

By Alexandra Copper and Ruth Greenwood / August 17, 2018

## THE CIVIC BENEFITS OF RANKED CHOICE VOTING

### Eight Ways Adopting Ranked Choice Voting Can Improve Voting and Elections

“Consider asking a small child about her favorite ice cream. Chocolate, she might say. And what if there is no chocolate? you ask. Then she will have strawberry. And if there is no strawberry, she will settle with vanilla. The child just ranked three candidates: chocolate, strawberry, vanilla. That is all there is to [ranked choice voting].”<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. **Ranked choice voting encourages greater civility and less negative campaigning among candidates, as well as more direct outreach by candidates to voters.**

A traditional plurality voting system incentivizes candidates to engage in negative campaign tactics. Elections are a “zero-sum” game that usually come down to a choice between two major party candidates vying for votes.<sup>2</sup> Those candidates have clear incentives to disregard independent and third-party candidates who will not garner enough votes to pose a threat and, instead focus their energies on attacking each other, distinguishing themselves through negative messages about their opponent instead of affirmative issue-based campaigning.<sup>3</sup>

Ranked choice voting removes incentives for negative campaigning and increases civility among candidates, because it fosters more choice, more competition, and a greater need for cooperation. Each candidate must reach and attract a broader subset of the electorate, balancing efforts to win the most first choice votes, while not alienating other candidates’ supporters who might list them as a second or third choice.<sup>4</sup> Candidates, thus, will gain little from negative campaign

<sup>1</sup> Rob Richie, Caleb Kleppner, and Terrill Bouricius, *Instant Runoffs: A Cheaper, Fairer, Better Way to Conduct Elections*, 89.1 NATIONAL CIVIC REVIEW 95, 105 (Spring 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Caroline Tolbert, *Experiments in Election Reform: Voter Perceptions of Campaigns Under Preferential and Plurality Voting*, Presented at conference on Electoral Systems Reform, Stanford University 2 (Mar. 15-16, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> See Robert Richie, *Instant Runoff Voting: What Mexico (and Others) Could Learn*, 3.3 ELECTION LAW JOURNAL 501, 504 (2004); see also David Cobb, Patrick Barrett, and Caleb Kleppner, *Preserving and Expanding the Right to Vote: Ranked-Choice Voting*, 1 ADVANCE 107, 111-12 (2007).

<sup>4</sup> See Richie, *supra* note 3 at 504.

tactics and instead are encouraged to build coalitions with ideologically like-minded opponents.<sup>5</sup>

The capacity for ranked choice voting to increase civility of campaigns is well-documented. In several studies, researchers have analyzed voter perceptions of campaign tone and, time and again, have found that voters in ranked choice voting jurisdictions report less negative campaigning than voters in non-ranked choice voting jurisdictions.<sup>6</sup> In a 2013 survey, only 5 percent of responding voters in three ranked choice voting cities thought candidates criticized each other “a great deal” compared to 25 percent of respondents in non-ranked choice voting cities.<sup>7</sup> The same study found that, overall, respondents in non-ranked choice voting cities were more than three times more likely to report that local elections were more negative than in past years.<sup>8</sup>

A 2014 survey of California cities yielded similar results: 28 percent of responding voters in ranked choice voting cities reported that candidates criticized each other “a great deal” compared to 36 percent of respondents in non-ranked choice voting cities.<sup>9</sup> Overall, voters in non-ranked choice voting cities were 35 percent more likely to report that local campaigns were more negative than in past years.<sup>10</sup>

A third study found that people in ranked choice voting cities were almost twice as likely to report that local campaigns were significantly less negative than in past years, while voters in non-ranked choice voting cities were twice as likely to report that candidates criticized each other “some or most of the time.”<sup>11</sup>

It is not just voters who recognize the effects of ranked choice voting on campaign style. Candidates themselves also report greater civility in ranked choice voting elections.<sup>12</sup> In a survey of approximately 226 candidates across seven cities using ranked choice voting and twenty-five cities using traditional plurality voting, only 29 percent of candidates in ranked choice voting cities reported that their rival described them in negative terms, compared to nearly 40 percent of candidates in

---

<sup>5</sup> Steven Hill and Robert Richie, *Success for Instant Runoff Voting in San Francisco*, NATIONAL CIVIC REVIEW 65, 66 (Spring 2005).

