RANKED CHOICE VOTING
A Tool for Building Black Voter Power?

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INTRODUCTION

Ted Berry and the Promise of Ranked Choice Voting

In the early 20th century, Cincinnati's government failed to represent its citizens. Republicans won a little more than half the vote, and almost all the city council seats. Despite the significant Black population, not a single Black candidate was elected to the council. In 1925, in response to unrepresentative and corrupt government, voters overwhelmingly supported proportional representation through ranked choice voting. The tide began to turn. 10 out of the next 15 city councils had *at least* a single Black elected member. Then in the 1950's Ted Berry, a Black Cincinnati leader, rose to prominence. He advocated for policies like a city-wide income tax, to make sure elites didn't hoard community resources. He also received more votes than any other city councilor, putting him in line to be mayor. White elites were threatened, so they spread lies, stoked fear, and in a low turnout election, over the support of Black voters, Cincinnati ended its proportional representation. Currently, as written by Sightline magazine, "although the city is 42 percent Black, only two of the city's nine councilmembers are Black." [1] Cincinnati slid back into unfair representation. Ted Berry spent the rest of his career organizing to bring back what had been ended, and he never succeeded. Except things are starting to change. The seeds he planted are taking bloom. Ranked choice voting is a sort of middle point between our status quo and proportional representation, and campaigns for ranked choice voting are winning across the country. From Alaska to Utah to New York City, voters want fairer systems. Participants in our focus groups called for "transformative" action, and "more voice, more choice." Ranked choice voting might be the first step on the path to strengthening democracy for all and restoring Black voting power.

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[1] Lee, Jay, and Kristin Eberhard. "How Proportional Representation Gave American Voters Meaningful Representation In The 1900S". *Sightline Institute*, 2022. https://www.sightline.org/2021/10/05/how-proportional-representation-gave-american-voters-meaningful-representation-in-the-1900s/.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to present findings from a semester-long project researching Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) as a viable pathway for building Black voter power. In service to this goal, a team of six enrollees in Professor Cornell William Brooks' Harvard Kennedy School course titled "Creating Justice in Real Time: Vision, Strategies, and Campaigns" embarked on a multi-pronged approach to study RCV. This report features a brief history and literature review of RCV, case studies of cities using RCV across the country, and messaging strategies for a future RCV campaign. This report concludes with a final set of recommendations for Black Voters Matter to consider in launching a future RCV campaign.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Most U.S. elections are single-member, winner-take-all plurality elections in which the candidate with the most votes wins an election even when they do not have a majority (50% + 1).[2] The current system is faulted for some of the negative aspects of voting, particularly that plurality elections favor a two-party system, which 62% of Americans agree is not promoting responsive elections and governance.[3] While researchers have identified at least nine political ideologies, the two party systems forced voters into one of two camps with significant variation within each party. Since third party candidates rarely have enough votes to win elections, voters throw away their votes if they support a third-party candidate.

Most scholars agree that electoral reform is possible under two key circumstances: if most elected officials believe they can benefit under the proposed system, or if voters adopt a new system through referendum or voter initiative.[4]

Ranked Choice Voting (RCV)/Instant Runoff Voting (IRV): Referred to as Alternative Vote in other countries, RCV allows voters to rank their candidates in order of preference instead of casting a ballot for a single preferred candidate. RCV is seen by some scholars as a compromise system between plurality and proportional voting. In plurality, the result is single-party government with two major parties, while proportional systems promote sharing power by producing governments with multiple political parties and coalitions.

The key promises of RCV are that it would incentivize candidates to campaign to be placed as second or third place and would inspire voters by allowing more choice. Additionally, proponents of RCV argue that it would protect voters from having to make strategic calculations instead of voting for their preferred candidate, from choosing between the "lesser of two evils", and from the fear that their votes may be wasted. RCV would also save governments money on multiple elections. While there is research suggesting that RCV increases youth participation in elections and women's representation in elected office, there is not much data exploring how RCV affects Black voters more generally.

Main arguments:[5] Proponents of Ranked Choice Voting use a series of arguments related to representation, polarization, choice, convenience, and costs. These proponents argue that RCV promotes representative outcomes and majority rule, discourages overly negative campaigning,

[2] Tolbert, & Kuznetsova, D. (2021). Editor's Introduction: The Promise and Peril of Ranked Choice Voting. Politics and Governance, 9(2), 265–270. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v9i2.4385

[3] Jones, J. M. (2021, February 15). Support for third U.S. political party at high point. Gallup. Retrieved from https://news.gallup.com/poll/329639/supportthird-political-party-high-point.aspx

[4] Ibid. Tolbert, & Kuznetsova (2021)

[5] "Ranked Choice Voting / Instant Runoff- Fairvote". *Fairvote*, 2022. https://www.fairvote.org/rcv#rcvbenefits.

provides voters with more choice, saves money on preliminaries and runoffs, promotes diverse representation, and minimizes strategic voting.

Promotes Representative Outcomes and Majority Rule: Vote splitting occurs when multiple candidates with similar political ideologies or voter bases draw votes from one another and weaken both candidates' chances of winning election. Vote splitting is minimized because voters express a back-up option under RCV, so that if their top ranked candidate is eliminated, their vote is reallocated to another more viable candidate. RCV in a single winner election typically works by eliminating the last place candidate and reallocating their votes to the remaining candidates. Every voter who ranked the eliminated candidate first on their ballot would have their vote cast for their second choice if they ranked one. This process continues with the last place candidate being eliminated and votes being reallocated until a single candidate has secured a majority of the vote. While the exact rules on the number of candidates voters are allowed to rank and the process for eliminating candidates between rounds may vary from place to place, the process follows the general outline of the lowest ranked candidate(s) being dropped and their votes reallocated in each round. Vote splitting in single-winner plurality elections results in some very unpopular candidates elected.

Discourages Overly Negative Campaigning: In traditional elections, mudslinging helps candidates by directly harming their opponents. Under RCV, candidates need to compete for second choice votes from their opponents' supporters. According to FairVote research, voters report more positive campaigning and more satisfaction with elections.

Gives Voters More Choice: In traditional, non-RCV elections, vote-splitting is mitigated by limiting the number of candidates who compete. Candidates must often first compete in primary elections before qualifying for a general election. Candidates are sometimes encouraged to stay out of the race due to vote splitting concerns. For example, progressives may discourage a second progressive candidate from running because of fears that this will undermine their progressive majority in the end.

Saves Government Resources Currently Spent on Expensive Runoffs: In states that currently hold runoff elections, it costs voters millions of dollars each year to execute an additional round of voting. Despite the high costs, the runoff elections, lacking mass voter mobilization, only attract a small share of voters.[6]

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[6] "Report: The Solution to Costly and Low-Turnout Runoff Elections". *The Fulcrum*, 2022. https://thefulcrum.us/voting/runoff-elections.

Promote Diverse Representation: Since RCV addresses vote-splitting, candidates who would generally split the vote amongst a demographic, would no longer be discouraged from entering an electoral race.

Minimize strategic voting: Strategic voting is when voters cast their ballot for what is generally called "the lesser of two evils." In these cases, voters select a candidate with viability in mind, which hinders support for candidates that may become viable if voters did not have to vote strategically. Under RCV voters can rank their truly preferred candidate first, and rank other, more viable options lower on their ballot.

Voters View RCV Favorably: According to a University of Maryland, 61% of voters favor RCV in federal elections. 73% of Democrats, 55% of independents, and 49% of Republicans favor the voting system.[7]

Criticisms: While the argument has been effectively refuted, critics of RCV argue that candidates only need a majority in the final round of counting, rather than most peoples' first choices, effectively resulting in the victory of a low-ranked candidate. The key criticism, however, has been that it is too complicated and confusing for voters. The states that have preempted RCV have used this argument to push their legislation forward.

Situating RCV in the Context of a Broader Voting Rights Movement: Voter suppression, gerrymandering, lack of early voting, restrictive voter ID laws, disenfranchisement of a racially profiled prison population, and the weakening of the Voting Rights Act are all issues related to Black voter power. In the past decade, the U.S. Supreme Court has struck down key provisions from the 1965 Voting Rights Act, gutting preclearance provisions that held states accountable in Shelby County v. Holder and making it harder to bring lawsuits against discriminatory practices in Brnovich v. DNC.[8] In the last year, Republican state lawmakers have moved tenaciously to reshape the country's elections and have passed over 34 laws restricting voting access in 19 states.[9] RCV is one of many reforms necessary to advance Black voter power.

RCV MATRIX

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[7] "Six-In-Ten Favor Ranked Choice Voting in Federal Elections". *Vop.Org*, 2022. https://vop.org/ranked-choice-voting/.

[8] "Fact Sheet: The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act". *Brennancenter.Org*, 2022. https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/JohnLewisVRAA_factsheet.pdf.

[9] "Democrats Fear for Democracy. Why Aren't They Running on It In 2022?". *Nytimes.Com*, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/21/us/politics/democrats-democracy-election.html.

RCV Throughout the United States: Ranked Choice voting is utilized in six states to prevent disenfranchisement of military and overseas voters. In the case of a runoff election, RCV ballots limit correspondence, drawn out election timelines[10], and ballot mail issues. Historically, military members would not be able to participate in nominating presidential candidates, and generally by the time that ballots were mailed back, one or multiple candidates would have already dropped out of the race. Presently, RCV is used in Arkansas, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia, and South Carolina for this purpose.[11]

As of April 2022, there are 55 cities, counties, and states expected to use RCV for all voters in their upcoming elections, affecting nearly 10 million voters.[12]
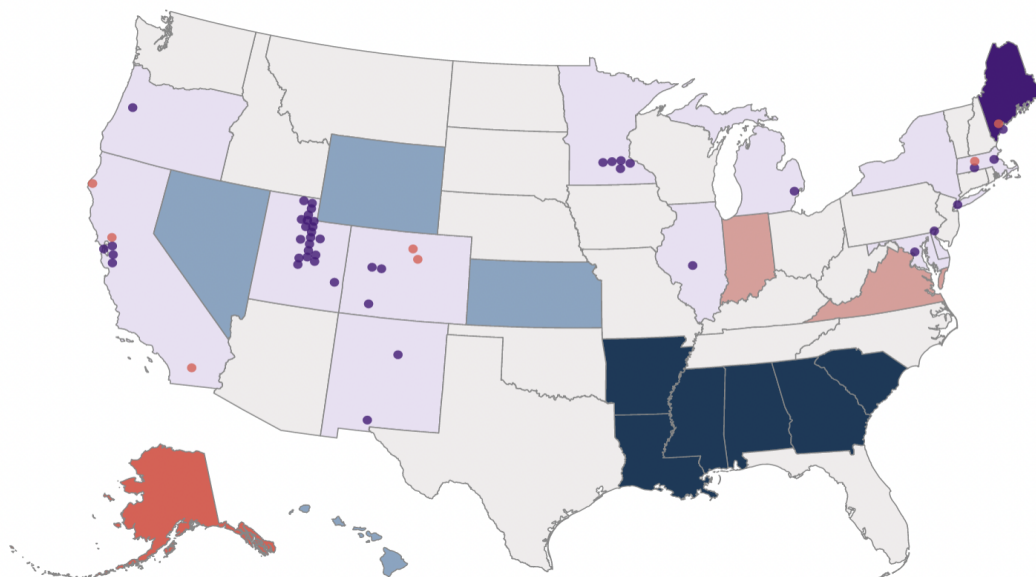
Source: FairVote

Backlash through Pre-Emption Laws: Some progressive cities have aimed to implement RCV. However, conservative state legislatures have occasionally passed preemption laws to prohibit RCV implementation in localities. Two notable and recent cases stand out: Memphis, Tennessee and Sarasota, Florida.

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[10] "Ranked Choice Ballots for Military And Overseas Voters - Fairvote". Fairvote, 2022. https://www.fairvote.org/ranked_choice_ballots_for_military_and_overseas_voters.

[11] "Ranked Choice Ballots for Military And Overseas Voters - Fairvote". *Fairvote*, 2022. https://www.fairvote.org/ranked_choice_ballots_for_military_and_overseas_voters.

[12] "Where Is Ranked Choice Voting Used? - Fairvote". *Fairvote*, 2022. https://www.fairvote.org/where_is_ranked_choice_voting_used.

Memphis, Tennessee: Memphians voted three times to try RCV – arguing that it promotes "less ideologically fractious" candidates, and provides the opportunity for less well-known, less well-funded candidates who might otherwise be dismissed. For years after voters passed it through ballot initiative, arguing that ranked choice voting is not allowed under the Tennessee elections statutes. However, since there was doubt about the current statute, a Republican assembly member introduced successful legislation to ban county election commissions from using ranked choice voting in state or local elections, SB1820,[13] which was signed by the governor on Monday, February 28, 2022.[14]

Sarasota, Florida: Voters of Sarasota, Florida enacted a charter amendment, with more than 77.6% of voters endorsing the measure.[15] In April 2022, however, the legislature passed, and the governor signed Senate Bill 524, which among establishing an Office of Election Crimes and Security, bans ranked choice voting across the state.[16]

[13] "Tennessee General Assembly Legislation". *Wapp.Capitol.Tn. Gov*, 2022. https://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/BillInfo/default.aspx?BillNumber=SB1820&GA=112.

[14] "Tennessee Bans Ranked-Choice Voting in State, Local Elections", 2022. https://www.thewellnews.com/in-the-states/tennessee-bans-ranked-choice-voting-in-state-local-elections/.

[15] "Lawmakers Explore Ranked-Choice Voting Possibilities for Florida". Florida Politics - Campaigns & Elections. Lobbying & Government., 2022. https://floridapolitics.com/archives/484728-ranked-choice-voting-could-be-eliminated-before-the-first-ballots-get-cast-in-florida/.

[16] "Senate Bill 524 (2022) - The Florida Senate". *Flsenate.Gov*, 2022. https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2022/524/?Tab=Analyses.

Matrix of Case Studies

Election	District % Black	Result	Themes	Did This Build Black Voting Power?
2020 SF D7 Supervisor	4%	Myrna Melgar was elected with 53% of the vote (Round 6). Melgar finished 3rd on the first ballot (20%; -4% from leader).	Appealing to a broad range of voters in the ideological center of your district	Probably not. Very few Black voters in D7. Topline takeaways were about coalition building and appealing to the median voter.
2010 SF D10 Supervisor	34%	Malia Cohen was elected with 53% of the vote (Round 20). Cohen finished 3rd on the first ballot (12%; -0.3% from leader).	Cooperation between candidates matters in close elections. Multiple Black candidates can run without worrying about splitting the vote.	Probably. RCV plus single-member districts can help build Black voting power.
2010 Oakland Mayor	28%	Jean Quan was elected with 51% of the vote (Round 10). Quan finished 2nd on the first ballot. (25%; -9% from leader).	Actively campaigning for second and third place votes is a winning strategy. Big shifts can happen between the first and final ballot.	Unclear. Black vote likely splintered among top 3 candidates. Few resources on Black voters' preferences in the 2010 election.
2021 NYC Mayor	24%	Eric Adams was elected with 50.4% of the vote (Round 8). Adams finished 1st on the first ballot (31%; leading by 9%).	Appealing to a broad range of voters in the ideological center of your district	Unclear. Eric Adams had strong support in Black community, and likely wins with or without RCV. Black candidates (Adams/Wiley) probably do better without RCV.

