



Voters Understand Ranked Choice Voting

Evidence from Voter Surveys and Official Election Results

FairVote: The Center for Voting and Democracy

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More and more American jurisdictions are turning to ranked choice voting (RCV), a candidate-based voting system in which voters rank candidates in order of preference. RCV is in use in at least ten cities across the United States and was used by overseas/military voters in five southern states in congressional elections with runoffs. The increasing use of RCV, including in four Bay Area cities in California and Minnesota's Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, provides us with abundant data demonstrating that RCV is understood and preferred by those voters lucky enough to have the opportunity to use it.

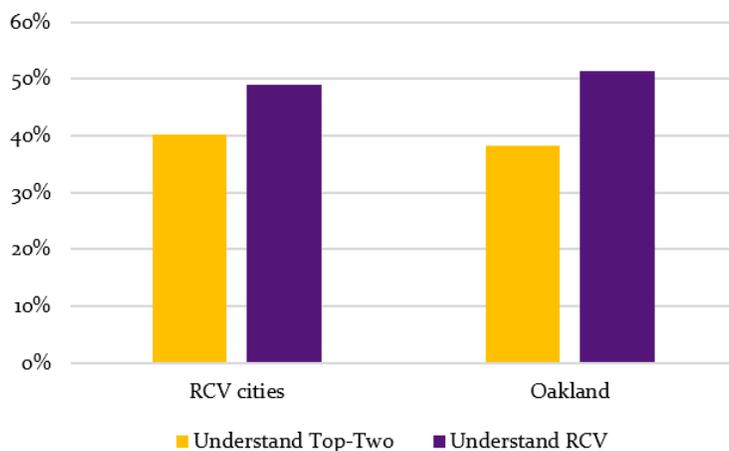
Polls conducted by Rutgers Eagleton Poll and developed by professors Caroline Tolbert and Todd Donovan explore voters' experiences with RCV in city elections in the United States. These polls surveyed a total of more than 2,400 likely voters in local elections with RCV in 2013 (Minneapolis, St Paul and Cambridge) and 2014 (San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley and San Leandro). A similar number of voters were also polled in control cities without RCV.

RCV is already used for municipal elections in:

- Berkeley, CA
- Cambridge, MA
- Minneapolis, MN
- Oakland, CA
- Portland, ME
- St. Paul, MN
- San Francisco, CA
- San Leandro, CA
- Takoma Park, MD
- Telluride, CO

Finding: In 2014, voters in California cities with Ranked Choice Voting understood it better than they did the state's Top-Two Primary system.

Figure 1: Percentage Understanding RCV or the Top-Two Primary Extremely or Very Well, California RCV Cities, 2014



Half (49%) of all respondents in the 2014 survey reported that they understood RCV extremely or very well as compared to 40% who understood the Top-Two Primary extremely or very well (Figure 1). In Oakland, a diverse city of over 400,000 people, 51% of respondents reported that they understood RCV extremely or very well, while only 38% reported that level of understanding of their Top-Two Primary system used to elect governor and Congress. Comparably few voters said they did not understand the systems "at all."

Voters also find RCV simple to use in practice. In the Eagleton Poll's Tolbert-

Donovan surveys, **over 90% of voter reported that using their RCV ballot in the November 2013 or 2014 election was simple.** Similarly, an Edison Research exit poll of Minneapolis voters in 2013 found that 85% of voters found RCV very or somewhat simple to use.

(Please see next page.)

Data in this fact sheet are from the Eagleton Tolbert-Donovan Survey, Alameda County and San Francisco County Official Statements of the Vote, Ballot Image Data made available by the Alameda Registrar of Voters and the San Francisco Elections Commission, Minneapolis Elections and Voter Service and FairVote Minnesota.

The high level of voter understanding of RCV is demonstrated by the tiny proportion of voters who make mistakes on their ballot that invalidate their vote.

Finding: In each of the 24 ranked choice voting elections held in November 2014, over 99% of voters cast a valid ballot.

Even in the 16-candidate, highly competitive 2014 contest for mayor in Oakland, 99.2% of voters cast a valid ballot. In the average Bay Area RCV contest with fewer than five candidates, 99.8% of voters cast a valid ballot in 2014. Similarly, only 0.5% of all ballots cast in the 35-candidate race for mayor in Minneapolis in 2013 had errors, such as an over-vote or skipped ranking. 90% of these errors were correctable, resulting in a valid ballot rate of 99.94%.

Levels of invalidity under RCV tend to be lower than those delivered by the Top-Two Primary in California, particularly the Top-Two Primary's first use in June 2012 (Table 1).

Table 1: Percentage of Invalid Ballots under the Top-Two Primary and RCV

City	2012 Senate Top-Two Primary	2014 gubernatorial Top-Two Primary	Most recent RCV mayoral election
San Francisco	1.6	0.5	0.4 (2011)
Oakland	4.5	0.5	0.8 (2014)
Berkeley	2.5	0.2	0.3 (2012)
San Leandro	4.6	0.5	0.2 (2014)

Finding: Voters have embraced the additional choices offered by the RCV ballot.

- In 2014, three-quarters (74%) of Oakland voters ranked three different mayoral candidates (the maximum allowed) and another 11% of voters ranked two mayoral candidates.
- In 2013, more than three-quarters (78%) of Minneapolis voters ranked three different mayoral candidates (the maximum number allowed). Another 10% of voters ranked two candidates for mayor.
- In the 11 RCV Alameda County races in 2014 contested by more than two candidates, 78% of all ballots cast ranked two or more candidates; almost two thirds (64%) ranked three candidates.

Finding: Winners, in RCV elections, have broad support among voters.

- Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf won almost 30% of the first round vote in a split field and was ranked first, second or third by a full 56.5% of voters. The second-placed candidate, Rebecca Kaplan, by contrast, won 14% of the first round vote and was ranked first, second or third by only 41.9% of voters. Both candidates beat out incumbent mayor, Jean Quan, to reach the final round of vote counting.
- Minneapolis Mayor Betsy Hodges won 36.5% of the first round vote in 2013 in a field of 35 candidates. She built a broad coalition of first, second and third choice support, and was ranked first, second or third on 63% of all ballots.



For more information on the Eagleton Tolbert-Donovan Survey and the positive impacts of Ranked Choice Voting visit www.fairvote.org or call (301) 270-4616.