<sup>6</sup> See Sarah John and Andrew Douglas, *Candidate Civility and Voter Engagement in Seven Cities with Ranked Choice Voting*, NATIONAL CIVIC REVIEW 25, 26 (Spring 2017); see also Todd Donovan, Caroline Tolbert, and Kellen Gracey, *Campaign Civility Under Preferential and Plurality Voting*, 42 ELECTORAL STUDIES 157, 159-60 (2016); Tolbert, *supra* note 2 at 11-13.

<sup>7</sup> John and Douglas, *supra* note 6 at 26.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* at 27.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 26.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at 27.

<sup>11</sup> Donovan, Tolbert, and Gracey, *supra* note 6 at 160.

<sup>12</sup> Haley Smith, *Ranked Choice Voting and Participation: Impacts on Deliberative Engagement*, FairVote Civility Report #7 4 (Jun. 2016).

plurality voting cities.<sup>13</sup> Regarding their own campaigns, 21 percent of ranked choice voting candidates reported engaging in negative attacks on a rival, compared to 37 percent of plurality voting candidates.<sup>14</sup> Overall, 47 percent of candidates in ranked choice voting cities said that their elections were less negative than in previous years, compared to 37 percent of candidates in plurality voting cities.<sup>15</sup>

Research also shows that, in addition to fostering greater civility, ranked choice voting may have further positive effects on candidates' style of campaigning. Two studies have found that ranked choice voting candidates are more likely to reach out to and engage with voters directly than candidates in traditional plurality voting systems.<sup>16</sup> One study found that ranked choice voting candidates spent less time on the phone, less time meeting with staff, and more time campaigning door-to-door.<sup>17</sup>

The other study also found that ranked choice voting candidates were more likely to engage directly with voters, either in person or via email.<sup>18</sup> The authors of this study hypothesized that the increase in candidate outreach to voters stems from the very structure of ranked choice voting, which incentivizes candidates to seek support from broader sections of the electorate, including not only voters who would select the candidate as their first choice, but also voters who might support the candidate as a second or third choice.<sup>19</sup>

#### **DEFINITIONS:**

**First-Past-the-Post or Plurality Voting:** occurs where all voters get a single vote and the winning candidate is the one who gets the most amount of votes, even if it is not a majority.

**Ranked-Choice Voting:** allows voters to rank candidates, in order of preference, when marking their ballots. If a candidate receives a majority of the first-choice votes cast for that office, that candidate will be elected. However, if no candidate receives a majority of the first-choice votes cast, an elimination process begins. The candidate who received the fewest first-choice votes is eliminated. Next, each vote cast for that candidate will be transferred to the voter's next-ranked choice among the remaining candidates. This elimination process will continue until one candidate receives a majority and is deemed the winner.

---

<sup>13</sup> Todd Donovan, *Candidate Perceptions of Campaigns under Preferential and Plurality Voting*, Paper prepared for the workshop on Electoral Systems, Electoral Reform, and Implications for Democratic Performance, Stanford University 10 (Mar. 14-15, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> See Smith, *supra* note 12 at 9-12; see also Donovan, *supra* note 13 at 8-9.

<sup>17</sup> Donovan, *supra* note 13 at 8.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, *supra* note 12 at 9.

<sup>19</sup> *Id.* at 11.