2020 San Francisco District 7 Supervisorial Election

Theme(s)
- Appealing to a broad range of voters in the ideological center of your district

Major Candidates
- **Joel Engardio** is a local news journalist, filmmaker, and former advocate with the ACLU. While Engardio has never held elected office, he's well connected in San Francisco politics having served on the boards of the local DCCC (the governing body of the SF Democratic party), the SF United Democratic Club, and the Alice B. Toklas LGBTQ Democratic Club. Engardio had previously run for District 7 Supervisor in 2012 and 2016, losing both times to progressive Norman Yee. Engardio is aligned with the moderate wing of the San Francisco Democratic party.
- **Vilaska Nguyen** is a public defender. Prior to 2020, Nguyen was not well-known in politics, having never run for elected office. Nguyen was endorsed by many labor groups as well as some of the more progressive members of the Board of Supervisors. Nguyen is aligned with the progressive wing of the San Francisco Democratic party.
- **Myrna Melgar** is an urban planner who's spent her career working in housing policy and community development. Before running for the Board of Supervisors, she served in leadership roles in multiple community-based organizations, the Mayor's Office of Housing and finally as President of the San Francisco Planning Commission. While Melgar is generally viewed as a progressive, she sometimes straddles the city's progressive-moderate divide and earned endorsements from Democrats in both camps.

District Demographics

Race and Ethnicity	
Asian	34%
Black	***4%***
Latino (of any race)	11%
White	52%
Multiracial or Other	10%

Background: The San Francisco Board of Supervisors is the main legislative body in San Francisco city government. It is composed of 11 members who are elected in single-member districts and serve four-year terms. Elections take place every two years, with odd numbered district elections in presidential years, and even numbered districts in midterm years. Supervisors are limited to 2 consecutive terms. The city used single member districts to elect Supervisors from 1977-79, which greatly increased the Board's diversity,

and reintroduced single member districts in 2000. Supervisors have been elected using Ranked Choice Voting since 2002.

Election Description: In 2020, seven candidates competed to replace term-limited Supervisor Norman Yee, who had represented District 7 for two terms and recently served as the President of the Board of Supervisors. San Francisco politics traditionally break down along moderate vs. progressive lines. Among the seven candidates, Joel Engardio positioned himself as the leading moderate – messaging about the importance of "clean streets, less crime and better services."[17] Engardio also had high name recognition in the district, having run against Yee in each of the prior two elections. Progressive support was mainly split between two candidates – Vilaska Nguyen and Myrna Melgar. Nguyen served as a public defender and was not well known in city politics. Despite his low name recognition, Nguyen was able to secure endorsements from many of the city's labor unions as well as some progressive politicians. Melgar, while widely viewed as progressive, had a close relationship with the city's moderate mayor, London Breed, and received endorsements from progressives and moderates alike. She was also endorsed by the local Democratic Party. Melgar was well-known in city government, having served in the Mayor's Office of Housing and in an appointed role as President of the San Francisco Planning Commission. Despite her endorsements and relationships in City Hall, Melgar began the race with low name recognition in her district and little money.

Four other candidates qualified for the ballot but would not end up mounting a serious challenge to the front runners. Dr. Emily Murase had previously won citywide elected office as a member of the Board of Education from 2010-2018. Despite her high name recognition and connections in local politics, she did not run a very active campaign. Ben Matranga ran for the seat in 2016, finishing third. However, while Matranga and Engardio split the moderate vote in 2016, moderate voters seemed to consolidate behind Engardio prior to the 2020 election and Matranga's campaign struggled to gain traction. Stephen Martin-Pinto, a firefighter, and Marine Corps veteran ran a very conservative campaign by San Francisco standards and never attracted broad support. A seventh candidate, Ken Piper, qualified for the ballot but little information is available about his campaign.

District 7 has long been one of the more moderate districts in San Francisco but may be during a voter realignment. The district is the city's fourth whitest, contains the second highest concentration of homeowners, and has the third highest household income[18]. In 2000, after San Francisco reintroduced single-member districts for Supervisorial elections, District 7 elected the most conservative supervisor in recent memory. However, by 2012 voters elected former school board member Norman Yee, who campaigned as a progressive. Yee's brand of progressivism was non-threatening to moderate voters in his district. Some of his signature issues on the Board were child and family policy and improving pedestrian safety. Yee also blocked several new housing developments from being built in his district, in line with the wishes of more moderate homeowners. The 2020 race was viewed as being wide open, with a serious potential for a progressive candidate to win.

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[17] Shaw, Randy. "San Francisco's D7 Has Another Tight Race - Beyond Chron". Beyond Chron, 2022. https://beyondchron.org/another-tight-race-in-sfs-d7/.

[18] "San Francisco Supervisor Districts Socio-economic Profiles". Default.Sfplanning.Org, 2022. https://default.sfplanning.org/publications_reports/SF_NGBD_SocioEconomic_Profiles/2012-2016_ACS_Profile_SupeDistricts_Final.pdf.

Results: No candidate received most of the support on the first ballot, so the race continued to an instant runoff. Engardio received the most first place votes (24%), followed by Nguyen (21%) and Melgar (20%). Throughout subsequent rounds of vote counting, Melgar benefitted from her broad base of support. When moderate candidate Ben Matranga was eliminated in the second round, Melgar closed to within 73 votes (0.19%) of Nguyen. In the next round, when Emily Murase was eliminated, Melgar gained the plurality of her votes and jumped into second place – nearly 1,000 votes (2%) ahead of Nguyen. Despite being more progressive than Murase, Melgar may have benefitted from being the only other woman in the race. Murase was seen as a leader on women's issues and had long served as the Director of San Francisco's Department of the Status of Women. This may have been a salient factor for many Murase voters, who threw their second-place support behind Melgar. In the next round, Martin-Pinto was eliminated. His voters skewed more conservative, and a plurality threw their support behind Engardio. Nguyen was eliminated in the last round, and a large majority of his voters cast their second-place votes for Melgar. This was enough to help Melgar close a nearly 7% deficit and vault ahead of Engardio on the last round of balloting. Myrna Melgar was elected with 53% of the vote on the final ballot (Round 6).[19] Melgar is the first Latina woman elected to the Board of Supervisors since the re-introduction of single-member districts in 2000.

2020 District 7 Supervisor RCV Election Results
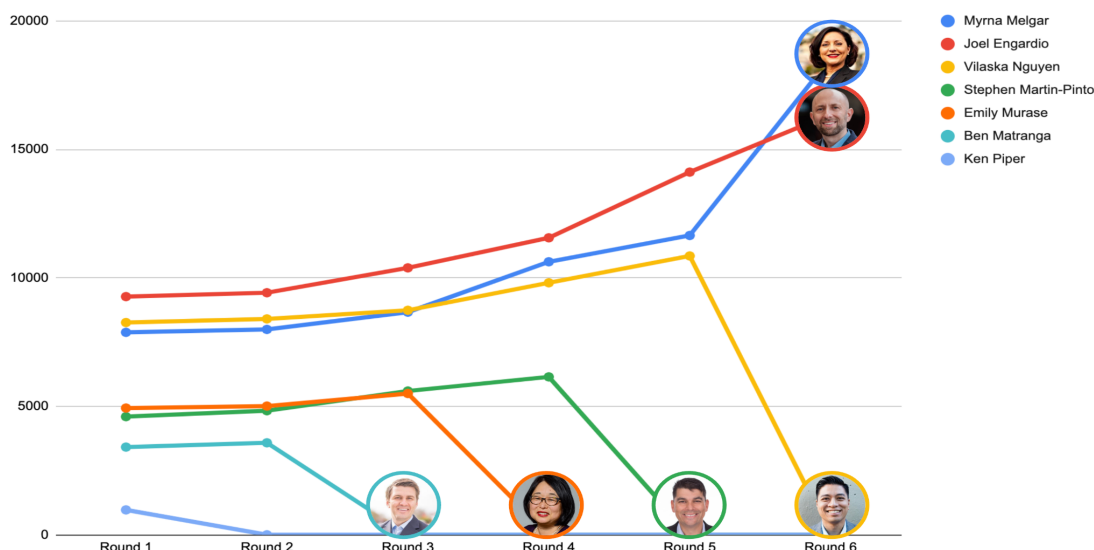
Analysis: Melgar straddles the city's progressive-moderate divide and was able to build broad support among voters in her district. While she was the third-place vote getter on the first round of balloting – finishing behind the leading moderate and progressive candidates – she picked up enough support on subsequent ballots to vault into first place.

This is also a rare example of an election where the third-place finisher on the first ballot was actually the Condorcet winner, meaning they would have beaten every other candidate in a head-to-head matchup. If this election had been conducted using a traditional runoff system, Melgar would have been eliminated despite being preferred head-to-head against every other candidate.

Did RCV build Black voting power in this election? Probably not. District 7 has very few Black voters and it's unclear whether their votes were amplified by RCV in this election.

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[19] Ibid.

2010 San Francisco District 10 Supervisorial Election

Theme(s)
- Civil campaigning and alliances between candidates matter in a close election
- Multiple Black candidates can run without worrying about splitting the vote
- RCV plus single-member districts can help build Black voting power

Major Candidates
- **Lynette Sweet** is the former chair of the BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) Board, Director of the San Francisco Redevelopment Commission, and President of the Taxi Commission. She won the endorsement of the San Francisco Chronicle for her "clear edge in depth of experience and can-do centrist sensibilities for creating jobs and growth."[20] When the race began, Sweet was considered a frontrunner due to her high name recognition, campaign cash, and endorsements from former Mayor Willie Brown and District 10 incumbent Sophie Maxwell. However, Sweet was hampered by scandals – she owed back taxes and reportedly failed to disclose over $100,000 in earnings – making the race much more competitive.
- **Tony Kelly** is a director of a local theater company and a progressive Democrat.
- **Malia Cohen** is an alumna of Emerge, a former field organizer for Gavin Newsom's first campaign for Mayor of San Francisco, a legislative aide to a San Mateo County Supervisor, and the founder of a social media and public policy consulting firm.
- **Marlene Tran** is a former educator, community organizer, and member of the local DCCC (the governing body of the SF Democratic party).
- **Steve Moss** is the editor of a local newspaper, the Potrero View, based out of the Potrero Hill neighborhood of San Francisco. Moss is considered a moderate Democrat.
- **DeWitt Lacy** is a civil rights attorney and a progressive Democrat.

District Demographics

Race and Ethnicity	
Asian	31%
Black	***34%***
Latino (of any race)	25%
White	12%
Multiracial or Other	24%

Background

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[20] "District 10: Lynette Sweet, A Sensible Leader". SFGATE, 2022.
https://www.sfgate.com/opinion/editorials/article/District-10-Lynette-Sweet-a-sensible-leader-3249812.php.

The San Francisco Board of Supervisors is the main legislative body in San Francisco city government. It is composed of 11 members who are elected in single-member districts and serve four-year terms. Elections take place every two years, with odd numbered district elections in presidential years, and even numbered districts in midterm years. Supervisors are limited to 2 consecutive terms. The city used single member districts to elect Supervisors from 1977-79, which greatly increased the Board's diversity, and reintroduced single member districts in 2000. Supervisors have been elected using Ranked Choice Voting since 2002.

Election Description

In 2010, 22 candidates vied to replace term-limited Supervisor Sophie Maxwell in a wide-open race for District 10 Supervisor. Lynette Sweet, the former chair of the BART Board, was initially seen as the frontrunner and collected endorsements from Maxwell and former Mayor Willie Brown. However, revelations that Sweet owed $20,000 in back taxes[21] damaged her campaign and left the race wide open. None of the other 21 candidates were able to consolidate support and emerge as a clear front-runner heading into the election. While Sweet remained competitive heading into election day, Steve Moss, the editor of the local Potrero View newspaper, cut into Sweet's support with moderate voters and had a strong base in the Potrero Hill neighborhood of D10. Marlene Tran, a retired teacher, former DCCC member, and community activist also emerged as a strong contender. Tran was considered a favorite to do well among the district's large base of Asian voters.[22] Notably, the city's progressive faction failed to coalesce around a single candidate. Progressive endorsements were split among civil rights attorney DeWitt Lacey, former legislative aid and political organizer Malia Cohen, and the director of a local theater company, Tony Kelly.[23] Cohen also collected endorsements from the San Francisco Democratic Party, and the more moderate Firefighters Union and Building Trades Union.

District 10 includes the Bayview, Hunters Point, Visitacion Valley, Portola, and Potrero Hill neighborhoods of San Francisco. D10, and Bayview Hunters Point in particular, have long been the center of Black life in San Francisco. During WWII, the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard was a major employer and attracted thousands of Black workers to settle in San Francisco as part of the Great Migration. Newly arrived Black workers faced housing discrimination, and were mostly restricted to redlined areas of the city like Bayview and the Fillmore. In the 1960s-70s, thousands of Black families were displaced from the Fillmore as part of an "urban renewal" project by the San Francisco Redevelopment Authority, and the Bayview became the city's lone majority Black neighborhood. By 2010, Bayview's Black population had declined to 34% and the neighborhood was experiencing the early stages of gentrification. After decades of disinvestment, the neighborhood was seeing the expansion of a new light rail line and plans to develop thousands of new housing units. A top concern for voters was how to balance new public and private investment in their district with fears that it would cause gentrification and displacement.

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[21] "S.F. Supe Hopeful Owes $20,000 In Back Taxes". SFGATE, 2022. https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/S-F-supe-hopeful-owes-20-000-in-back-taxes-3176402.php.

[22] Schneider, Benjamin,. "Marlene Tran's Success Shows Strength Of Asian Voters - SF Weekly". SF Weekly, 2022. https://www.sfweekly.com/news/marlene-trans-success-shows-strength-of-asian-voters/.

[23] "Progressives In Trouble In District 10 Supervisor Race - Beyond Chron". Beyond Chron, 2022. https://beyondchron.org/progressives-in-trouble-in-district-10-supervisor-race/.

Also of concern for the district's Black population was maintaining Black representation on the Board of Supervisors. Outgoing Supervisor Sophie Maxwell was the Board's only Black member, and none of the other district elections that year fielded strong Black candidates with any shot of winning. Several Black candidates were crowded atop the field in D10, including Sweet, Cohen, and Lacy.

