Local Offices - Ranked Choice				
City of Boulder Mayoral Candidates				
One to be elected				
Rank up to Four candidates				
Special Instructions: Rank candidates in the order of your preference. Fill in the oval:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the first column, for your first choice. • In the second column, for your second choice. • In the third column, for your third choice, and so on. 				
	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice	4th Choice
Aaron Brockett	<input type="radio"/> ¹	<input type="radio"/> ²	<input type="radio"/> ³	<input type="radio"/> ⁴
Nicole Speer	<input type="radio"/> ¹	<input type="radio"/> ²	<input type="radio"/> ³	<input type="radio"/> ⁴
Bob Yates	<input type="radio"/> ¹	<input type="radio"/> ²	<input type="radio"/> ³	<input type="radio"/> ⁴
Paul Tweedlie	<input type="radio"/> ¹	<input type="radio"/> ²	<input type="radio"/> ³	<input type="radio"/> ⁴

If a candidate wins more than 50% of the first-preference votes, they are declared the winner. If no candidate reaches that threshold, candidates with the fewest first-preference supporters are eliminated, and their voters’ second choices are added to the tally. The process continues until one candidate exceeds 50% of the total vote.

[This video explains the process](https://coloradosun.com/2024/10/02/proposition-131-ranked-choice-colorado-explained-election/) in more detail:



A barrier to Proposition 131 taking effect

If the initiative passes, it would not go into effect right away — if ever.

That's because of a **clause added** to Senate Bill 210, a broader elections measure passed by the legislature this year.

The clause requires 12 Colorado municipalities in counties of a certain size and with a specific demographic makeup to conduct ranked choice elections before a ranked choice election could be used in a race for state or federal office. Additionally, the amendment said that Colorado could not move to the new primary system proposed by Colorado Voters First until that requirement has been met.

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Gov. Jared Polis nearly vetoed Senate Bill 210 because of the clause, which was added in the final days of the General Assembly's lawmaking term **and first reported publicly by** The Colorado Sun. Polis said the provision may violate the state constitution — and at least was designed to frustrate the will of voters.

Polis wrote in a statement explaining his decision to sign the bill that he thinks statewide ranked choice voting could be implemented in Colorado by 2028. He said that extra time would be enough for local elections officials to get prepared and vowed to convene state leaders to make that happen.

As written, the measure is meant to go into effect in 2026, and the supporters of the measure want it to stay that way. Ultimately, when it goes into effect will be up to the legislature — not the governor or the supporters of the initiative.

Would it affect all races?

No.

It would apply to races for Congress, governor, attorney general, secretary of state, treasurer, the state board of education and University of Colorado regents, as well as state legislative contests. It would not apply to the U.S. presidential race or certain local contests, like those for district attorney or county commissioner.

Do other states use a similar system?

Yes.

Alaska uses an all-candidate primary system where the top four vote-getters advance to a ranked choice voting general election. That system was **adopted by voters** in 2020 and first used in 2022. There is a measure on Alaska's November ballot **asking voters to repeal the** state's system.

California, Louisiana, Nebraska and Washington also use different versions of all-candidate primaries, though they don't use ranked choice voting for their general elections.

Maine and New York City are other places where ranked choice voting is used.

Colorado isn't the only state voting this year on a ballot measure that would adopt an all-candidate primary followed by ranked choice general elections. Voters in Idaho and Nevada will be deciding whether to adopt similar changes.

Where is ranked choice voting in Colorado being used right now?

Just a handful of Colorado cities and towns currently use ranked choice voting in their municipal elections or plan to do so in the future, including Boulder, Basalt, Broomfield and Fort Collins.

Aspen and Telluride have used ranked choice voting in the past.

What are the general arguments for and against Proposition 131?

The supporters of Proposition 131 say it represents a better way to boost voter participation in elections and ensure that every voter's opinion is reflected in results. That's because turnout during primary elections is often low, meaning that the most partisan candidate often wins. Also, ranking candidates means voters have a better chance at influencing general election results even if their top choice loses.

Opponents say the system is too complicated and will exacerbate conspiracies about elections. They also argue that Colorado's election processes are already among the nation's best and don't need changing, a process that would be pricey. Elections officials have warned they need time to implement changes.