## 2. **Ranked choice voting is more majoritarian and more democratic than traditional plurality voting.**

Traditional plurality voting—in which each voter may vote for only one candidate and the candidate who receives the most votes wins—is marked by a pervasive lack of competitiveness. Many electoral districts have become “safe districts” in which the incumbent or his or her party are all but guaranteed to win reelection. Statistics starkly highlight this problem. For example, in the 2002 and 2004 United States House elections, only eleven of more than 800 incumbents were defeated.<sup>20</sup> In 2006, 73 percent of House elections were won by margins of more than 20 percent.<sup>21</sup> In 2012, the average victory margin in House elections was 36 percent, and the minority party did not gain a new seat in the 177 most Republican districts and the 176 most Democratic districts.<sup>22</sup>

“**One study found that ranked choice voting candidates spent less time on the phone, less time meeting with staff, and more time campaigning door-to-door**”

Lack of competitiveness, coupled with low voter participation, ensures that many election results do not reflect the will of the majority of citizens. Plurality voting exacerbates this problem because it does not require a candidate to garner a majority of votes to win, just the most votes, and candidates are regularly elected without majority support. Since the Civil War, more than one third of American presidents have been elected by only a plurality.<sup>23</sup> And, in 2000, more than 20 percent of sitting governors were elected by a mere plurality, including several who did not even receive 40 percent of the vote.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, plurality voting is not a majoritarian system because it is plagued by problems of wasted votes, spoiler candidacies, and vote splitting. Voters who support independent, less popular, or third party candidates are often left with the unsavory choice of voting for their preferred candidate and wasting their vote or voting for a candidate they support less but who has a better chance of winning.<sup>25</sup> Plurality voting thus incentivizes voters to cast their ballots based on strategy and predicted outcome, rather than true political conviction.<sup>26</sup> Even when votes for minor

---

<sup>20</sup> Cobb, Barrett, and Kleppner, *supra* note 3 at 113.

<sup>21</sup> John Edward Porter, *Empowering Moderate Voters: Implement an Instant Runoff Strategy*, in OPPORTUNITY 08: INDEPENDENT IDEAS FOR AMERICA’S NEXT PRESIDENT 191, 192 (Brookings Institute, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> Rob Richie and Andrew Spencer, *The Right Choice for Elections: How Choice Voting Will End Gerrymandering and Expand Minority Voting Rights, from City Councils to Congress*, 47 U. RICH. L. REV. 959, 972 (2013).

<sup>23</sup> Tolbert, *supra* note 2 at 2.

<sup>24</sup> Richie, Kleppner, and Bouricius, *supra* note 1 at 97.

<sup>25</sup> Cobb, Barrett, and Kleppner, *supra* note 3 at 110.

<sup>26</sup> See Richie, Kleppner, and Bouricius, *supra* note 1 at 98.

candidates are not wasted, they can lead to spoiler candidacies, whereby an independent or third party candidate who stands no chance of actually being elected nevertheless receives enough votes to dictate the outcome of the election.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, plurality voting is susceptible to the problem of vote splitting, whereby voters cast their ballots for two candidates with similar platforms or ideologies, splitting the vote and allowing a third candidate to win.<sup>28</sup>

Ranked choice voting is, by its nature, a more majoritarian system than plurality voting because it requires a candidate to receive more than 50 percent of votes in order to win.<sup>29</sup> Ranked choice voting thus provides voters more democratic influence and maximizes their chances to help elect a candidate of their choosing. As an example, under ranked choice voting in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 2013, 93 percent of voters were able to elect one of their top three candidate choices.<sup>30</sup>

Ranked choice voting is also more democratic and majoritarian because it avoids the problems of wasted votes, spoiler candidacies, and vote splitting. Voters may express their true political preferences freely without risking the pitfalls of winner-take-all plurality voting. Ranked choice voting thus “facilitates voter interest in self-expression.”<sup>31</sup>

### **3. Ranked choice voting encourages a greater number of candidates with more diverse backgrounds and views to run for office.**

Traditional plurality voting, which usually results in a contest between two candidates from the major political parties, suppresses independent and minor party candidacies.<sup>32</sup> Even within the major parties, plurality voting suppresses candidacies, as party leaders often try to avoid vote splitting by clearing the field for those candidates they believe are strongest.<sup>33</sup> The suppression of candidacies does not affect all equally, as it often falls hardest on those with the least political experience and influence, including first-time candidates, young candidates, candidates of color, female candidates, and low-income candidates.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Douglas, *The Effect of Fair Representation Voting on 2013 Cambridge, Massachusetts Municipal Elections*, FairVote Research Report 10 (Feb. 2014). In this election, twelve candidates ran for nine positions.