Results

As expected, no candidate claimed a majority on the first round of balloting, so the race proceeded to an instant runoff. On the first ballot, five candidates were separated by less than 1%, with just 181 votes separating first and fifth place. Sweet received the most first place votes (12.1%) followed by Kelly (11.8%), Cohen (11.8%), Tran (11.5%) and Moss (11.1%). Cohen slowly picked up votes in the first six rounds and by the seventh round of balloting had nudged ahead of Kelly for second place. The first lead change came after the 11th round of balloting, when Eric Smith was eliminated, and Cohen edged into first place by 31 votes (0.2%) ahead of Sweet. Smith and Cohen had campaigned together down the stretch and endorsed each other for second place. The candidates even sent out a joint mailer encouraging voters to support their "District 10 team."[24] Sweet lurched back into first place in the 14th round. In the 16th Round Tran shot up into first place after Teresa Duque was eliminated and her voters overwhelmingly threw their support behind Tran. In the next round, DeWitt Lacy was eliminated and his voters overwhelmingly broke for Cohen, the other progressive Black candidate in the race. This gave Cohen the lead which she wouldn't give up. In the next round, Sweet was eliminated, and Cohen was the biggest beneficiary when her votes were redistributed. After Sweet, Tran was eliminated, with her votes breaking slightly toward Tony Kelly. However, this was not enough to close the gap between Cohen and Kelly, and Cohen was elected with 52.7% of the vote on the final ballot (round 20).[25]

2010 District 10 Supervisor RCV Election Results (Top Candidates)
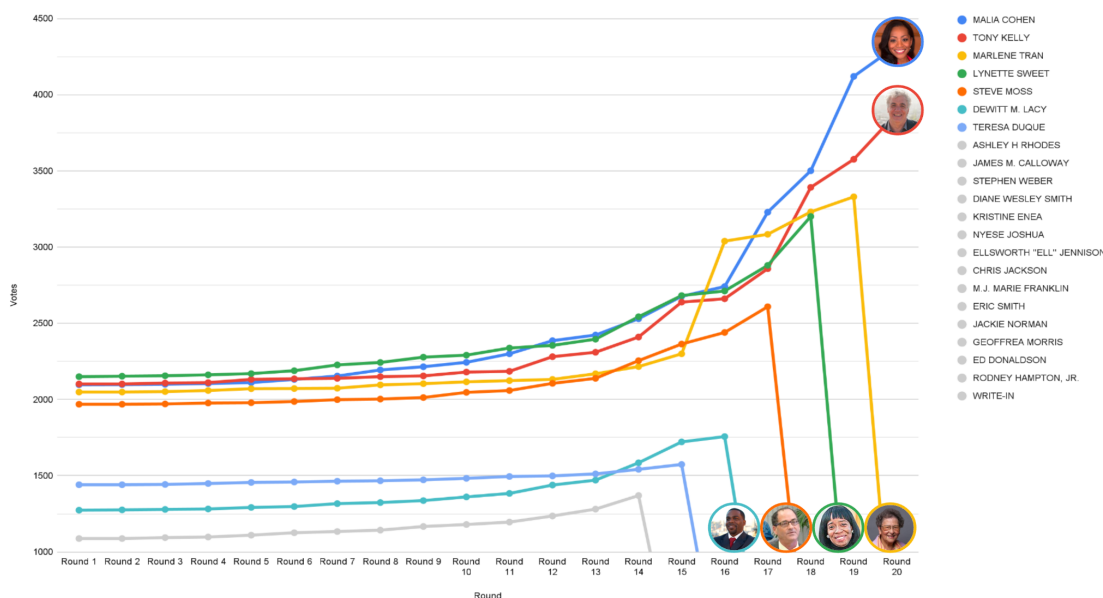
Did RCV build Black voting power in this election?

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24 "How Ranked Choice Voting Elected Malia Cohen - Beyond Chron". Beyond Chron, 2022. https://beyondchron.org/how-ranked-choice-voting-elected-malia-cohen/.
25 "RCV BOS D10". Sfelections.Org, 2022. https://sfelections.org/results/20101102/data/d10.html.

Probably. Multiple Black candidates were able to run and ultimately help each other win in a district where 34% of voters were Black. Even though the three main Black candidates had markedly different politics – Lynette Sweet was an old guard member of San Francisco's political establishment who drew her support from more moderate voters, while Malia Cohen and DeWitt Lacy were younger, progressive candidates with less political experience – Lacy and Sweet were ultimately able to help catapult Cohen to victory once they were eliminated and their votes were reallocated.

One important point to note is that RCV worked well in conjunction with single-member districts, and it's difficult to say which mattered more for building Black voting power in this election. District 10 was the only district with any chance of electing a Black Supervisor in 2010, and it seems unlikely that any candidate from D10 would have won a seat in a citywide election in that year. Fewer votes were cast in D10 than in the other Supervisorial races, except for D4 where Carmen Chu ran unopposed. And the second place vote getters in Districts 2, 6, and 8 all received more votes on the first ballot than Malia Cohen did on the final ballot, which casts further doubt on D10's ability to elect a candidate in a citywide race. On the other hand, districting alone might not have been enough if Black voters wanted to elect a Black candidate in 2010. While Lynette Sweet finished with the most first place votes, under San Francisco's pre-2002 rules the race would have gone to a runoff election since no candidate received a majority. The top two finishers on the first ballot were Sweet and Kelly, who were separated by just 48 votes. It's not clear who would have won in a head-to-head race, especially with a continued focus on Sweet's taxes.

2010 Oakland Mayoral Election

Theme(s)
- Big shifts can happen between the first and final ballot.
- RCV helps progressive candidates avoid vote splitting
- Actively campaigning for second and third place votes is a winning strategy

Major Candidates
- **Jean Quan** is a longtime community activist who served as the district 4 Oakland City Councilor at the time of the 2010 Mayoral election. She had previously served for 12 years on the Oakland School Board. At the time of the election, Quan was generally viewed as a progressive candidate.
- **Don Perata** is a longtime Oakland politician who served for a decade in the California State Senate, including for four years as its highest-ranking member (President pro tempore). Prior to representing Oakland in the state Senate, Perata represented Oakland in the California State Assembly. Heading into the 2010 Mayoral race, Perata was widely viewed as the front runner and had amassed huge amounts of campaign funding. Perata was seen as a moderate or conservative Democrat by Oakland standards.
- **Rebecca Kaplan** is tenant's rights attorney who served as an at-large Oakland City Councilor at the time of the 2010 Mayoral Election. Prior to serving on the Oakland City Council, Kaplan was a member of the AC Transit Board (the local public transit agency). She's the first out lesbian to hold elected office in Oakland history. Kaplan is a progressive Democrat.

District Demographics

Race and Ethnicity	
Asian	17%
Black	*28%*
Latino (of any race)	25%
White	35%
Multiracial or Other	21%

Background

In 2010 Oakland held its first election using RCV, with a Mayoral election garnering the most attention at the top of the local ticket. Under the previous rules, mayoral candidates needed to win a majority of the vote, or else the top two finishers would face off in a runoff election. The new system allowed voters to rank up to three candidates on their ballots, with the race proceeding to an instant runoff if no candidate received a majority of first place votes. 10 candidates vied to replace incumbent Mayor Ron Dellums, who had announced he would not seek reelection.

Election Description

Heading into the election, Don Perata was widely viewed as the frontrunner. Perata had served in the State Assembly and State Senate for over a decade and had recently been the Senate's top ranked Democrat. He'd essentially been campaigning since his Senate term ended in 2008. In addition to his political connections and high name recognition, Perata had amassed a large warchest and was expected to widely outspend other candidates. Also in the race were two Oakland City Councilors. Rebecca Kaplan had been elected to an at-large seat on the City Council just two years prior to the 2010 Mayoral race. A former member of the Green Party, Kaplan was widely viewed as a progressive alternative to Perata. Another City Councilor, Jean Quan, was first elected to represent the relatively white and affluent District 4 in 2002. Quan was a long-established figure in Oakland, having also served on the School Board for 12 years prior to her first term as City Councilor. Like Kaplan, Quan was widely viewed as a more progressive alternative to Perata. Seven other candidates qualified for the ballot but were not widely viewed as being seriously competitive.

By most accounts, Perata ran a fairly traditional campaign focused on appealing to voters for their first-choice ranking. Quan on the other hand, adopted campaign tactics much more tailored toward the new RCV system. According to the New York Times, Quan created and led an "anybody but Don" coalition that focused on appealing to supporters of other candidates for their second or third place votes. A political consultant from the Kaplan campaign noted that Quan "ran a very focused campaign to be the second-place candidate for a lot of candidates. She never spoke ill of anyone except Don Perata, and she really became the leader of the 'not Don Perata' sentiment in Oakland, and that's how she became everybody's second choice."[26] While Perata remained the frontrunner, progressive voters lined up behind Kaplan and Quan, with many ranking both candidates somewhere on their ballot.

Results

Perata finished in first place by a wide margin on the first round of balloting but failed to secure a majority of the vote. The top three finishers in terms of first place votes were Perata (33.7%), Quan (24.5%), and Kaplan (21.6%). As candidates were eliminated in subsequent rounds, the gap between Perata and Quan persisted. By the second to last round, Quan still trailed Perata by 9%. However, when Kaplan was eliminated in the final round, Quan won 75% of her votes and vaulted into the lead. Quan won with 51% of the vote on the final ballot (round 10), making her Oakland's first female and first Asian Mayor.

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[26] "The Winning Strategy In Oakland: Concentrate On Being 2nd Or 3rd Choice (Published 2010)". *Nytimes.Com*, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/12/us/politics/12bcvoting.html.

2010 Oakland Mayor RCV Election Results (Top Candidates Displayed Only)
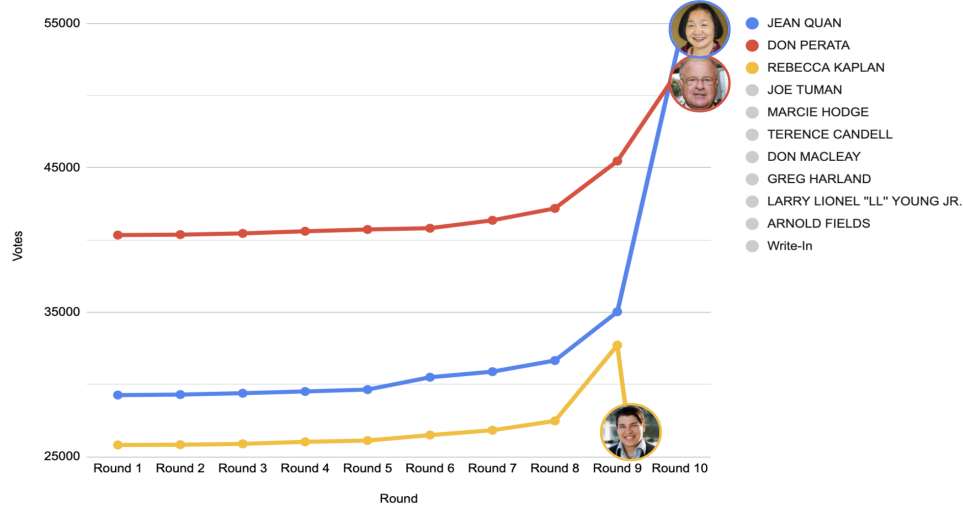
Did RCV build Black voting power in this election?

It's unclear. There were very few resources available documenting Black voters' preferences in this election. One article from the New York Times noted that the top three candidates had split the support of Oakland's Black political and cultural elite, with each racking up endorsements from prominent political and community leaders. The article went on to suggest that Ron Dellums, the city's outgoing Mayor, had been elected with widespread Black support in 2006, but had disappointed while in office and no other candidate had been able to consolidate Black voters' support by 2010. It's unclear how Quan, Perata, and Kaplan responded to the concerns of a splintered Black electorate in the 2010 race.

2021 New York Mayoral Election

Theme(s)
- Appealing to a broad range of voters in the ideological center of your district

Major Candidates
- **Eric Adams** is a former NYC Police Officer, New York State Senator, and Brooklyn Borough President. His campaign largely focused on appealing to blue-collar voters of color. His policy priorities centered around community safety and policing. Adams was a well-known name in New York politics, garnered endorsements from major labor unions, and raised over $10m to emerge as a strong candidate early on. Adams was considered a moderate in the Democratic primary.
- **Maya Wiley** is a former civil rights attorney with the NAACP LDF and ACLU, an MSNBC commentator, and a political counselor to Mayor Bill de Blasio. Wiley emerged as the leading progressive candidate in the Democratic primary. She often critiqued Adams' positions on policing and public safety and pledged to shift at least $1b from the NYC Police budget to education and social services.
- **Kathryn Garcia** is the former New York City Commissioner of Sanitation. She also briefly served as the interim chair of the New York City Housing Authority. Garcia's campaign centered around her pragmatism and competency. She was endorsed by the New York Times Editorial Board as a "go-to problem solver for the past decade" with "a zeal for making government work better." Garcia was considered a moderate Democrat.
- **Andrew Yang** is a businessman who gained political prominence with his 2020 campaign to be the Democratic party's nominee for President. In the New York Mayoral race, Yang leapt out to an early lead. However, his support steadily eroded. Yang committed a series of political missteps and was critiqued for his inexperience and lack of substance. Yang was considered a moderate.
- **Scott Stringer** is the former NYC Comptroller, Manhattan Borough President, and New York State Assemblyman. Stringer is well-known in NYC politics, having served in elected office continuously since 1993. Over the course of the mayoral primary, two women accused Stringer of sexual assault. He emerged as a leading progressive candidate early in the race but lost progressive support to Wiley over time.

District Demographics

Race and Ethnicity	
Asian	14%
Black	*24%*
Latino (of any race)	29%
White	41%
Multiracial or Other	21%

Background

In 2019, New York City voters adopted a measure to allow for RCV in some municipal elections. Under the new rules, voters could rank up to five candidates in primary and special elections for Mayor and a short list of other local offices (e.g., Borough President, City Council, etc.). The 2021 Mayoral Primary was the first major race to use RCV. Since New York is an overwhelmingly blue city, most of the attention focused on the Democratic primary. The primaries would be held in June, with the Democratic and Republican winners facing off in a November General Election.

Election Description

2020 Presidential candidate Andrew Yang entered the race in January 2021, and early polling suggested he was the clear frontrunner. Yang had high name recognition and a strong fundraising network after his national campaign. Much like his Presidential campaign, Yang's Mayoral platform centered around poverty reduction. He promised a Basic Income for the poorest New Yorkers and a "People's Bank" to expand access to financial services. However, his campaign was hampered by a series of political missteps. Yang was hammered for being tone-deaf after saying:

> "We live in a two-bedroom apartment in Manhattan. And so, like, can you imagine trying to have two kids on virtual school in a two-bedroom apartment, and then trying to do work yourself?"

Opponents criticized Yang for being out of touch with the experiences of everyday New Yorkers, and for his inexperience in government.

Also fielding strong early showings were former NYC police officer, Eric Adams, and NYC Comptroller, Scott Stringer.

Adams was a well-known figure in NYC politics and was polling near the top of the field from the onset. His campaign focused on his blue-collar background and moderate positions on public safety. Adams attempted to stake out a nuanced position on policing and drew contrasts between himself and the more progressive candidates in the race. During his 20-year career as a NYC police officer, Adams spoke out frequently and publicly against police brutality and stop-and-frisk[27]. As a candidate for mayor, he argued against defunding the police.

> "I don't hate police departments — I hate abusive policing, and that's what people mix up."[28]

Public safety became a highly salient issue during the campaign, as NYC experienced an uptick in crime and gun violence. Adams continued to highlight the cleavage between himself and the progressive candidates on policing, appealing to moderate voters who viewed police as essential for public safety. In addition, Adams highlighted his working-class background and sought to build a coalition of working class voters of color. He appealed to voters as a candidate who understood their lived experience and was ultimately successful in heavily Black and Latino areas of Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx.[29] Crucially,

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[27] "'Keep An Eye On This Guy': Inside Eric Adams'S Complicated Police Career". *Nytimes.Com*, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/19/nyregion/eric-adams-nyc-police-mayor.html.

