Ontario

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Ministry of Housing

Counting Votes in a Ranked Ballot Election

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Learn how votes are counted in single-member and multi-member elections.

Counting the ballots in a single-member election

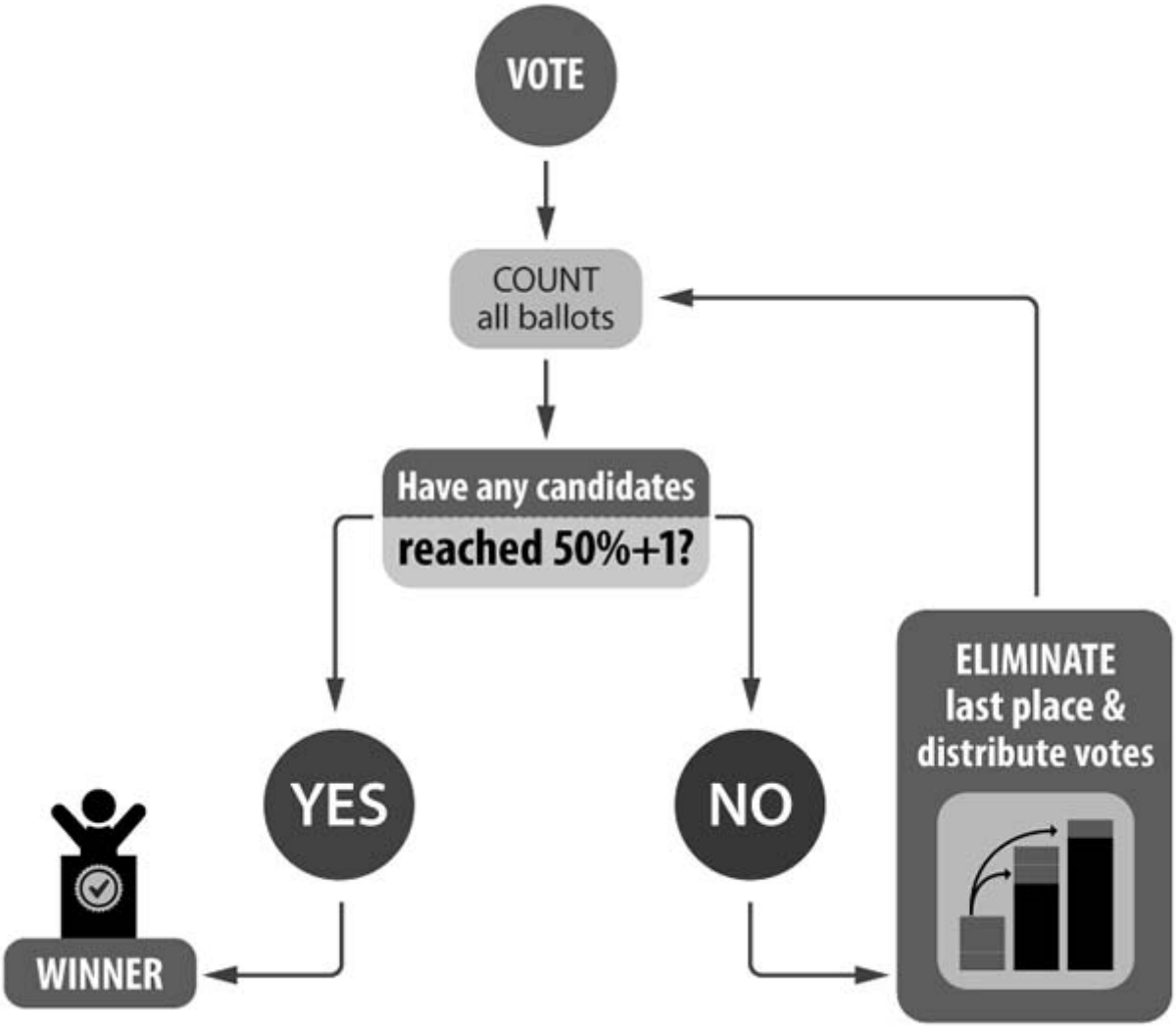
In order for a candidate to be elected in ranked ballot elections, they must receive a pre-determined number of votes.

In a **single-member ranked ballot election**, that number is 50 per cent of the total votes plus one (a simple majority).

First choice votes are counted for all of the candidates. If a candidate receives at least 50 per cent plus one votes, he or she is elected. If none of the candidates receives enough first choice votes, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated.

When a candidate is eliminated, their ballots are not disregarded. Instead each of the ballots is redistributed to one of the remaining candidates according to the next highest choice marked on the ballot.

If a candidate now has enough combined votes, he or she is elected. If none of the candidates receives enough votes to be elected, the candidate that now has the fewest votes is eliminated and those ballots are redistributed. This process continues until one candidate has enough votes to win.



In a single-member election, your first choice vote is always counted. Your second or third choices will only be counted if your earlier choice has been eliminated.

For more information and an example of how ranked ballot voting works see our Follow Your Ballot exercise.