Critics also point out that the measure is largely funded by wealthy donors. (More on that in a minute.)



Ballot boxes at the Arapahoe County elections facility, June 9, 2022, in Littleton. (Hugh Carey, The Colorado Sun)

Supporters and opponents of the measure both argue that it would reduce the influence of political parties — for better or worse.

Shad Murib, the chair of the Colorado Democratic Party, which opposes the measure, argued during a Colorado Sun panel that there is a Democrat and Republican running against each other for almost every elected office in Colorado. In Alaska, which has adopted a system identical to Proposition 131, Murib pointed out that a share of general election races in the state this year will pit only candidates from the same party against each other, leaving supporters of the opposite party with no one who aligns with their political views.

Kent Thiry, the wealthy former CEO of Denver-based dialysis giant DaVita and the chief supporter of the measure, pointed out during the panel that most Colorado races are decided in the primary because the seats either lean decidedly Democratic or Republican. He argues it's better to have a higher turnout general election with multiple candidates from the same party running against each other than one with candidates from opposing parties when only one side has a realistic chance of winning.

Who is behind Proposition 131?

Colorado Voters First, the committee leading the charge on Proposition 131, had raised more than \$9 million through Sept. 25.

Thiry has given the most to the committee of any individual. He had given the committee about \$1.5 million through late September. Unite America, a Denver-based nonprofit that

advocates for election changes, had given Colorado Voters First about \$4.7 million through Sept. 25. Thiry is cochair of the Unite America board.



Colorado Sun reporter Jesse Paul, left, moderates a panel on Proposition 131 at SunFest 2024 with former DaVita CEO Kent Thiry, former Denver Elections Division Director Amber McReynolds and Colorado Democratic

Party Chairman Shad Murib. The annual gathering was held Sept. 27 at the University of Denver. (Andy Colwell, Special to The Colorado Sun)

Other big donors to Colorado Voters First include Ben Walton, a grandson of Walmart founder Sam Walton; Kathryn Murdoch, the daughter-in-law of Rupert Murdoch; Reed Hastings, the executive chairman and cofounder of Netflix; Marc Merrill, cofounder of Riot Games; Robert Small, a managing director at Berkshire Partners; and John Carroll, a managing director at Summit Partners.

Much of the group's roughly \$8 million in spending through Sept. 25 had gone to signature gathering to get the measure on the November ballot, as well as advertising on TV and other platforms.

The measure has been endorsed by Democrats Gov. Jared Polis, U.S. Sen. John Hickenlooper and Denver Mayor Mike Johnston, as well as Republicans Aurora City Councilman Dustin Zvonek and state Rep. Matt Soper.

Who opposes it?

Voter Rights Colorado, a group opposing Proposition 131 that's backed by a list of progressive organizations, has started raising money, too, though to a much lesser extent.

The committee had raised less than \$100,000 through Sept. 25. It had received \$46,000 from Coloradans For Accessible and Secure Elections, a nonprofit created in December that doesn't disclose its donors.

The Colorado Fund for Children and Public Education had given Voter Rights Colorado \$25,000 through Sept. 25, while the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees had given \$20,000 and the Working Families Party had given \$10,000.

The Voter Rights Colorado coalition includes the Colorado AFL-CIO, American Federation of Teachers Colorado, Conservation Colorado, New Era Colorado and the Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition.

The Colorado Democratic Party and Colorado GOP also oppose the measure.

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More resources

Nonpartisan legislative staff creates a guide for each initiative on the statewide ballot. You can find their analysis of Amendment 79 [here](#).

You can read the full text of the ballot measure [here](#).

And here is some previous Colorado Sun coverage of the measure:

- [A spicy discussion on Proposition 131 at SunFest](#)
- [Colorado's all-candidate primary and ranked choice general election ballot measure is poised to pass, poll shows](#)
- [Colorado governor signs bill that would prevent voter-adopted statewide ranked choice voting from taking effect](#)
- [Why the Colorado Democratic Party chairman loathes Kent Thiry's election overhaul plan](#)
- [Kent Thiry's next political focus: Big changes to Colorado's primary election process](#)

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4:00 AM MDT on Sep 27, 2024

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