[28] "Eric Adams Leads In The Mayor's Race. Here's What To Know About Him.". *Nytimes.Com*, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/23/nyregion/who-is-eric-adams.html.

[29] "The Most Detailed Map Of New York City Mayoral Primary Results". *Nytimes.Com*, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/06/23/nyregion/nyc-mayor-primary-results-precinct-map.html.

Adams built a multiracial coalition and did well with Latino voters. For example, he won the endorsement of Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., and racked up votes in heavily Latino precincts there.

Stringer was competing with a handful of other candidates for the progressive vote. A longtime figure in NYC politics, Stringer was campaigning as both an experienced public servant and a progressive leftist. As Comptroller, Stringer had divested NYC pensions from private prisons and fossil fuels[30][31]. He'd also long called for the closure of Rikers Island[32] and an end to stop-and-frisk[33] during his time as Comptroller and Manhattan Borough President. One supporter was quoted comparing Stringer to Senator Elizabeth Warren for his detailed progressive policy proposals.[34] In April Stringer was accused of sexual assault and other leading candidates called on him to drop out of the race. He continued to campaign, but lost ground with progressive voters.

Maya Wiley competed with Stringer for progressive backing. A former civil rights attorney with the NAACP LDF, an MSNBC contributor, and a counselor to Mayor Bill de Blasio, Wiley had a compelling resume that appealed to progressives. However, she trailed Stringer in name recognition and campaign cash, and struggled to consolidate progressive support for much of the race. Wiley was a fierce critic of Adams, especially on policing and public safety. She pledged to defund at least $1b from the NYC Police and shift those resources to schools and social services. She also introduced a series of progressive proposals to reduce income inequality and invest in jobs, education, and community care. Late in the campaign Wiley was able to emerge as the leading progressive candidate after Stringer was accused of sexual assault. She racked up endorsements from Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, SEIU 1199, and Hakeem Jefferies.

Kathryn Garcia was the last major candidate to emerge in the race. Much like Adams and Stringer, Garcia was a NYC insider with a long track record in public life. However, she'd served in a series of appointed roles, rather than elected office. As Sanitation Commissioner, Garcia modernized the routing system for snowplows and garbage trucks, cutting traffic from garbage trucks in half. As the interim chair of NYCHA, she addressed a lead paint scandal and cut lead poisoning for children in public housing by 21% in her first year. Garcia framed herself as a competent public servant with a track record of success and won an endorsement from the New York Times Editorial Board for her "zeal for making government work better."[35] While she was viewed as a moderate, Garcia allied with progressives down the stretch. Many Wiley voters listed Garcia on their ballots to prevent Adams from being elected.

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[30] "NYC Pension Funds To Divest $4 Billion From Fossil Fuels". *AP NEWS*, 2022. https://apnews.com/article/new-york-us-news-bill-de-blasio-new-york-city-scott-stringer-38866c4a149af462823a6733ff8d2138.

[31] "New York City Pension Funds Pull Out Of Private Prison Companies", 2022. https://www.wsj.com/articles/new-york-city-pension-funds-pull-out-of-private-prison-companies-1496951174.

[32] "City Controller Scott Stringer: Rikers Island Is An 'Urban Shame' That Should Be Shut Down", 2022. https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/scott-stringer-time-shut-rikers-island-article-1.2439552.

[33] "Borough President Seeks Limits On Stop-And-Frisk (Published 2011)". *Nytimes.Com*, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/24/nyregion/scott-stringer-manhattan-leader-criticizes-stop-and-frisk.html.

[34] "He Has Trained To Be Mayor For Decades. Will Voters Be Persuaded? (Published 2021)". *Nytimes.Com*, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/14/nyregion/scott-stringer-new-york-mayor.html.

[35] "Opinion | Kathryn Garcia for Mayor (Published 2021)". *Nytimes.Com*, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/10/opinion/kathryn-garcia-nyt-endorsement-nyc-mayor.html.

Among those supporting a candidate (first-past-the-post polls)
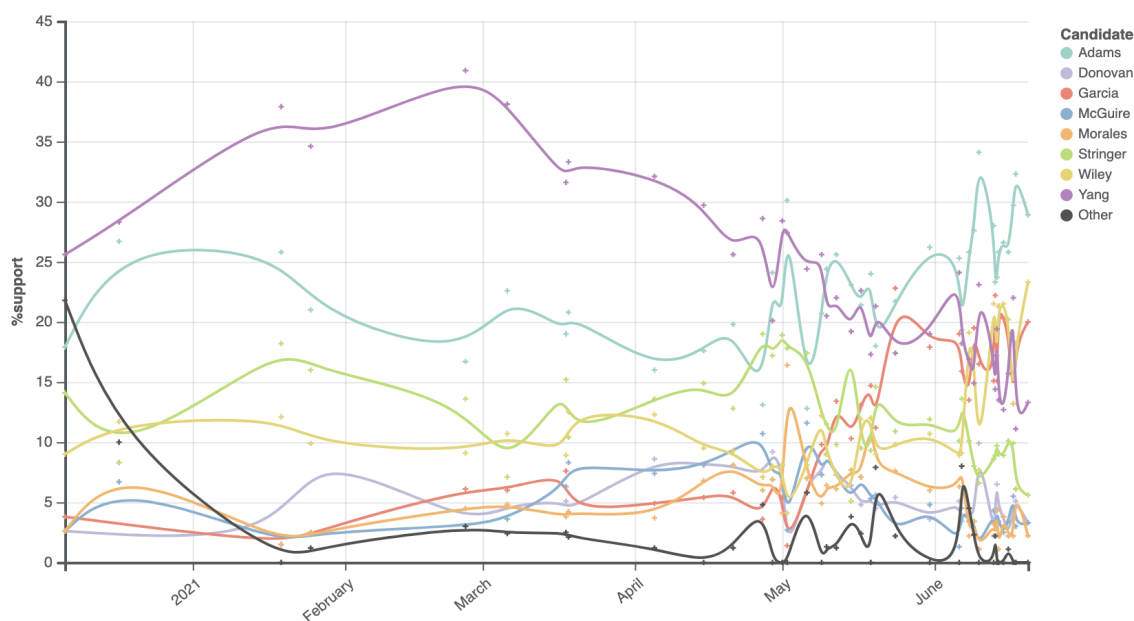
Results

Adams amassed a comfortable lead on the first round of balloting, but failed to secure a majority of the vote, triggering an instant runoff. Adams led the first ballot with 30.7%, followed by Wiley (21.4%), Garcia (19.6%), Yang (12.2%), and Stringer (5.5%). The candidates maintained this positioning through the first five rounds of the instant runoff. Stringer was eliminated in the sixth round, though his support had declined so much by election day that his votes didn't meaningfully alter the race once they were redistributed. Yang was eliminated on the seventh ballot and the plurality of his votes were redistributed to Kathryn Garcia, nudging her 1.4% ahead of Maya Wiley. On the eighth and final ballot, Wiley was eliminated. The overwhelming majority of her votes were redistributed to Garcia, but it wasn't enough to close the 10% gap between Garcia and Adams. Adams defeated Garcia in the final round (round 8)[36] with 50.4% of the vote.

How the votes were counted - round by round

	Round 1		Round 2			Round 3			Round 4			Round 5			Round 6			Round 7			Round 8		
Eliminated in this round			Write-ins			Isaac Wright Jr.			Paperboy Love Prince; Aaron S. Foldenauer; Art Chang; Joycelyn Taylor**			Shaun Donovan			Raymond J. McGuire; Dianne Morales; Scott M. Stringer**			Andrew Yang			Maya D. Wiley		
Elected																		Eric L. Adams*					
Votes in this round	# votes	% of vote	votes transfered	# votes	% of vote	votes transfered	# votes	% of vote	votes transfered	# votes	% of vote	votes transfered	# votes	% of vote	votes transfered	# votes	% of vote	votes transfered	# votes	% of vote	votes transfered	# votes	% of vote
Eric L. Adams	**289,403**	30.7%	200	**289,603**	30.8%	452	**290,055**	30.8%	1751	**291,806**	31.2%	3992	**295,798**	31.7%	21294	**317,092**	34.6%	37565	**354,657**	40.5%	49856	**404,513**	50.4%
Maya D. Wiley	**201,127**	21.4%	66	**201,193**	21.4%	325	**201,518**	21.4%	4495	**206,013**	22.0%	3095	**209,108**	22.4%	30066	**239,174**	26.1%	15554	**254,728**	29.1%	-XXX		
Kathryn A. Garcia	**184,463**	19.6%	108	**184,571**	19.6%	98	**184,669**	19.6%	2062	**186,731**	19.9%	5145	**191,876**	20.5%	31758	**223,634**	24.4%	43298	**266,932**	30.5%	130384	**397,316**	49.6%
Andrew Yang	**115,130**	12.2%	171	**115,301**	12.2%	201	**115,502**	12.3%	2506	**118,008**	12.6%	3589	**121,597**	13.0%	14089	**135,686**	14.8%	-XXX					
Scott M. Stringer	**51,778**	5.5%	72	**51,850**	5.5%	101	**51,951**	5.5%	1648	**53,599**	5.7%	3124	**56,723**	6.1%	-XXX								
Dianne Morales	**26,495**	2.8%	39	**26,534**	2.8%	111	**26,645**	2.8%	3512	**30,157**	3.2%	776	**30,933**	3.3%	-XXX								
Raymond J. McGuire	**25,242**	2.7%	30	**25,272**	2.7%	146	**25,418**	2.7%	943	**26,361**	2.8%	1573	**27,934**	3.0%	-XXX								
Shaun Donovan	**23,167**	2.5%	22	**23,189**	2.5%	125	**23,314**	2.5%	728	**24,042**	2.6%	-XXX											
Aaron S. Foldenauer	**7,742**	0.8%	16	**7,758**	0.8%	61	**7,819**	0.8%	-XXX														
Art Chang	**7,048**	0.7%	16	**7,064**	0.8%	29	**7,093**	0.8%	-XXX														
Paperboy Love Prince	**3,964**	0.4%	43	**4,007**	0.4%	53	**4,060**	0.4%	-XXX														
Joycelyn Taylor	**2,662**	0.3%	21	**2,683**	0.3%	97	**2,780**	0.3%	-XXX														
Isaac Wright Jr.	**2,242**	0.2%	12	**2,254**	0.2%	-XXX																	
Write-ins	**1,568**	0.2%	-XXX																				
Inactive ballots			752	752		455	1,207		4107	5,314		2748	8,062		18383	26,445		39269	65,714		74488	140,202	

[36] "Board Of Elections In The City Of New York 2021 Primary". *Vote.Nyc*, 2022. https://www.vote.nyc/sites/default/files/pdf/election_results/2021/20210622Primary%20Election/rcv/DEM%20Mayor%20Citywide.pdf.

N.Y.C. Mayoral Democratic Primary
Districts shaded by the color of the leading candidate.
942,031 total votes reported

Candidate	First round votes	Pct.
Eric Adams	289,403	**30.7%**
Maya Wiley	201,127	**21.4**
Kathryn Garcia	184,463	**19.6**
Andrew Yang	115,130	**12.2**

Show more candidates
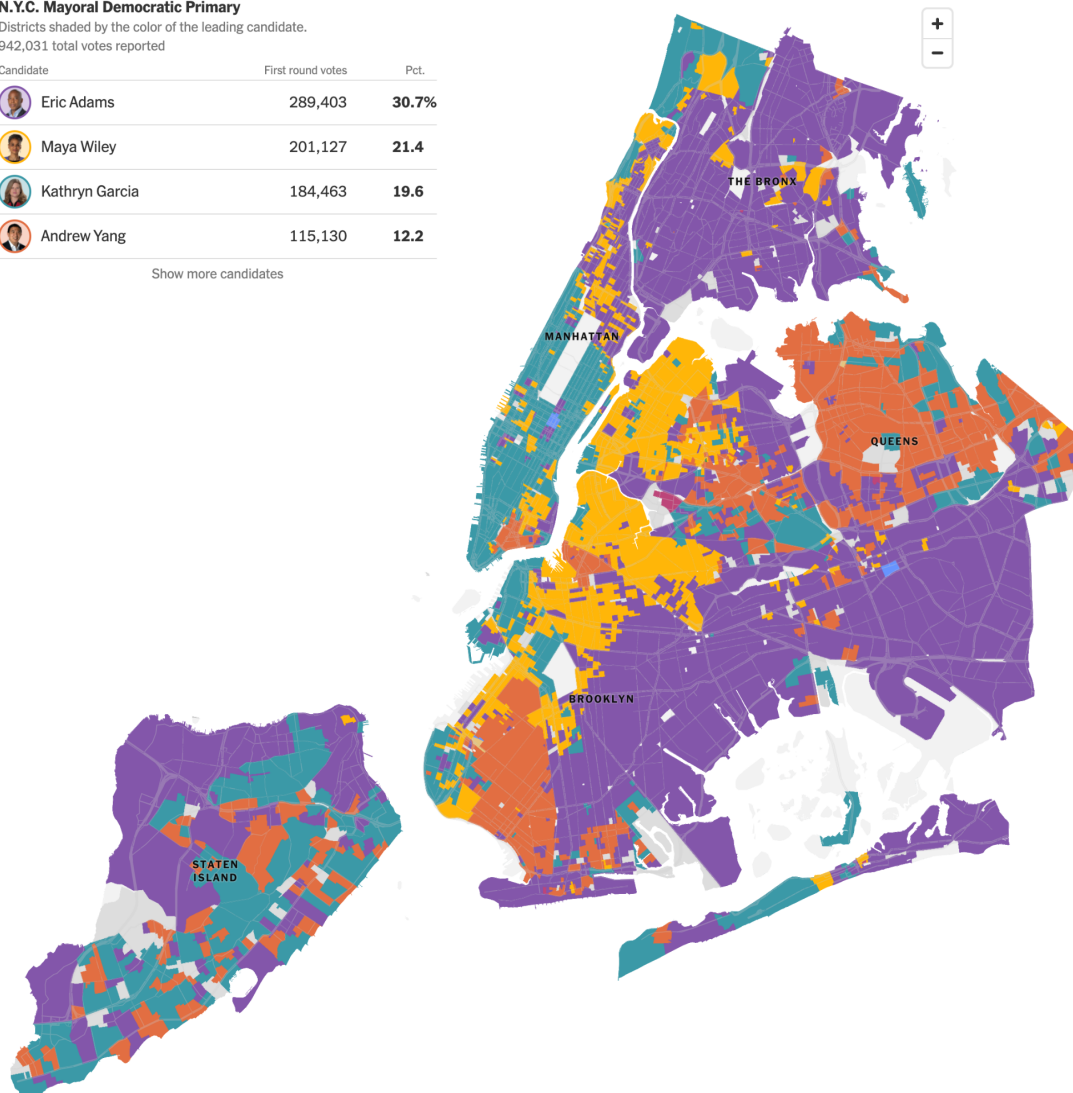
Did RCV build Black voting power in this election?