Counting the ballots in a multi-member election

Multi-member elections are elections where more than one candidate is elected, such as:

- When council members are elected at large
- A ward election where two or more people will be elected to represent the ward

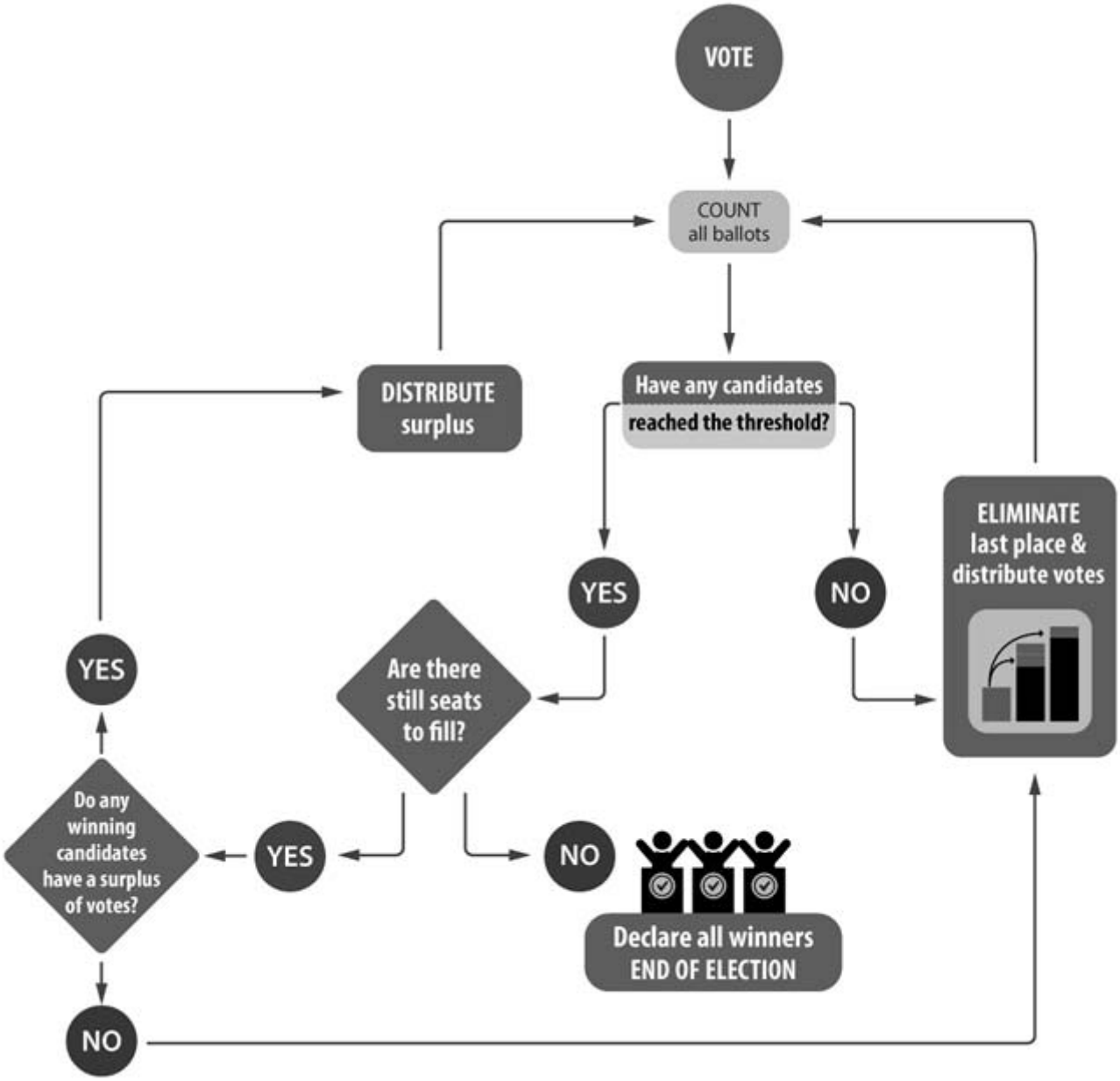
In a **multi-member ranked ballot election**, the number of votes needed to win will depend on the total number of candidates being elected.

The threshold would be calculated by dividing the number of votes cast by the total number of candidates being elected plus one, then adding one to make it a majority.

number of votes cast

$$\text{Threshold} = \left(\text{number of candidates being elected} + 1 \right) + 1$$

2 seats: 33.33%+1
3 seats: 25%+1
4 seats: 20%+1
…and so on.



First choice votes are counted for all of the candidates. If none of the candidates receives enough first choice votes, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated. The ballots for the eliminated candidate are redistributed according to each voter's next choice, and those votes are added to the total votes for the remaining candidates. If a candidate now has enough combined votes, he or she is elected.
If a candidate receives more than the number of votes that they need to be elected, their surplus votes are redistributed according to each voter's next choice. This is to ensure that there are enough votes remaining to elect all candidates with the same threshold.

In a multi-member election, your first choice vote is always counted. Your second or third choices will only be counted if your earlier choice has been elected or eliminated.
For more information and an example of how ranked ballot voting works in multi-member elections see our Follow Your Ballot exercise.

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