<sup>29</sup> It is possible that voters will choose not to rank candidates beyond their first or second choice, and so it is technically possible to win under RCV without getting 50% of *all the possible votes*. In that case though, the winner will still have more than 50% of the votes that *ranked their choices all the way*.

<sup>30</sup> Douglas, *supra* note 28 at 10-11.

<sup>31</sup> Michael E. Lewyn, *Two Cheers for Instant Runoff Voting*, 6 PHOENIX L. REV. 117, 125 (2012).

<sup>32</sup> Cobb, Barrett, and Kleppner, *supra* note 3 at 110-11.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*

<sup>34</sup> *Id.* at 111.

Ranked choice voting eliminates the problem of candidacy suppression and, instead, encourages more people to run for office. This is evident in a case study of Minneapolis, Minnesota, where the number of candidates for local office nearly doubled after the introduction of ranked choice voting, increasing from 25 candidates in 2005 to 47 in 2013.<sup>35</sup> Not only did more candidates run for office, but local races became more competitive. While not a single ward in 2005 had more than two candidates for city council, by 2013, ten of the thirteen wards had more than two candidates running for each seat.<sup>36</sup>

Ranked choice voting not only encourages more people to run for office, it encourages more diverse candidates to run. More diversity means greater representation of traditionally underrepresented demographic groups. In particular, because ranked choice voting eliminates the problem of vote splitting, candidates from underrepresented groups need not worry about competing for voters and may, instead, all run for office and work together to ensure representation for the group.<sup>37</sup> Studies have confirmed that ranked choice voting benefits minority candidates, including candidates of color and women running for office.<sup>38</sup>

More diversity also means candidates with more diverse views and policy platforms. Moderate, independent, and third-party candidates may run and champion their ideas without fear of spoiling the election for major party candidates, and voters may support these candidates without fear of wasting their vote.<sup>39</sup>

Ranked choice voting, thus, encourages more people to run for office and more diversity among those candidates, developments that are good for American voters and American democracy.

#### **4. Because ranked choice voting encourages more diverse candidates to run for office, it may, in turn, reduce political polarization.**

Political polarization is high in traditional plurality elections. Turnout is low and candidates may win simply by mobilizing and championing the views of a core group of committed supporters, who are often more ideologically extreme than the broader

---

<sup>35</sup> David Kimball and Joseph Anthony, *Voter Participation with Ranked Choice Voting in the United States*, University of Missouri-St. Louis, Department of Political Science 20 (Oct. 2016), [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKewjEmqnJnPnbAhVqw1kKHxsBBNEQFggpMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.umsl.edu%2F~kimball%2FKimballRCV.pdf&usq=AQvVawlw2l-R9zBu\\_hf3DpJOivc-](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKewjEmqnJnPnbAhVqw1kKHxsBBNEQFggpMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.umsl.edu%2F~kimball%2FKimballRCV.pdf&usq=AQvVawlw2l-R9zBu_hf3DpJOivc-)

<sup>36</sup> *Id.*

<sup>37</sup> The New America Foundation and FairVote, *Instant Runoff Voting and Its Impact on Racial Minorities* 8 (Jun. 2008); Andrew Spencer, Christopher Hughes, and Rob Ritchie, *Escaping the Thicket: The Ranked Choice Voting Solution to America's Redistricting Crisis*, 46 CUMB. L. REV. 377, 404 (2015); see also Ritchie and Spencer, *supra* note 22 at 959.

<sup>38</sup> Spencer, Hughes, and Ritchie, *supra* note 37 at 405, 419-20; Ritchie and Spencer, *supra* note 22 at 1007-08.