It's unclear. Eric Adams was elected as New York's second Black Mayor and did well in heavily Black areas of the city. His campaign explicitly centered working-class Black and Latinx voters. However, it's unclear what role RCV played in building Black voters' power in this election. The top two Black candidates in this election were fierce rivals and didn't appear to share many voters. When Maya Wiley was eliminated, the overwhelming majority of her supporters favored Kathryn Garcia over Adams. While RCV can help prevent Black candidates from splintering the Black vote, this strategy doesn't seem to work when Black candidates actively campaign against each other. It also seems likely that Adams would have been elected without RCV. Under the previous NYC election rules, this race would have gone to a runoff between Adams and Wiley. In this hypothetical matchup between to Black candidates, it seems likely that the moderate Adams would have won, given the fact that three of the top four vote getters were moderates.

In fact, the race was likely closer because of RCV. Kathryn Garcia, whose voter base came from heavily white areas of Manhattan and Staten Island, appeared to be the biggest beneficiary of RCV. Garcia was a

moderate who positioned herself to the left of Adams and right of Wiley. This was enough to boost her on subsequent rounds of balloting, and almost catapulted her ahead of Adams.

Non-RCV Case Study: 2000 Presidential Election

The 2000 Presidential Election is a classic example of an election that would have likely resulted in a different outcome if voters had cast their ballots with ranked choice voting. In 2000, George W. Bush narrowly defeated Al Gore in a race that famously came down to Florida. Ultimately, Bush won the state by less than 1,000 votes, propelling him to the Presidency.

Neither candidate received 50% + 1 in Florida, which would have triggered an instant runoff under RCV rules. Ten candidates qualified to be on the ballot in Florida, so the process would have proceeded by iteratively eliminating the last place vote getter and transferring votes to the remaining candidates. The bottom seven candidates (excluding write-in candidates) collectively accounted for 0.68% of the vote, which was not enough to propel either of the front runners to a majority. Three candidates would have remained after the bottom seven candidates were eliminated – Bush, Gore, and Green Party nominee Ralph Nader. While Nader was a distant third, his voters' alternate choices would have been decisive in determining whether Bush or Gore would win the state.

Nader garnered nearly 100,000 votes in Florida, or 1.64%, splitting the progressive vote and likely drawing significant support from Gore. Given that Nader voters tended to be more progressive than Gore voters, and Gore was more progressive than Bush, it seems reasonable to assume that a majority of Nader voters would have preferred Gore to Bush. Even a slight advantage for Gore would have likely been enough to tip the election in his favor.

For the sake of analysis, let's assume that if the election had been conducted using RCV, every voter would have cast a complete ballot that ranked every candidate. We can test what level of support Gore would have needed among Nader voters in different scenarios in order to win the election.

For the first scenario, let's assume that support for Bush and Gore would have been evenly split among voters who ranked one of the bottom seven candidates as their first choice. This seems like a reasonable assumption, since these candidates represent a wide range of political ideologies. In this scenario, Gore would only have needed to win 51% of Nader supporters' votes in order to win the election. This seems easily achievable, given the close ideological alignment between Nader and Gore.

Hypothetical RCV Election Results in Florida											
Party	Presidential Candidate	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5	Round 6	Round 7	Round 8	Round 9	Round 10
Republican	George W. Bush	**2,912,790**	**2,912,794**	**2,912,856**	**2,912,943**	**2,913,160**	**2,913,523**	**2,914,125**	**2,918,563**	**2,926,315**	2,980,711
Democrat	Al Gore	2,912,253	2,912,257	2,912,319	2,912,406	2,912,623	2,912,986	2,913,588	2,918,026	2,925,778	**2,982,395**
Green	Ralph Nader	97,488	97,492	97,554	97,641	97,858	98,221	98,823	103,261	111,013	

Party	Presidential Candidate										
Reform	Patrick Buchanan	17,484	17,488	17,550	17,637	17,854	18,217	18,819	23,257		
Libertarian	Harry Browne	16,415	16,419	16,481	16,568	16,785	17,148	17,750			
Natural Law	John Hagelin	2,281	2,285	2,347	2,434	2,651	3,014				
Workers World	Monica Moorehead	1,804	1,808	1,870	1,957	2,174					
Constitution	Howard Phillips	1,371	1,375	1,437	1,524						
Socialist	David McReynolds	622	626	688							
Socialist Workers	James Harris	562	566								
	Write in	36									
Total		5,963,106	5,963,106	5,963,106	5,963,106	5,963,106	5,963,106	5,963,106	5,963,106	5,963,106	5,963,106

Assumes a 51/49 split among Nader voters between Gore/Bush and a 50/50 split among all other candidates

In a second scenario, let's assume that all voters who ranked one of the bottom seven candidates as their top choice would have preferred Bush as their second choice. This isn't a reasonable assumption, since Socialist and Communist voters are unlikely to have preferred Bush, but it provides an upper bound of support that Gore would have needed to garner from Nader supporters to win. In this more difficult scenario, Gore would have needed 72% of Nader supporters' votes to win the election. While this would be challenging, it's not unreasonable to imagine happening.

Hypothetical RCV Election Results in Florida											
Party	Presidential Candidate	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5	Round 6	Round 7	Round 8	Round 9	Round 10
Republican	George W. Bush	**2,912,790**	**2,912,826**	**2,913,388**	**2,914,010**	**2,915,381**	**2,917,185**	**2,919,466**	**2,935,881**	**2,953,365**	2,980,662
Democrat	Al Gore	2,912,253	2,912,253	2,912,253	2,912,253	2,912,253	2,912,253	2,912,253	2,912,253	2,912,253	**2,982,444**
Green	Ralph Nader	97,488	97,488	97,488	97,488	97,488	97,488	97,488	97,488	97,488	
Reform	Patrick	17,	17,	17,	17,	17,	17,	17,	17,		

rm	Buchanan	484	484	484	484	484	484	484	484		
Libertarian	Harry Browne	16,415	16,415	16,415	16,415	16,415	16,415	16,415			
Natural Law	John Hagelin	2281	2281	2281	2281	2281	2281				
Workers World	Monica Moorehead	1804	1804	1804	1804	1804					
Constitution	Howard Phillips	1371	1371	1371	1371						
Socialist	David McReynolds	622	622	622							
Socialist Workers	James Harris	562	562								
	Write in	36									
Total		5,963,106	5,963,106	5,963,106	5,963,106	5,963,106	5,963,106	5,963,106	5,963,106	5,963,106	5,963,106

Assumes a 72/28 split among Nader voters between Gore/Bush and all other votes going to Bush

In reality, Gore would have likely needed to win somewhere between 51-72% of Nader voters' second choices in order to win Florida. While it's impossible to say which candidate Nader voters would have preferred, it seems likely that a large enough majority would have preferred Gore to tip the election in his favor.

A more comprehensive analysis shows 10 states where neither candidate received 50%+1 vote. Of these states, Florida is the only state that seems likely to have flipped from one candidate to another under RCV. New Hampshire is the next most likely, and would have also flipped from Bush to Gore if at least 67% of Nader voters preferred Gore to Bush and support among other candidates was evenly split.

States where neither candidate received 50%+1 vote						
State	**George W. Bush**	**Al Gore**	**Ralph Nader**	**Other Candidates**	**Actual Result**	**Likely Result under RCV**
Florida	**48.85%**	48.84%	1.63%	0.68%	Bush	Gore
Iowa	48.22%	**48.54%**	2.23%	1.01%	Gore	Gore

Maine 2	45.56%	**47.43 %**	5.56%	1.45%	Gore	Gore
Minnesota	45.50%	**47.91 %**	5.20%	1.39%	Gore	Gore
Nevada	**49.52 %**	45.98%	2.46%	1.10%	Bush	Bush
New Hampshire	**48.07 %**	46.80%	3.90%	1.22%	Bush	Bush
New Mexico	47.85%	**47.91 %**	3.55%	0.69%	Gore	Gore
Ohio	**49.97 %**	46.46%	2.50%	1.07%	Bush	Bush
Oregon	46.52%	**46.96 %**	5.04%	1.48%	Gore	Gore
Wisconsin	47.61%	**47.83 %**	3.62%	0.94%	Gore	Gore
Assumes "Other Candidates" votes would have been split 50/50 between Bush and Gore, and that Nader's votes would have been split 60/40 to Gore.						

An Al Gore victory would have had enormous consequences for the arc of American history.

Non-RCV Case Study: 2020 Georgia Senate Election

It's not the case that either party is systematically advantaged by RCV. In this case, we'll examine how Republicans could have held control of the U.S. Senate in 2020 if Georgia had utilized RCV.

The 2020 Senate campaign in Georgia was contested between incumbent David Perdue (R) and Democratic challenger Jon Ossoff. A third-party candidate, Libertarian Shane T. Hazel, also appeared on the ballot.

Perdue won a plurality of the first-round vote (49.7%), however, due to GA runoff laws which require 50% + 1, the race proceeded to a special runoff election. In between the general election and the runoff, President Trump actively undermined Republican confidence in the validity of the 2020 election and discouraged voters from turning out. At the same time, Democratic and non-partisan activists like Black Voters Matter mobilized Democratic voters to boost turnout. Ossoff ultimately won the runoff election with 50.6% of the vote.

Had GA utilized RCV, the race would have gone to an instant runoff. It's likely that a majority of Libertarian voters would have preferred Perdue as their second choice and tipped the election in his favor. Ossoff would have needed to win more than 88% of the Liberarian vote to secure a victory under RCV – a very unlikely prospect. The result would have been Republican control of the U.S. Senate.

SNAPSHOT: GEORGIA

The Opportunity

If there's any Southern state in which to begin and even win ranked choice voting, it's Georgia. But call it instant runoff.

Georgia and Louisiana both use runoffs for state elections. Under this rule, if no statewide candidate wins 50%+1 of the vote, the state holds a second runoff election between the two top candidates. This way, any state officer must win at least 50%+1 of the vote to hold office. Along with many other political institutions, state runoffs have a racist origin. They were created so that the minority population, Black people, could never elect a statewide leader, even if the "white" vote was initially split. This is a shameful history. But it's complicated. Because it *is* more democratic to elect a statewide candidate with 50%+1 of the vote. Such a rule gives every voter the *chance* to make sure their votes are truly heard. If their first choice doesn't get enough support in the first round, they can vote again in the second.

Runoff voting is like a stretched-out version of ranked choice voting. In ranked choice voting, the outcome is similar - if no candidate receives 50%+1 in the first round, the candidate with the fewest votes drops out, and everyone who voted for her/him has their vote counted for their second-choice candidate. The second-place votes are then counted. This process continues until a candidate gets 50+1 of the votes and becomes the winner. The difference between ranked choice voting and runoff is that in ranked choice, it happens all at once.

That's why *instant* runoff has a good chance in Georgia. Holding a second runoff election after the general election is a burden for everyone involved. Governments throw resources away covering the costs; Fulton County spent $6.1 million on their runoff election in 2020 and voters face the hassle of a second election, especially the Black and immigrant voters who already face barriers to voting.

In the 2018 runoff for Georgia's Secretary of State, voter turnout was only 38% of what it had been during the first-round general election. To collapse the runoff into a single instant runoff election would mean that 38% of the voters aren't making important decisions for the other 62%, not to mention the people who don't vote. As a voting method, instant runoff includes both financial responsibility and democratic empowerment. In Georgia, instant runoff voting is already used by military personnel stationed overseas. They use instant runoff when they mail in their ballots to participate in state elections. If military service people use instant runoff, why shouldn't we? In other states, from Maine to Utah to Alaska - all of which passed RCV to increase choice and voice for voters - this is a new system, perhaps initially tricky to figure out. For Georgia, it's a way to make the status quo system a lot easier for everyone. Because Georgia already uses runoffs, instant runoff isn't just smart policy - it's a better branded version of ranked choice voting (RCV).

Instant runoff could restore Black voting power. In the 2021 senate runoff, more progressive and Black voters turned out than had turned out in the general election a few months before. That may have been an anomaly because it's almost always the other way around. Marginalized voters turn out in fewer numbers during the second runoff election, and a smaller group of Georgia voters dominate those elections. If Georgia held a single instant runoff election, it could empower Black voters to show up to the polls at the same rates as other voters.

This is supported by what we heard from Georgia State Representative Stacey Evans. She is a powerful Democrat and a big supporter of instant runoff voting. She was persuaded to support RCV for its positive impact on representative democracy, but she emphasized that its convenience and efficiency could be its greatest selling point, especially for conservatives. She has experience partnering across the aisle. Evans co-sponsored a bill, HB 1085, that would enable local municipalities to establish instant runoff voting. Three of the co-sponsors are Democrats, and three others are Republicans. The bill has bipartisan support.

The central organizing push for HB 1085 was led by Eternal Vigilance, a "democracy" group founded by a past Republican state representative. Another group active in the space, Better Ballot Georgia, is explicitly non-partisan. Conservatives have their own interests in passing instant runoff voting. It seems like we must strike a balance between joining coalitions that don't share our interests, while also using shared interests to make headway.

Unfortunately, HB 1085 never gathered the momentum to reach the House floor for a vote in 2022. But maybe that's a good thing. When ranked choice voting gathered momentum in Memphis and Sarasota, the Heritage Foundation pounced. Reactionaries organized and Republican trifectas banned the use of RCV in the state.

Between now and 2023, when instant runoff has its next chance to turn into law in Georgia, all the activist groups in the space are focusing on voter education. Rep. Evans told us that the most strategic path to passing the local instant runoff bill is through grassroots support. If voters tell their representatives to vote for it, the bill may pass during the next legislative session. But the movement must spread more knowledge and support for instant runoff before it can hope to mobilize voters in favor of it.

On a separate note, Rep. Evans and Daniel, a leader of Better Ballot Georgia (BBG), both articulated the political need for Black support of instant runoff. "We need BVM's support to get this off the ground," Daniel told us. "You can't do a panel on this issue without a Black member, speaking to the Black community," Rep. Evans told us frankly.

The Path Forward

BVM will be focused on the midterm elections through November 2022. Our messaging results suggest that there is not enough support in the BVM base for the organization to put significant resources towards instant runoff yet.

This could be the moment to deepen community knowledge and imagination about instant runoff. It's a little difficult to understand what it is, and why it matters. After the election, interested staff and committed volunteers could read up on the case examples, and develop a better sense of how instant runoff can restore Black voting power. We envision these "Community Experts" holding Instagram lives, making TikToks, writing blog posts - not necessarily speaking to voters broadly, but nurturing the seeds of imagination among the BVM base. Instant runoff may never be the most animating issue for BVM constituents, simply because other areas may have greater impact in strengthening Black voting power.

But as Community Experts spread the word about instant runoff, they could also plant the seeds of imagination for proportional voting. As described above, proportional voting is the gold standard for representative democracy. Daniel from Better Ballot Georgia wrote to us that

"proportional representation is a much deeper conversation," but that "RCV allows us to get closer to it because many of the good proportional representation types rely on ranked choice ballots." Perhaps BVM constituents in Georgia can lend their voice to the chorus for instant runoff, while also calling for proportional representation. If we win the first, we could set ourselves up with the momentum and clarity to secure the second.

