RANKED CHOICE VOTING

ONE PERSON ONE VOTE

- **Eliminates Voter Equity**
- **Hurts Voters of Color**
- **Adds Confusion and Risk**

RANKED CHOICE VOTING

State and local governments continue to explore how best to run their elections with an eye toward issues like security, trust, candidate diversity, and voter access. Proponents of Ranked Choice Voting claim it is a solution to many of the challenges of the current election process. But are the claims rooted in fact?

WHAT IS RANKED CHOICE VOTING?

Very simply, Ranked Choice Voting (RCV), also referred to as "Instant Runoff Voting" (IRV), is an electoral system that allows people to vote for multiple candidates in order of preference. For example, if there are 7 candidates in a race, the voter would mark their first, second, third, fourth, fifth choice, etc.

In addition to general confusion and opportunity for political gaming of the electoral system, RCV risks disproportionately suppressing the value of the votes of seniors, less educated and lower economic voters, as well as voters of color. These are the very voters that RCV claims to benefit.

The RCV system is confusing for the voter, and the actual data is equally complex. The data touted by RCV proponents is often cherry-picked to reach a desired conclusion, misrepresenting the benefits. There is little or no evidence that they work in actual elections.

CLAIM: RCV increases voter turnout and engagement of voters of color.

FACT: A series of studies report that RCV decreases turnout among African Americans.

A study by Professor Lawrence Jacobs, Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, concluded there is no evidence RCV increases voter engagement and turnout by voters of color, and there is some evidence it chases them away.

The principle of "one man (person), one vote" supports democratic equity, ensuring that each citizen's ballot carries equal weight in determining election outcomes. Ranked Choice Voting creates an imbalance in voter influence because one person's vote may be counted more often depending on who they supported and how many candidates were ranked.

CLAIM: RCV saves money.

FACT: RCV does not save money.

The 2016 study, "The Cost of Ranked Choice Voting" by Christopher Rhode, could not show that implementing Ranked Choice Voting resulted in financial savings or liabilities in the cities that have chosen to use it.

For candidates, there is no evidence that campaign costs have gone down in RCV races. Data indicates money from independent expenditures and corporations has actually increased with RCV.

CLAIM: RCV reduces negative campaigning.

FACT: Analysis shows increased partisan polarization and negligible impact on the civility of campaigning.

An in-depth analysis found that RCV increased animosity among Democrats and Republicans. The study found a slightly more positive tone in newspaper articles in RCV elections, but Twitter and social media traffic was far more negative.

A non-scientific exit poll found voters felt a reduction in negative campaigning, however, MOST research found increased negativity from outside groups.

CLAIM: RCV adds clarity and fairness to the election process.

FACT: RCV creates even more opportunity for strategic voting and "gaming" the system.

RCV provides many opportunities for strategic voting or "gaming" the system, such as slate recommendations, calls to vote for "anyone but," candidates urging voters to vote for each other, and requesting voters not rank candidates at all. Campaign consultants will use this to their candidate's advantage and the voter's disadvantage.

CLAIM: RCV ensures a "true" majority winner.

FACT: RCV candidates are not elected by majority of the VOTERS.

Many ballots from voters that voted in the race are thrown out of the final count, or "exhausted." Exhausted ballots are not used to determine a majority winner. Multiple studies have shown that because of this, most RCV elections have resulted in a winner that did NOT have majority support from the voters.

A Federal Court has determined RCV is a plurality voting system, not a majority system, like we have now. A candidate with the most votes can lose an election. This happened in the 2010 Oakland mayor's race.

CLAIM: RCV will increase turnout because it uses a higher turnout, single election for the decision.

FACT: RCV reduces turnout, disproportionately impacting seniors, less educated, lower economic, and voters of color.

RCV is more complex, requiring greater knowledge of candidates and is more "cognitively demanding." The added complexity results in lower turnout. One survey showed that of those who DID NOT VOTE, 56% claimed it was because RCV was too complex.

Other studies have shown drops in turnout for RCV cities over non-RCV cities.

Seniors, less educated, and lower economic voters, as well as voters of color, have higher instances of disqualified ballots.

CLAIM: RCV is easy to understand and voter education will address any gaps in understanding.

FACT: Even with expensive voter education, RCV confusion increases ballot errors.

Confusion leads to ballot errors that can have a huge impact on election results.

Contributing to lower turnout, studies have shown confusion disproportionately impacts voters who are seniors, less educated, lower economic, as well as voters of color.

CLAIM: RCV encourages a more diverse pool of candidates resulting in an increase in the diversity of elected officials.

FACT: There is no consistent effect of RCV on the diversity or viability of the candidate pool.

According to a study by the Electoral Reform Research Group, cities choosing to implement RCV already have a more diverse candidate pool. There is little evidence that RCV significantly improves the diversity of candidates in local elections.

Princeton Professor McCarty's study compared a NYC council plurality election in 2017 with an RCV election in the same city council district in 2021. The 2021 election had fewer majority winners and lower winning margins than the 2017 plurality election. The professor concluded, "both of these outcomes run contrary to the arguments proffered by RCV advocates."

EXPERIENCES WITH RCV

Jurisdictions continue to experience challenges with RCV. Multiple cities and counties, even one state (North Carolina) dropped RCV after voters rejected it. Other cities, and even the United Kingdom, voted to oppose RCV by referendum. In an Alameda County School Board election, a software error was discovered two months after the election was certified, requiring a court to change the outcome. In Maine, Alaska, and New York City, there were massive errors in which an excessive number of ballots were discarded and election results took a month to certify.

For most voters, the primary way they connect to their political leaders' agenda and values is through elections. Faith in the overall political system can be eroded if trust in the electoral process is compromised.

And voters most impacted by a reduced perception of integrity are likely to be the very voters that RCV claims to benefit – seniors, less educated, lower economic, and first-time voters, as well as voters of color.

SOURCES

For sources and informational videos, please visit the Ranked Choice Voting is Bad Public Policy website by clicking here or scan the QR Code to the right.

If you would like someone to speak to your group about Ranked Choice Voting, please contact Larry Stone at lstone@larrystone.net, or call 408-391-1100.

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