<sup>39</sup> Lewyn, *supra* note 31 at 125; Hill and Ritchie, *supra* note 5 at 65.



electorate.<sup>40</sup> Plurality voting further exacerbates polarization because it typically results in a contest between only two candidates, leaving voters with a purely binary choice between individuals who are more partisan than the average citizen.<sup>41</sup>

Ranked choice voting may reduce political polarization because it encourages more diverse candidates and greater competition in local and state elections.<sup>42</sup> In fact, in a 2015 survey, prominent political and election law scholars selected ranked choice voting as the number one proposed reform, out of thirty-seven, in terms of positive impact on policymaking across party lines.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the scholars voted ranked choice voting the most impactful proposed reform overall.<sup>44</sup>

Figure 1: Candidates Reporting Negative Portrayal by Opponents, 2011-2013<sup>45</sup>

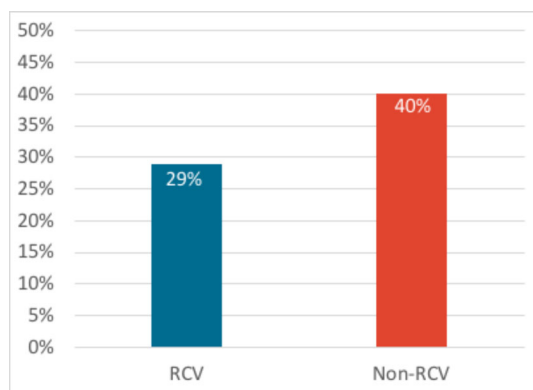
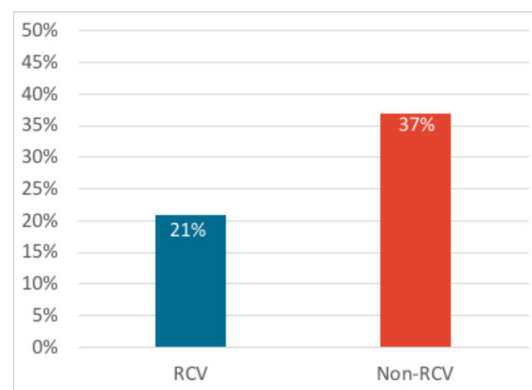


Figure 2: Candidates Admitting to Portraying Opponents Negatively, 2011-2013<sup>46</sup>



## 5. Ranked choice voting may decrease the influence of big money in politics.

While research on this subject is only preliminary, ranked choice voting may decrease the influence of big money in political campaigns. Because ranked choice voting allows for more candidates with more diverse views to run, including independent and third-party candidates, there will be greater competition in many local and state elections. Candidates who spend less money have a greater chance of

<sup>40</sup> Sarah John and Brandon Leinz, *Polarization and Multi-Winner Ranked Choice Voting in Cambridge, Massachusetts, City Council Elections*, FairVote Civility Report No. 6, 6 (Apr. 2016).

<sup>41</sup> *Id.*

<sup>42</sup> Porter, *supra* note 21 at 197.

<sup>43</sup> Spencer, Hughes, and Ritchie, *supra* note 37 at 418-19.

<sup>44</sup> *Id.*

<sup>45</sup> John and Douglas, *supra* note 6 at 26. Chart adapted from FairVote, *Ranked Choice Voting in Practice: Candidate Civility in Ranked Choice Elections, 2013 & 2014 Survey Brief* (2015), <https://fairvote.app.box.com/v/APSA-Civility-Brief-2015>.

<sup>46</sup> Chart adapted from FairVote, *supra* note 45.

winning than they do under the current system, thus potentially diminishing the influence of big donors on the outcome of elections.<sup>47</sup>

In one study of ranked choice voting in Pierce County, Washington, the authors found that, in 2004, under a traditional plurality voting system, the candidates who spent the most won in five out of six races studied.<sup>48</sup> In 2008, after the county adopted ranked choice voting, candidates who spent the most won in only three out of six races.<sup>49</sup> This result suggests preliminarily that the adoption of ranked choice voting may diminish the effect of campaign finance on election outcomes.<sup>50</sup>

## **6. Ranked choice voting saves jurisdictions money because it eliminates the need for multiple rounds of voting.**

Multiple rounds of voting for a single office, including primary elections, general elections, and runoff elections, can be costly and time intensive for cities and states to administer. By one estimate, election administration costs an average of one to two dollars per resident per election, though the cost can be much higher in small and special elections.<sup>51</sup> The burden of multiple rounds of voting falls not only on taxpayers but also on election officials and poll workers, as well as candidates, who are forced to raise campaign funds for successive elections, often with little time in between.<sup>52</sup>

Ranked choice voting alleviates the burden of multiple rounds of voting by compressing them into a single election, through a process that is sometimes called '*instant runoff voting*'. Ranked choice voting can be used to replace the combination of primary and general elections or eliminate entirely the need for expensive runoffs.<sup>53</sup> Because ranked choice voting requires only one election to produce a majority winner, it minimizes costs for taxpayers and eliminates the need for candidates to raise additional campaign funds.

The financial benefits of ranked choice voting to cities and states is well-documented. As an example, prior to its adoption of ranked choice voting, the city of San Francisco was forced to hold citywide runoff elections in 1999, 2001, and 2003, spending more than \$3 million to do so in 2003 alone.<sup>54</sup> The city adopted ranked choice voting in 2004 and, just that year, saved \$1.2 million by avoiding four runoff

---

<sup>47</sup> Cobb, Barrett, and Kleppner, *supra* note 3 at 114.

<sup>48</sup> Loren Collingwood, Todd Donovan, and Matt Barreto, *An Assessment of Rank Choice Voting's Debut in Pierce County, WA: A Research Report of the Washington Poll* 14 (Jun. 8, 2009).

<sup>49</sup> *Id.*

<sup>50</sup> *Id.*

<sup>51</sup> Richie, Kleppner, and Bouricius, *supra* note 1 at 99.

<sup>52</sup> *Id.*; see also Cobb, Barrett, and Kleppner, *supra* note 3 at 111.

<sup>53</sup> See Tolbert, *supra* note 2; see also Richie, Kleppner, and Bouricius, *supra* note 1 at 102.

<sup>54</sup> Hill and Richie, *supra* note 5 at 66.



elections, more than enough to offset the one-time costs associated with transition to a ranked choice voting system.<sup>55</sup>

Ranked choice voting has yielded similarly cost-effective results in other cities. The implementation of ranked choice voting in San Leandro, Berkeley, and Oakland, California led to the avoidance of a total of seventeen runoffs in just three election cycles, saving taxpayers millions of dollars and city officials untold amounts of administrative resources.<sup>56</sup>

Ranked choice voting, thus, will save cities and states, as well as taxpayers, money normally required to administer multiple rounds of voting.

**7. By eliminating multiple rounds of voting, ranked choice voting avoids the decline in voter participation that occurs in most primary and runoff elections.**

Voter turnout in most American elections is dismally low. In the 2014 midterm elections, the national turnout of voters was only 36.4%, the lowest rate of participation in 72 years.<sup>57</sup> Worse still, local elections have traditionally seen even lower voter participation rates: in 2016, fewer than 20% of eligible voters voted in mayoral elections.<sup>58</sup> Many political scientists have attributed low voter turnout to the large number of elections held in the United States.<sup>59</sup> The more times voters are asked to vote—in primaries, general elections, and runoffs—the less likely they are to do so in any particular election.

Ranked choice voting eliminates the need for multiple rounds of voting and, therefore, avoids the decline in participation that occurs in most primary and runoff elections.<sup>60</sup> Ranked choice voting simplifies the demands on voters by allowing them to express their political preferences through a single ballot in a single election.

In addition, because it demands only one election, ranked choice voting affords jurisdictions the flexibility to schedule their elections to coincide with elections for other state and federal offices, when voter turnout will be highest.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> *Id.* at 67.

<sup>56</sup> Madeline Alys Henry, *The Implementation and Effects of Ranked Choice Voting in California Cities* 28 (Fall 2016) (unpublished M.A. thesis, California State University, Sacramento).

<sup>57</sup> Jose A. DelReal, *Voter Turnout in 2014 Was the Lowest Since WWII*, WASH. POST, Nov. 10, 2014, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2014/11/10/voter-turnout-in-2014-was-the-lowest-since-wwii/?utm\\_term=.829153987bca](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2014/11/10/voter-turnout-in-2014-was-the-lowest-since-wwii/?utm_term=.829153987bca).

<sup>58</sup> Kriston Capps, *In the U.S., Almost No One Votes in Local Elections*, CityLab, Nov. 1, 2016, <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2016/11/in-the-us-almost-no-one-votes-in-local-elections/505766/>.

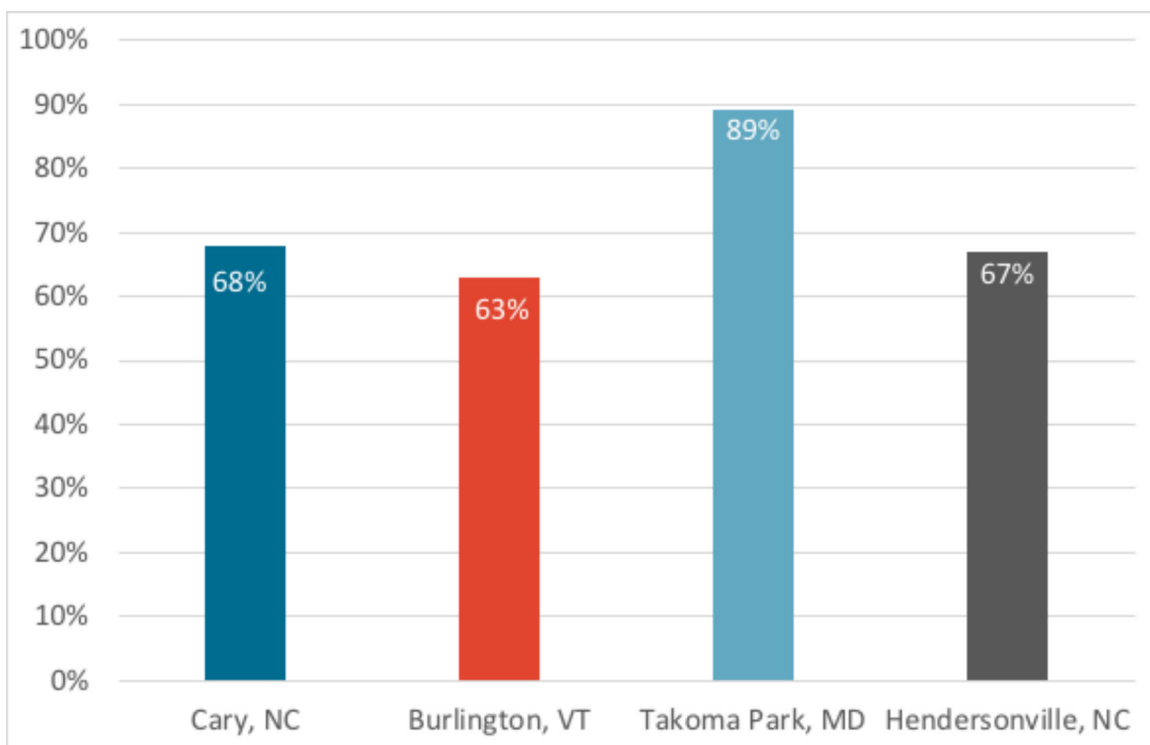
<sup>59</sup> Richie, *supra* note 3 at 505.

<sup>60</sup> Kimball and Anthony, *supra* note 35 at 1.

<sup>61</sup> Richie, Kleppner, and Bouricius, *supra* note 1 at 102; see also The New America Foundation and FairVote, *supra* note 37 at 5.