We know that BVM will proceed with caution when it comes to joining coalitions with conservatives. It seems like a possible if difficult balancing act to let "Eternal Vigilance" and their ilk spread reactionary messaging for instant runoff, while spreading our own forward-looking reasons to adopt the method. Relying on the knowledge and vision of Community Experts is a safe and smart first step.

At a later stage, we could envision BVM making instant runoff one of the demands on a broader platform to bring power back to the people. 2023 could be the year that BVM helps pass HB 1085 and sets up the movement for Black voting power in Georgia and the fight for proportional representation.

MESSAGE TESTING

Two focus groups were conducted with a total of 17 participants. The first focus group was in Atlanta, GA and the second was in Clarkston, GA. Prior to beginning each focus group, participants were asked to fill out a short pre-survey answering a series of baseline questions for which the focus group would test. At the conclusion of the focus group, participants were asked to fill out the post-survey to capture learnings, reflections, and reactions to concepts presented during the focus group.

During the focus group, participants were asked a series of questions establishing a shared context on democracy, voting, and representation in government. From here, a short training on instant runoff was conducted featuring videos, graphics, and a sample simulation. Once a general understanding of instant runoff was met, five campaign messages for instant runoff were presented to the focus group. For each message, participants were asked to rank from a scale of 1 (least compelling) to 10 (most compelling) on each message for an instant runoff campaign. Participants were also asked to explain their rankings for each message. Key overarching themes and recommendations are in the *Message Testing* section.

Participants of both focus groups are deeply motivated by the promise of democracy. Even when many participants noted challenges to voting and the lack of follow through by candidates – the prospect of equity, justice, and equal representation remains strong. Notably, participants also

sought to identify their role in not just electing candidates to office but holding them accountable regardless of their political party. This grounding belief set the context for the discussion of instant runoff that invited participants to consider an alternative to the current electoral system.

Final survey results indicate that most participants would vote for a ballot measure supporting instant run off, sign a petition, call or text 10 friends, and email their state representatives. However, very few participants stated they would phone bank or canvas on instant runoff.

The messages that resonated the most with participants emphasized greater choice, less divisiveness, more power, and greater self-determination. The messages that did not resonate with participants are ones that focused on one group of people or political party and/or relied on voters understanding more complex electoral behaviors. Each message with participants' reflections is highlighted below.

Messages

Message 1 – *Let's picture a mom at home who has three kids, no car, and works at the gas station. In the current system she must go through the burden of voting twice, in the November general election and the standard runoff in January. With instant runoff voting she just must vote once in November. Instant runoff voting makes it easier for us to participate in democracy.*

This message resonated with most focus group participants. Many noted that this messaging acknowledged the every-day circumstances of voters and the barriers that make voting challenging. By painting this picture, participants noted that this made them feel heard and validated and much more likely to support instant runoff.

Message 2 – *Vote splitting helps conservative candidates keep power, even when most people don't agree with them. In some local elections, two progressive candidates can split the vote and allow for the other side to win, even if most voters don't want them. Instant runoff allows voters to support multiple candidates at once without the fear of splitting the vote of their community.*

This messaging had mixed reviews. Some participants explained that the concept of "vote splitting" is foreign to most everyday voters. Similarly, many participants articulated that they feel most empowered when they can make a self-determined choice on the issues they care about. Resultantly, the focus on preventing vote splitting instead of self-determined candidate selection may disempower voters. Conversely, some participants who are well versed in electoral politics acknowledged the double-benefit of instant runoff as greater choice *and* preventing vote splitting.

Message 3 – *Instant runoff voting was implemented in Georgia for overseas military personnel because it simplified voting, made elections quicker, and saved money. It's also taken place in Alaska and Utah. We know Instant Runoff has already made for common sense voting law, so let's expand it here.*

This message had general positive views, though participants mentioned this could be a supplementary message but not a primary message. Participants explained they liked that this message acknowledged that instant runoff is not unfamiliar to the state and could feasibly be implemented to non-military personnel. However, participants also noted that because this focuses on military personnel and other states across the country, it makes the issue feel less connected to the people in Georgia. Voters articulate that a campaign for instant runoff should have a clear articulation of its impact on the average Georgia voter and not necessarily a military personnel or non-Georgia citizen.

Message 4 – *It costs Fulton County $20 million to run the standard runoff election in 2020. If we do instant runoff, it could free these resources for schools, roads, and public safety. We're wasting money, and we could have services that work for all of us.*

This message resonated with most participants, though some highlighted some concerns. Those who rated the message highly underscored the value of saving money while also making the voting process easier and more empowering for voters. They explained that often voters are hearing about budget deficits and cuts to critical social services so if instant runoff would reduce the costs of elections, that money can be reappropriated or saved for other public matters. Conversely, voters cited that some concerns with this messaging is that its focus on the cost of elections rather than the enhanced voter choice and power potentially may disway voters. It may also misrepresent the totality of the impact of instant runoff by focusing on the cost savings at the expense of its other positive attributes.

Message 5 – *Politics is tearing us apart. Instant runoff would allow us to support multiple viewpoints rather than just picking one. It would make our politics more civil and less dividing.*

This message resonated with most participants particularly because of its push to make politics more welcoming and less polarized. Many voters described a deep sense of exhaustion by the current hyper-polarized and divisive political environment. Like the sentiments expressed in response to the prior messages, participants underscored that decency, respect, and balanced political messaging are crucial to their ability to stay engaged and support instant runoff.

Key Learnings for Messaging

Key findings for curating messages include the following:

1) ***Focus on the Enhanced Power of a Vote:*** Participants felt most empowered by the message of instant runoff if it focused on their ability to harness more power at the voting booth.
    a) Words and phrases such as "having our voices heard," "equity," "fairness," and "community" were repeatedly mentioned in connection to the promise of instant runoff voting.
2) ***Lead with Self-Determination:*** Participants felt motivated by voting on their own accord based on issues they care about. An instant runoff campaign should emphasize that voters will be able to vote on the issues they care about and place their vote to the candidate(s) of their choice.
3) ***Emphasize Greater Choice:*** Many participants shared instances where they had to vote for the lesser of two evils or voted strategically for a candidate. An instant runoff campaign should highlight that this would allow them greater choice, flexibility, and power to give their vote to the candidates they desire.
4) ***Less Divisiveness & Partisanship:*** Participants bemoaned the hyper-polarized state of our politics today. An instant runoff campaign should paint the picture of a more inclusive, vibrant, and issue-focused electoral cycle that significantly reduces divisive rhetoric.
5) ***Center Everyday Voter Experiences:*** Participants were most compelled by messaging that acknowledged the daily circumstances of average citizens that make voting in multiple elections challenging. An instant runoff campaign should reflect current circumstances and highlight how it would reduce one (or more) barriers to voting.
6) ***Simple is More:*** Participants shared that messaging must be short, concise, and simple for voters to understand. Long messaging narratives may in theory be impactful but may introduce more confusion and apathy from voters.
    a) Example: Messages such as "Vote Once," "No Run-Off," and "Your Choices Count" are effective at explaining the benefits of instant runoff without running the risk of confusing voters.
7) ***Greater Educational Awareness is Key:*** Without increased educational awareness on instant runoff, participants warn this could further dissuade voters and lead to greater confusion and apathy for the voting process. Explaining instant runoff and developing more streamlined ways for voters to know who is running will be crucial to ensuring voters are informed on the process and their choices.

SURVEY ANALYSIS

Survey analysis

<u>Introduction</u>

Launched in April 2022, the survey provided an opportunity to broadly canvas BVM's base across multiple states to gain perspective on Ranked Choice Voting as a campaign. Three research questions significantly guided the survey design:

1. Regarding American Democracy, how does Ranked Choice Voting's value proposition compare with other threats to American democracy, and how do democracy reforms get prioritized among other issues?
2. Compared to other democracy reform campaign options, where do respondents rank an Instant Runoff campaign?
3. What kinds of campaigns would best draw respondents to increase their involvement with Black Voters Matter?

The survey included seventeen questions, including four radio-button or check-box matrices and open-ended questions about Ranked Choice Voting. Of the 32,500+ text message recipients of the survey link, 347 responses were submitted within the survey window of April 25 and 30. Fourteen responses were removed for obvious spam, such as cases where answers were critical of every category and the open-ended final question responses did not engage with the content of the survey at all.

<u>Survey Conclusions</u>

- Representation:
  - Most respondents indicated they are Black, Women, frequent voters, and older than 51.
  - Few respondents indicated a low voting propensity.
  - High geographic representation from PA, TX, FL, and lower but still useful representation from SC and GA.
- Findings:
  - Overall, democracy reform scored relatively poorly, but still quite similarly compared to other campaign options for Black Voters Matter
  - Of democracy reforms, the issues presented by proportional representation and Ranked Choice Voting were of slightly less importance to respondents, but there are still significant similarities.
  - Compared to other campaign options or democracy reforms, people are less excited about RCV and its potential, suggesting an emphasis on education and messaging will be important for BVM.
  - Of Democracy Reforms, lowering the voting age is a significantly less popular campaign option for BVM.
  - Insufficient data across states made interstate comparison difficult

Demographics of Survey Respondents

Race

Almost four in five respondents indicated "Black or African American" only in the race category.

Race	Respondents	Percent of total
Black	262	78.68%
Prefer not to say	29	8.71%
White	25	7.51%
Two or more races	15	4.50%
Native Indian or Alaska Native	1	0.30%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.	1	0.30%
Total	333	100.00%

Gender

Respondents by Gender

Prefer not to say
1.5%

Man
34.9%

Gender variant /…
1.5%
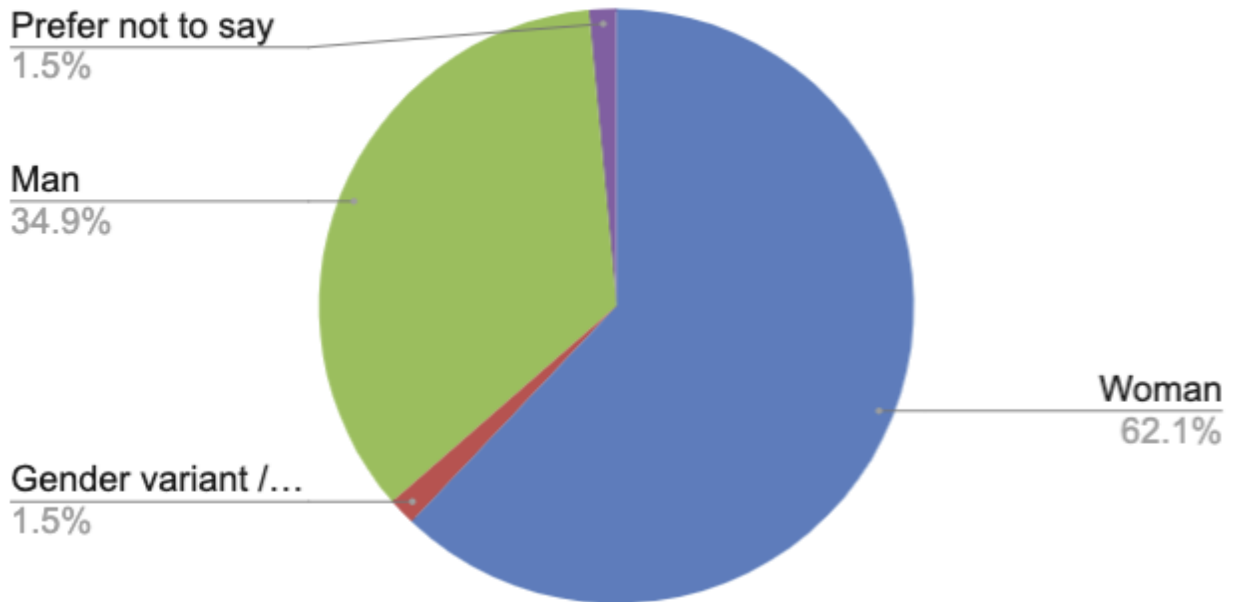
Woman
62.1%

215 of the 347 responses indicated Woman, with minimal representation from non-cis and "Prefer not to say" respondents.

State

There was significant representation from four states: Florida, Texas, and Pennsylvania. A typical statistical rule is that at least thirty is required to generalize on statistical significance. Twenty-one respondents indicated South Carolina and seventeen indicated Georgia.

State	# of Responses
FL	127
TX	83
PA	53
SC	21
GA	17
Blank	18
Other	15
Total	334

Age

Respondents skewed older, with 64% indicating ages over 51. 43% of respondents indicated being between   ages   41-65.

Respondents by Age

18-25
1.9%
65+
21.1%

26-35
8.7%
Less than 18
0.3%

36-50
22.9%

Prefer not t…
2.2%

51-65
43.0%
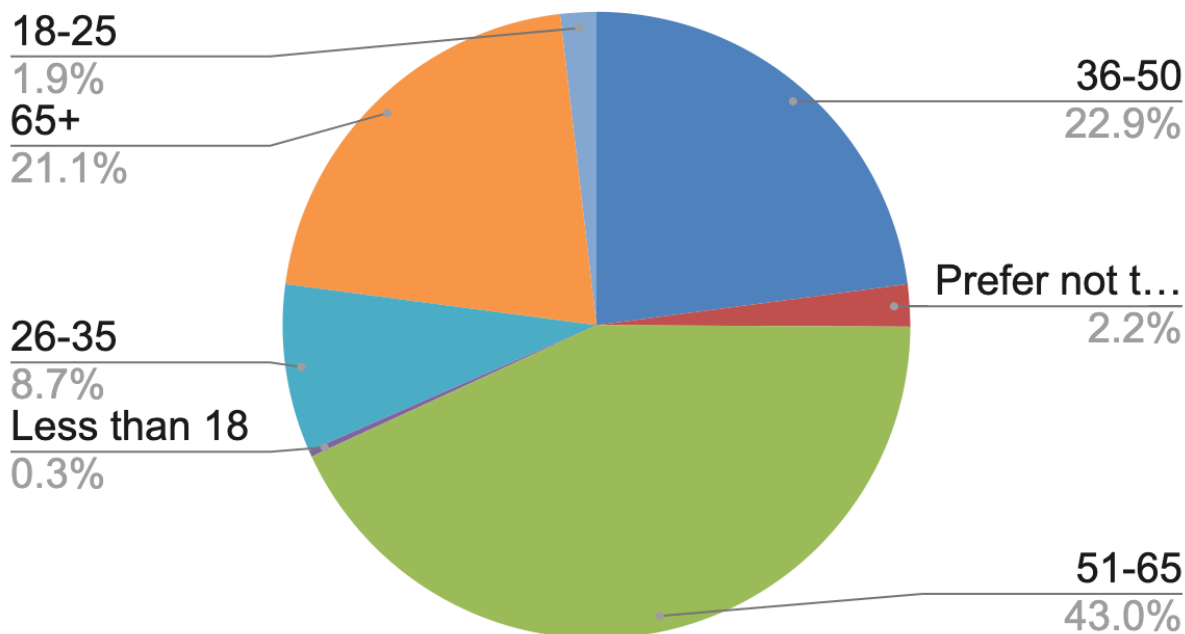
Educational Attainment

82% indicated some college education or higher, with a significantly higher proportion (22%) of respondents indicating attainment of a graduate degree compared to the population mean (13%)

Voting Frequency

Respondents were likely voters in federal elections, with over four in five responses indicating they vote in every election. While there was lower propensity of voting in a local election context, only 3.9% of respondents indicated they do not vote in local elections, and only 9.9% indicated a lower propensity of voting other than Most of the Time.

Respondent Voter Frequency in Local Elections

Some of the time 9.9%
Never 3.9%
Most of the time 22.9%
All of the time 63.4%
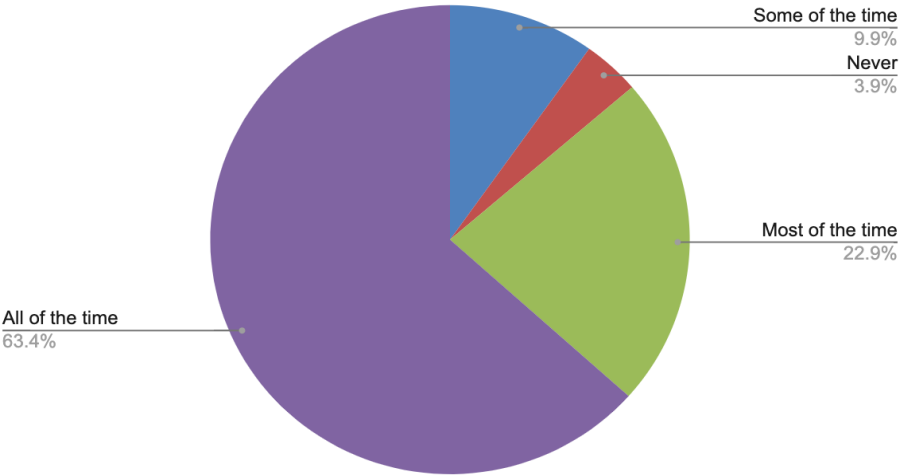
Respondent Voter Frequency in State or Federal Elections

Some of the time 5.6%
Never 1.4%
Most of the time 11.2%
All of the time 81.8%
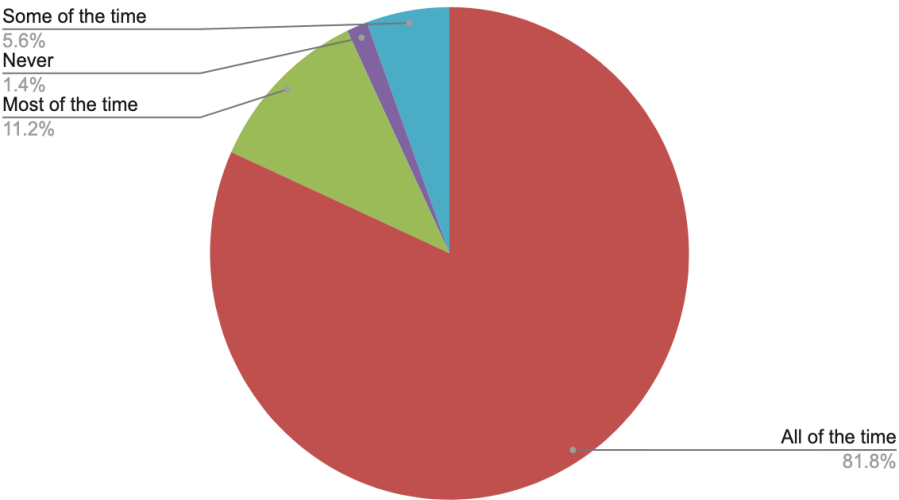
Previous Activities with Black Voters Matter

Respondents were most likely to be previous petition signers. Of those who completed the question, 21% indicated they had previously donated to the survey.

Activity	# of Responses
Helped on a campaign	44
Signed a pledge	51
Donated	57

Voter outreach	66
Attended a rally	76
Signed a petition	171
Did not answer	78

Detailed Survey Analysis

Salient Issues for BVM's Base: How relevant is democracy reform among social justice issues?

Overall, respondents did not distinguish between different social justice issues on average. Scores across issue areas did not deviate more than 6% from the mean score. However, when filtering for only top ranked issues, there is some deviation.

Social Justice Issue importance - Number of "5" Answers
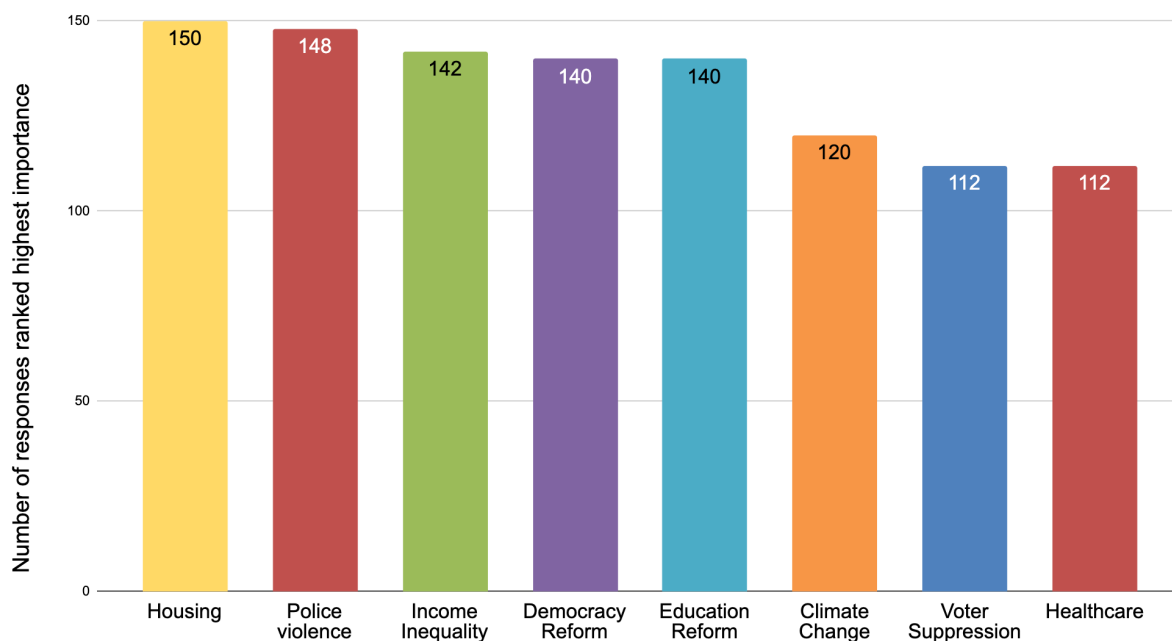
Voting and Election Topics: How important are the issues RCV is claimed to address?

Ranked Choice Voting can be said to improve candidate diversity, to change the electability of candidates, to reduce mudslinging in elections, and to challenge the "winner takes all" model. In ranking these issues against other types of priorities, respondents did not indicate a strong favorability for or against Ranked Choice Voting's reforms. The strongest preferences related to voter suppression and the weakest preferences related to changing ID requirements of voters. Between categories, not much can be generalized given the highly similar rankings across issue areas.

Voting / Election Topic Importance
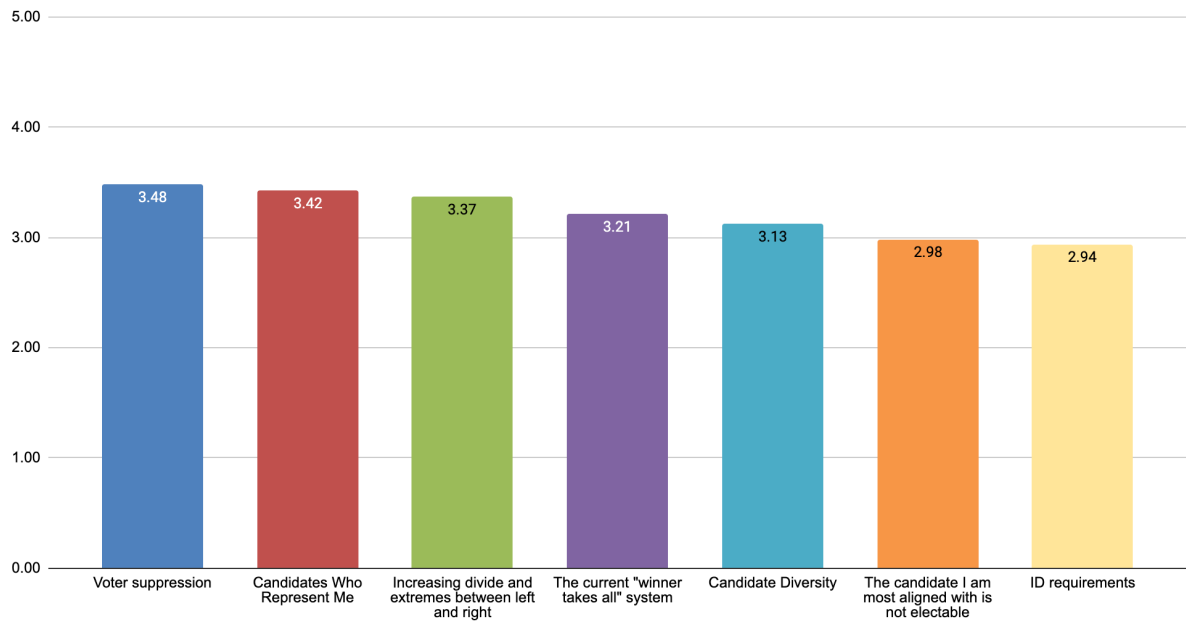
Democracy Campaign Reforms: of potential reforms, what are the most important to respondents?

Little deviation between reforms was visible from respondents, with numerous responses indicating 5/5 importance for every reform and issue presented. Still, Ranked Choice Voting received a 15% lower score compared to Gerrymandering and Restoring Voting Rights to those Formerly Incarcerated. Notably, there was a large drop in ranking for campaigning to lower the Voting Age.

Democracy Campaign Reforms
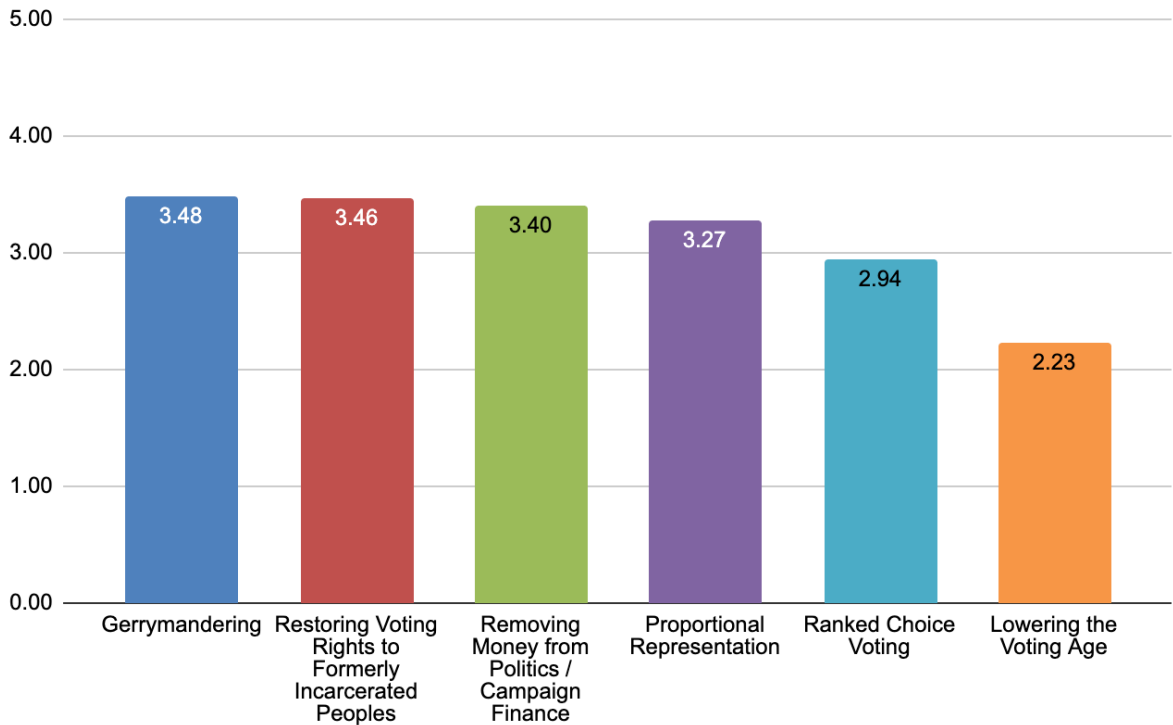
How do democracy reform campaign option preferences vary by state?

When cross tabulating this data against imputed zip codes, no conclusive evidence was found for variation between states. Georgia's responses, ~15, make drawing the conclusions difficult. BVM may find the lack of regional distinction between democracy reform campaigns compelling. Texans seemed to rank every type of campaign higher, but there was no notable within campaign options for Texans compared to non-Texan respondents.

Average Ranking of Democracy Reform Campaigns by State
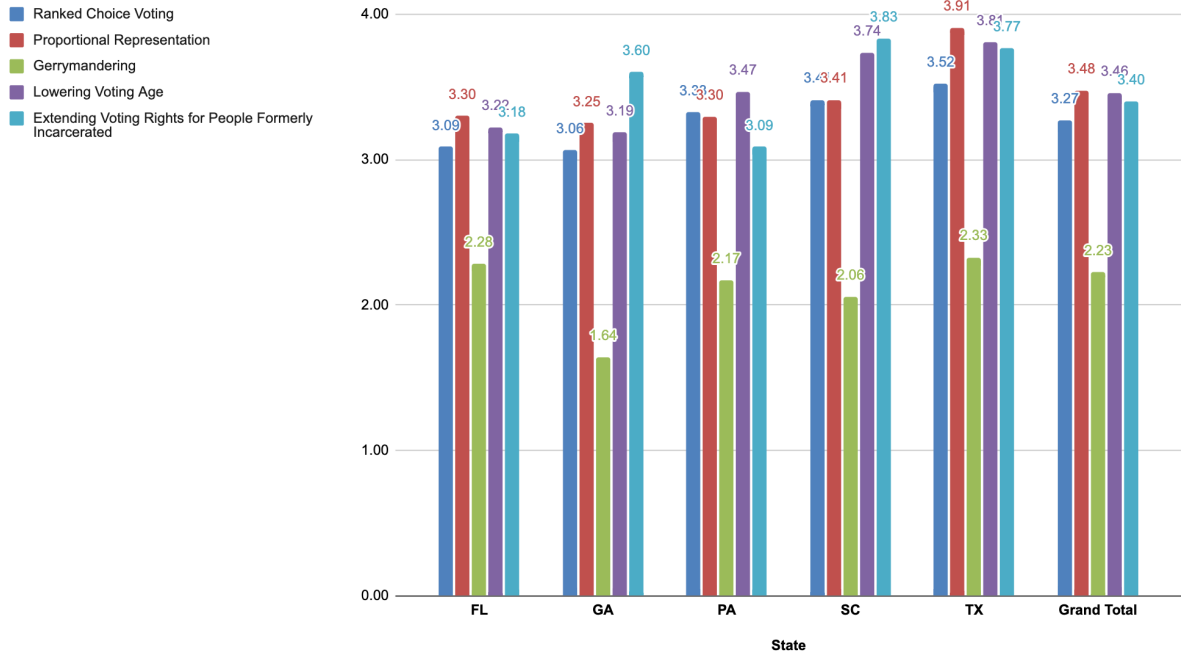
How do respondents from different states rank the importance of a Ranked Choice Voting campaign?