Research demonstrates the positive effect that ranked choice voting has on voter participation rates when compared to primary and runoff elections. One national study found that ranked choice voting led to a nearly 10 percent increase in voter turnout compared to plurality primaries and runoffs.<sup>62</sup> Another study of voter participation rates in San Francisco's 2005 elections—only the city's second year using ranked choice voting—voter turnout increased approximately 2.7 times.<sup>63</sup> In particular, the city experienced increases in voter participation in its six most racially and economically diverse neighborhoods, where turnout nearly quadrupled.<sup>64</sup>

Figure 3: Level of Support for Continued Use of Ranked Choice Voting instead of Plurality Systems<sup>65</sup>



**8. Voters demonstrate high levels of understanding and satisfaction with ranked choice voting in jurisdictions that have adopted it.**

Research to date overwhelmingly shows that voters in jurisdictions that use ranked choice voting understand and are satisfied with the voting system. In a 2013 survey of American cities using ranked choice voting, 90 percent of respondents

<sup>62</sup> Kimball and Anthony, *supra* note 35 at 5; see also Elliot Louthen, *Ranked Choice Voting in Practice: Analysis of Voter Turnout in RCV Elections*, FairVote RCV Civility Brief No. 8 2-3 (Nov. 2015).

<sup>63</sup> The New America Foundation and FairVote, *supra* note 37 at 4.

<sup>64</sup> *Id.* But see Kimball and Anthony, *supra* note 35 at 19 (finding, in a case study of Minneapolis, similar levels of socioeconomic and racial disparities in voter participation).

<sup>65</sup> The New America Foundation and FairVote, *supra* note 37 at 2.

found the ballot easy to understand.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, in a 2014 survey of California cities using ranked choice voting, 89 percent of respondents in those cities found the ballot easy to understand.<sup>67</sup>

Examination of voters in individual cities have yielded similar results. After Minneapolis' first election using ranked choice voting in 2009, voters were surveyed and 90 percent indicated that they understood the voting system "perfectly well" or "fairly well."<sup>68</sup> Similarly, in San Francisco's first election using ranked choice voting in 2004, 85 percent of voters indicated that they understood the ballot "very" or "fairly" well.<sup>69</sup>

Voters not only understand ranked choice voting but are satisfied with it. A majority of voters surveyed in both the 2013 and 2014 surveys mentioned above supported the continued use of ranked choice voting in their local elections. In the 2013 survey, 62 percent of voters supported the continued use of ranked choice voting, and 57 percent of voters in the 2014 survey supported it.<sup>70</sup> Even voters in cities that did not use ranked choice voting supported its introduction. In 2013, 49 percent of responding voters in cities using traditional plurality voting supported the introduction of ranked choice voting, and 54 percent of California voters surveyed in 2014 were in favor of the introduction of ranked choice voting in their cities.<sup>71</sup>

Studies of voters in individual cities already using ranked choice voting have documented similar levels of support. Sixty-eight percent of voters in Cary, North Carolina, 63 percent of voters in Burlington, Vermont, 89 percent of voters in Takoma Park, Maryland, and 67 percent of voters in Hendersonville, North Carolina supported the continued use of ranked choice voting instead of traditional plurality voting systems.<sup>72</sup>

In the words of one researcher, "to know [ranked choice voting] is to like it."<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> John and Douglas, *supra* note 6 at 26. *But see* Kimball and Anthony, *supra* note 35 at 22 (finding similar rates of voter confusion in plurality and ranked choice voting elections).

<sup>67</sup> *Id.*

<sup>68</sup> Lewyn, *supra* note 31 at 132.

<sup>69</sup> *Id.*

<sup>70</sup> John and Douglas, *supra* note 6 at 26.

<sup>71</sup> *Id.*

<sup>72</sup> The New America Foundation and FairVote, *supra* note 37 at 2.

<sup>73</sup> Tolbert, *supra* note 2 at 13-14.