In line with the finding above, there is no notable deviation across states in prioritization of Ranked Choice Voting. Please note the Georgia data's low response number.

Campaign Importance Ranking by State: Ranked Choice Voting
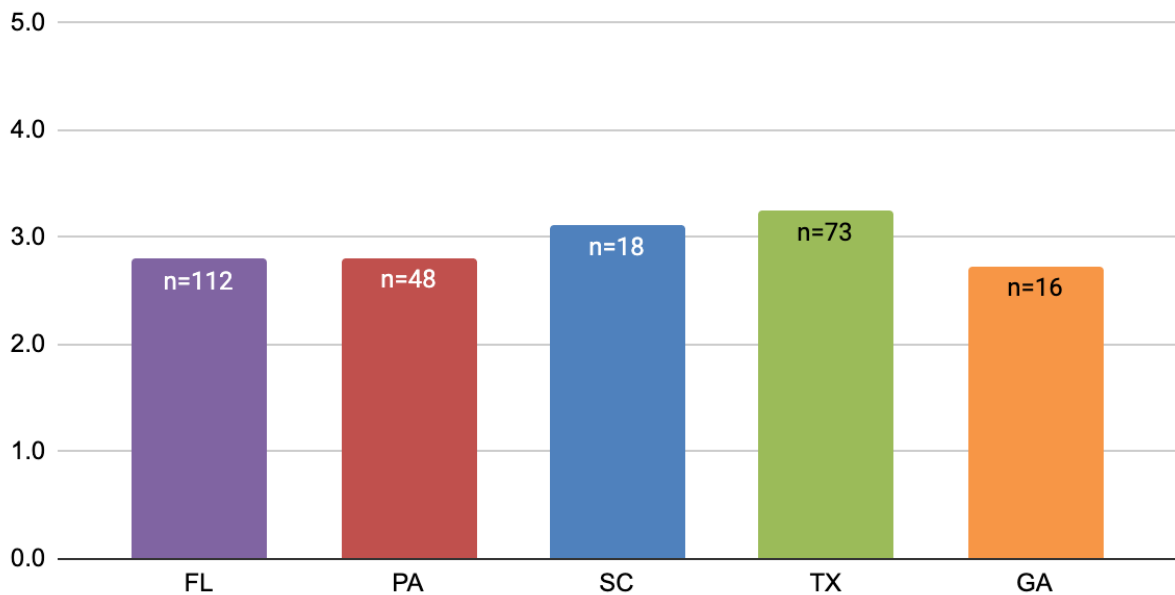
How would a Ranked Choice Voting campaign impact your perception of Black Voters Matter?

47

Survey respondents were asked how a Ranked Choice Voting campaign would impact their perception of Black Voters Matter. Radio buttons from 1 [Worsens] to 10 [Improves] were presented. The mean score was 7.4. We analyzed this data by state, voter status, age, whether they indicated they were donors, by education frequency, and by race and found no statistically meaningful difference across measures. In other words, the mean score for BVM campaign perception did not change by any other indicator. Most of the data looked like the following.

Impression of Black Voters Matter by Local Election Voter Frequency

How often do you vote in local elections (for example, Mayor or City Council)?
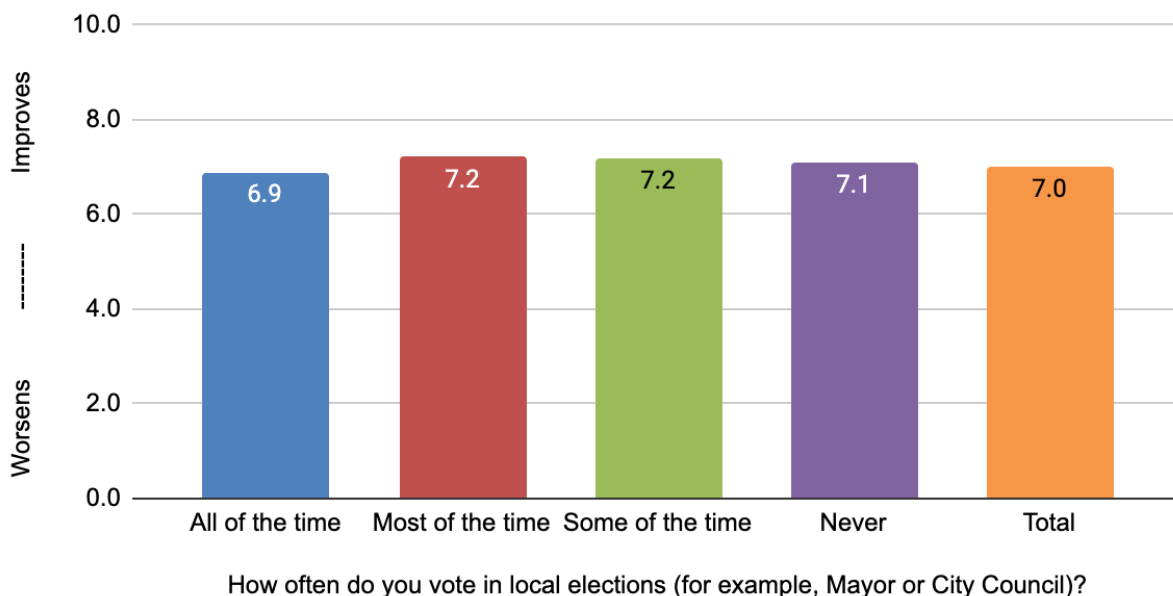
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, instant runoff provides a ripe opportunity for democratic reform, though also presents unique challenges to consider. Three key lessons include:

1. **Instant Runoff is not a Panacea**

While instant runoff solves some major challenges in electoral reform, it certainly will not solve all. Instant runoff in conjunction with other voter access efforts are necessary for maximizing Black voter power.

2. **Educational Awareness is Vital**

Instant runoff relies on voters knowing the candidates who are running and ranking them according to their preference. Without sufficient educational awareness, there is a risk of voters ranking candidates they do not support.

3. **Building Black Voter Power is not Synonymous with Pro-Democracy Efforts**

While instant runoff is designed as a "pro-democracy" tool for greater choice and power for the people, it is insufficient for building Black voter power.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Each of the key lessons from the Conclusion section informs the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Instant Runoff with a Larger Voter Package

Building Black political power requires larger systemic changes to the current electoral system. Pursuing instant runoff in isolation may leave other jointly important voter reform efforts. At the same time, leveraging instant runoff as a primer to a more ambitious proportional representation campaign could also be fruitful.

Recommendation 2: Simplify Language & Educational Materials

Many voters in the South are more familiar with the concept of runoff elections. By using "instant runoff" instead of "ranked choice voting" voters will quickly be able to understand what the process entails. Use simple messaging such as "Vote Once" or "No Run-Off."

Recommendation 3: Build Democracy Coalitions with Intention

Pursuing an instant runoff campaign will require establishing coalitions with organizations who are primarily interested in democracy improvement, and not necessarily greater equity, access, and representation for Black people. Building coalitions with intention, clarity, and purpose will be crucial for optimal impact.

TRAINING MATERIALS

Included in the focus group conducted by the authors of this report was a 20-minute workshop on RCV. The goal of the workshop was to introduce focus groups participants to the basics of RCV, including the rationale for the system and its practical applications at the voting booth. The following is a lesson plan designed to introduce voters to RCV.

Ranked Choice Voting Workshop

Total Time: 30 minutes

Goal: To introduce focus groups participants to the basics of Instant runoff, including the rationale for the system and its practical applications at the voting booth.

Materials: Sticky notes, video, projector

Write on board:

A - 36%
B - 21%
C - 27%
D   -   16%

Under a plurality, A wins. But 64% (those who voted for voter B, C, and D) did not choose the winning candidate.

Write on board:

Definition: Instant-runoff voting (IRV) is a voting system used in single-seat elections with more than two candidates. In instant runoff, voters rank their choices by order of preference, with the understanding that if no candidate gets 50%+1 of votes, the process moves to a next round in which voters' back up choices are then counted.

Time	Activity
3 mins	<u>**QUESTIONS ON FRUSTRATIONS WITH THE CURRENT VOTING SYSTEM**</u>

Facilitator asks:

1. **"Have you voted strategically? Can you remember a time when you considered factors other than a candidate's policy agenda to ensure that your vote counted?** (*i.e., I voted for candidate A although I preferred candidate B because I believe candidate B was not likely to win?)"*

Facilitator listens and looks for the following responses:
- *I didn't like my final vote, but I didn't think my first choice would win*
- *None of the candidates were close to my views, but I voted for the lesser of two evils*
- *I was worried about the outcome*

Drive-home point: *"The current voting system does not provide voters enough options to vote for candidates that best represent their interests."*

Facilitator asks:

2. **"What discourages you from voting? What about the current electoral system do you believe needs to change to ensure voters are inspired and mobilized?"**

Facilitator listens and looks for the following responses:
- *Voting is too time consuming and hard to get to*
- *Candidates are not accountable to the electorate*
- *None of the candidates running have my best interest in mind*
- *I am frustrated with our two-party system*

Drive-home point: *"The current voting system does not provide voters enough options to vote for candidates that best represent their interests."*

10 mins	**INTRODUCTION TO RANKED CHOICE VOTING** **Facilitator says:** "We have discussed many points of frustration with the current voting system. In this discussion, we will learn more about RCV and its promises." **The problems proponents aim to solve** 1. **Vote splitting**: Oftentimes, communities that share similar values are penalized when more candidates run, because voters ultimately end up splitting their vote among a series of candidates. This tends to happen with communities of color, particularly Black voters, who tend to be forced to tactically vote more than any demographic.

2. **Lack of collaboration in elections:**
   - More positive campaigns, less attack ads
   - Win a campaign with coalitions of candidates
3. **Polarizing and extreme candidates:** because of the ranking system in RCV, candidates have an incentive to appeal to as many voters as possible, discouraging polarizing positions.
4. **Costs and inconveniences related to voting:** because voters rank their back-up choices, governments save money on election costs and voters save time and money they would spend getting to the polls a second time for a runoff election.
5. **Lack of viable candidate options:** Prospective candidates are more likely to win because voters can take a risk on a less-resourced candidate.
6. **Dissatisfaction with current system:** Voters currently feel that they are choosing the "lesser of two evils", under RCV, voters have expanded choice.

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10 mins

FACILITATOR SAYS: "Democracy in the United States is broken and RCV promises to improve some of its negative aspects. Let's learn more about how this voting system works. Let's look first at the definition."

Definition: Instant-runoff voting (IRV) is a voting system used in **single-seat elections with more than two candidates**. In instant runoff, voters rank their choices by order of preference, with the understanding that if no candidate gets 50%+1 of votes, the process moves to a next round in which voters' back up choices are then counted.

VIDEO: Ranked Choice Voting Facts, FairVote, 1 minute and 33 seconds.

HYPOTHESIZING PAST ELECTIONS UNDER RCV:

a. **Florida 2000 Presidential Election (Bush vs. Al Gore)**
   - Decided by a margin of only 537 votes out almost 6 million
   - Green party candidate Ralph Nader received 97,488 votes.

TOGETHER: What would a ballot look like under Ranked Choice Voting?

Facilitator listens for:
- Candidates may have ranked 123
- Candidates may have ranked 1 or 2 and NOT 3

AT YOUR TABLE: What would happen if this election was under that system?

Facilitator listens for:

- The last place candidate would lose in the first round, and all ballots that had ranked a second choice (either Gore or Bush) would be counted as ballots toward those candidates. It can be assumed that many of the voters who cast a vote for Nader would have ranked Al Gore as their second choice, leading to Gore's victory.

b. **Georgia Senate Election (Perdue [R] vs. Ossoff [D])**

Perdue won a plurality of the first-round vote (49.7%), however, due to GA runoff laws which require 50% + 1, the race proceeded to a special runoff election. In between the general election and the runoff, President Trump actively undermined Republican confidence in the validity of the 2020 election and discouraged voters from turning out. At the same time, Democratic and non-partisan activists like Black Voters Matter mobilized Democratic voters to boost turnout. Ossoff ultimately won the runoff election with 50.6% of the vote. Had GA utilized RCV, the race would have gone to an instant runoff. It's likely that a majority of Libertarian voters would have preferred Perdue as their second choice and tipped the election in his favor.

FRONT OF ROOM DEBRIEF:

- This is a bipartisan policy
- Changes how elections work but does not consistently work in favor of a party vs. another.

ASK: Why would we want this campaign if we can't determine the outcome?

ANSWER: The goal is to create a fairer process that gives voters more voice and choice. It is not to manipulate outcomes. The outcomes, however, could build BVM voter power.

Now that we have these examples, we would like to demonstrate with the folks in this room.

Check for Understanding

Transition to Mock Election
Facilitator distributes mock ballots and runs a mock election.

Practice Ballot
- **Practice Ranking Bodega Snacks**
    Request a participant to put together preferences for the practice ballot

Review: scenarios no permissible on the ballot

Q&A

APPENDIX

Philanthropy and Funders for Democracy:

An excellent source of information about foundation funding for U.S. democracy is https://democracy.candid.org

Black Voters Matter Capacity Building Initiative and several other Georgia-based not-for-profit organizations engaged in civic engagement, voter education and/or GOTV received funding from several foundations in 2018 through 2020. Some, such as ProGeorgia State Table, have received funding for many years. The other nfps that received funding in 2018-2020 include the ACLU Foundation, Fair Count, Fair Fight Action, New Georgia Project, ProGeorgia State Table, Southern Partners Fund.

Potential Collaborators:
In 2012, ProGeorgia was officially established by 12 organizations and now consists of more than 30 organizations and is growing. These organizations include:
9to5
Atlantans Building Leadership for Empowerment
American Civil Liberties Union of Georgia
Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Atlanta
Atlanta Jobs with Justice
Common Cause of Georgia
Community Voters Project
Center for Pan Asian Community Services
The Counter Narrative Project
Environment Georgia
Equality Foundation of Georgia
Faith in Public Life
Feminist Women's Health Center
Georgia AFL CIO
Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials
Georgia Association of Educators
Georgia's Coalition for the People's Agenda
Georgia Muslim Voters Project
Georgia NAACP
Georgia Shift
Georgia Strategic Alliance for New Directions and Unified Policies (Georgia STAND-UP!)
Georgia Women's Action for New Directions (Georgia WAND)
Higher Heights for America
League of Women Voters of Georgia
McIntosh Seed
The National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
National Domestic Workers Alliance

New American Pathways
Planned Parenthood Southeast
SPARK: Reproductive Justice Now!
Women Engaged

Black Voters Matter may have already collaborated with some, if not all, of the above-mentioned organizations. That said, the ongoing intensification of voter suppression and disenfranchisement of Black people, people of color, low wealth people and the young have created fertile ground for deepening and expanding the network of collaborators.

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RANKED CHOICE VOTING

A Tool for Building Black Voter Power?

HARVARD Kennedy School

JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT