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# The Benefits and Drawbacks of Ranked-Choice Voting in Utah





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# **The Benefits and Drawbacks of Ranked-Choice Voting in Utah**

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# Executive Summary

The 2021 municipal elections saw the first widespread use of ranked-choice voting (RCV) in Utah, with more than 20 cities and towns participating in Utah's Municipal Alternate Voting Methods Pilot Project.<sup>1</sup> The use of RCV motivated myriad news stories, a public opinion survey, and multiple legislative proposals to reform RCV elections in Utah.

At the same time, the polarized political climate has heightened both the levels and resonance of politicization of elections in America. The potent mix of polarization and politicization of voting creates real risk of damaging public trust in elections – a fundamental civic institution in America's approach to governing.

The purpose of this report is to synthesize and analyze the available evidence and data on RCV to inform the public and policymakers about its current and potential future implementation in Utah. That evidence includes scholarly research, public opinion survey data, and input from key stakeholders. Taken together, it points to potential benefits and potential drawbacks regarding: (1) the Municipal Alternate Voting Methods Pilot Project, and (2) proposals to expand the use of RCV beyond the pilot program.

The evidence suggests the following potential benefits and drawbacks from the use of RCV at the municipal level through the state pilot program:

## Potential Benefits

1. Municipal policy decisions may better align with voter policy preferences.
2. Taxpayer funds are saved in municipal election administration.
3. More civility is observed in election campaigns.
4. Voters report a positive experience.

## Potential Drawbacks

1. Election criticisms are amplified in the current political climate.
2. Implementation issues harm public trust in elections.
3. "Ballot exhaustion" raises questions.
4. Effectiveness of RCV is susceptible to opposition efforts.

Available evidence suggests the following potential benefits and drawbacks of expanding RCV beyond municipal elections:

## Potential Benefits

1. Addresses low plurality winners in primary elections.
2. Representation by elected officials is improved.
3. Experience with RCV increases support for RCV.
4. Fewer votes are wasted.

## Potential Drawbacks

1. Unanswered policy questions surround RCV expansion.
2. Higher-profile elections mean higher risks for public trust in elections.
3. Current levels of public support for RCV expansion are questionable.
4. Election administration costs are unlikely to decrease.

The potential benefits of RCV suggest there is merit in continuing the Municipal Alternate Voting Methods Pilot Project. However, the potential drawbacks of RCV should not be ignored: They reinforce the importance of a thoughtful, deliberate approach to any expansion of RCV.

Based on the evidence, it seems prudent to continue with the pilot project to its 2026 completion date. This should give more Utah voters experience with RCV as additional municipalities participate in the pilot. This, in turn, should produce additional evidence that can better inform any proposed expansion of RCV beyond municipal elections – and help ensure that the use and growth of RCV in Utah does not come at the expense of public trust in the institution of voting.

# Brief History of RCV in the United States

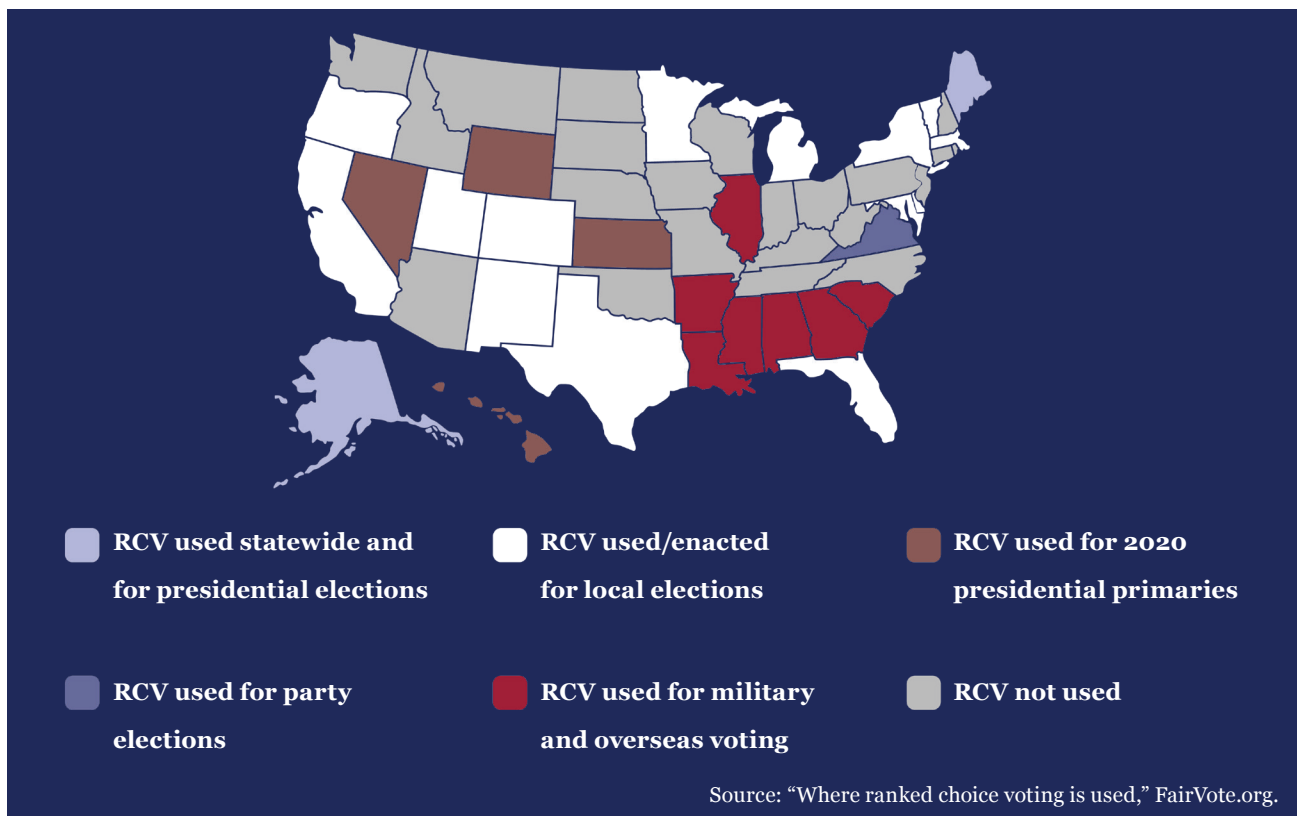
There are various forms of RCV, designed for different types of elections (e.g., a single-winner vs. multiple-winner election). RCV was first used in Europe in the 19th century for proportional representation elections; it was later adopted in nations like Australia during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.<sup>2</sup>

In the United States, RCV made its first appearance in the early to mid-1900s in cities from New York to California. It was also used in several states during this period for partisan primary elections.<sup>3</sup> The use of RCV (and the outcomes of RCV elections) generated opposition, including both legal challenges and ballot initiatives attempting to

repeal the use of RCV. Eventually, the latter were largely successful during the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>4</sup>

In recent decades, RCV has made a resurgence. Beginning in the early 2000s, municipalities in particular began adopting RCV for city elections. At least some local elections in over a dozen states now use RCV, as well as state elections in two states.<sup>5</sup> Three states used RCV for their 2020 presidential primaries, and seven states use RCV for military and overseas voting.

In Utah, municipalities can opt into the state's pilot program to use RCV for municipal elections. Two chose to do so in 2019, and that number expanded to more than 20 in 2021.





# RANKED CHOICE VOTING IN UTAH CITIES

## Benefits of Ranked Choice

- Ranked choice voting allows voters to rank candidates in order of preference.
- Ranked choice voting allows voters to vote for their favorite candidate, even if they are not the first choice.
- Ranked choice voting allows voters to vote for multiple candidates, even if they are not the first choice.
- Ranked choice voting allows voters to vote for candidates from different parties.
- Ranked choice voting allows voters to vote for candidates from different backgrounds.
- Ranked choice voting allows voters to vote for candidates from different communities.
- Ranked choice voting allows voters to vote for candidates from different professions.
- Ranked choice voting allows voters to vote for candidates from different ages.
- Ranked choice voting allows voters to vote for candidates from different genders.
- Ranked choice voting allows voters to vote for candidates from different ethnicities.

# Benefits and Drawbacks of RCV in Utah: Municipal Pilot Program

In RCV elections administered through Utah's municipal election pilot program, the dual roles of primary elections (narrowing the list of potential candidates for office) and general elections (selecting the person or persons who will serve in office) are combined into a single municipal election in November. The evidence suggests that this combining of roles has implications for municipal elections and governance – some positive and some negative.

## Potential Benefits

### ***1. Municipal policy decisions may better align with voter policy preferences***

One study of municipal elections found that public policies in cities whose leaders are chosen in elections with lower turnout (e.g., elections in odd-numbered years, like Utah's municipal elections) can reflect interest group preferences more than general voter preferences.<sup>6</sup> The researchers argue that this outcome is likely due to the outsize impact that organized interest groups can have in lower turnout elections.<sup>7</sup>

This logic can plausibly be extended to discussions of primary municipal elections versus general municipal elections. Because municipal primary elections have lower turnout than municipal general elections, it seems reasonable to conclude that organized special interest groups have a

disproportionate impact in determining who makes it out of a primary and into the general election. This dynamic may influence public policy decisions made by city council members, who may believe that they need interest group support to prevail in future primary elections.

To the extent that this logic holds true, RCV elections may better align municipal leaders' policy decisions with general voter policy preferences. By eliminating the need for a low-turnout municipal primary election, RCV eliminates that opportunity for outsize interest group influence. By using the general election to narrow the list of potential candidates, RCV reduces political pressure to satisfy interest groups' preferences to survive a future primary election.

### ***2. Taxpayer funds are saved in municipal election administration***

Because RCV in the pilot program eliminates the need for primary elections, it eliminates the costs associated with administering primary elections. In 2021, the cost of municipal elections ranged between \$2 and \$2.50 per voter in Utah's most populous counties.<sup>8</sup> This suggests a savings in election administration for taxpayers in many Utah cities in the range of thousands to tens of thousands of dollars from not having to hold a primary election.

### ***3. More civility is observed in election campaigns***

Some research on perceptions of campaign tone finds that both voters and candidates for office perceive campaigns in RCV elections to be less negative. One study found that voters in RCV elections were “twice as likely to report [that] campaigns were ‘a lot less negative.’”<sup>9</sup> Another found that “29 percent of candidates in RCV cities report[ed] being portrayed negatively by opponents, compared to 40 percent in non-RCV jurisdictions.”<sup>10</sup>

These survey results are backed up by studies of the language of campaign communications. The results of one study of transcriptions of mayoral candidate debates suggest that debates under RCV tend to be more civil and positive, while a doctoral dissertation examining campaign mass mailers suggested less negative, more positive campaigning under RCV.”<sup>11</sup>

Finally, a study of campaign communications in RCV elections found that news coverage of those communications had “significantly more positive than negative words ... validat[ing] survey research indicating that citizens perceive RCV campaigns are more civil.”<sup>12</sup>

### ***4. Voters report a positive experience***

The results of a poll of Utah voters about the 2021 municipal elections conducted by Y2 Analytics suggest that voters that used RCV in 2021 under the pilot program had, on average, a positive experience with it. The proportion of RCV voters

reporting satisfaction with their method of voting and their municipal election voting experience was comparable, statistically and substantively, to non-RCV voters in the poll.<sup>13</sup>

Other key results include:

- 86% of RCV voters being satisfied with their municipal election voting experience,
- 81% of RCV voters reporting it was easy to use,
- 90% of RCV voters reporting that RCV instructions were clear, and
- 63% of RCV voters reporting that they liked using RCV.

Some of these results were similar across municipalities, while others varied. For instance, significant majorities reported high levels of satisfaction with voting experience, ease of use and clarity of instructions regarding RCV in Salt Lake City, Lehi, Sandy and Draper. However, in Salt Lake City, 80% of voters reported that they liked using RCV, compared with 56% in Lehi and 51% in both Sandy and Draper. It is worth noting that scholarly research reports that most demographic groups find ranking candidates under RCV to be easy.<sup>14</sup>

## **Potential Drawbacks**

### ***1. Election criticisms are amplified in current political climate***

Heightened attacks on election outcomes have become a common feature in the current political climate, with resulting harm to public trust in the institutions of voting and elections.

For instance, a national poll in 2021 reported that 39% of Americans do not trust the fairness of elections in the U.S.<sup>15</sup> There are significant partisan gaps in these results, with 64% of Republicans not trusting that U.S. elections are fair, compared with 39% of independents and 13% of Democrats.

Utah's municipal elections seem to have avoided significant declines in public trust. The Y2 Analytics poll reported that 88% of all Utah voters are confident that their city or town election process produces fair election outcomes.<sup>16</sup>

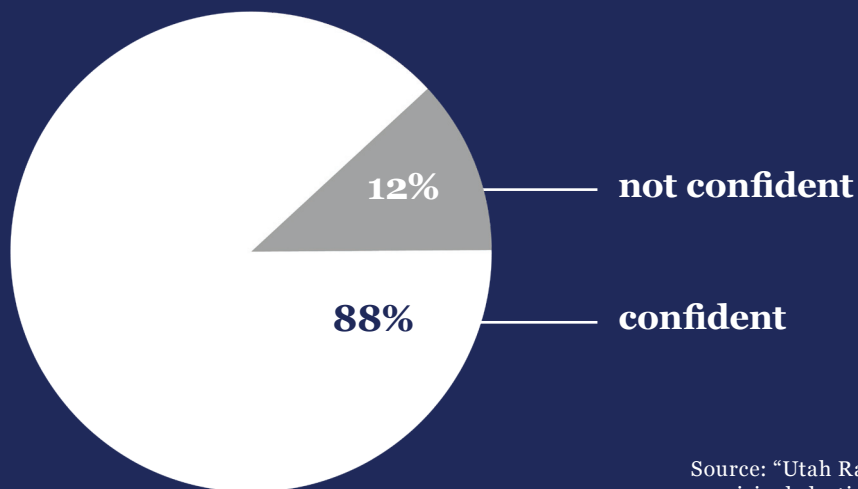
The same proportion of Utah voters in the Y2 poll reported confidence that their ballot would be counted accurately in 2021. This polling result was verified by a recent Deseret News/Hinckley Institute poll reporting that 81% of registered votes in Utah say they are confident that state and local government officials will conduct a fair and accurate election in 2022.<sup>17</sup>

While local polling data suggest high public trust in Utah elections, that trust is connected to traditional forms of casting a ballot, which are common and familiar. The newness and unfamiliarity of voting methods like RCV have a potential to create new opportunities for election criticisms to resonate in the minds of Utahns. For example, if Utahns do not fully understand RCV's methods for determining an election winner and an RCV election concludes with a surprising outcome – like all election systems do at times – the political climate of attacks on trust in elections may become more potent in the state.

## ***2. Implementation issues harm public trust in elections***

The risks associated with the current political climate mean that issues with implementation as the pilot program expands – normal for any new policy or program – have the potential to erode public trust in elections. For example, in Sandy

### **How confident are Utah voters that the current municipal election process produces fair election outcomes?**



Source: "Utah Ranked Choice Voting municipal election survey," Y2 Analytics.



city's mayoral election, the final outcome was decided by 21 votes out of more than 21,000 ballots submitted.<sup>18</sup> Due to the close margin a recount was merited, but confusion over RCV election recount procedures led to temporary public uncertainty over the outcome.<sup>19</sup>

If one or both of the Sandy city mayoral candidates who remained in the recount had attempted to exploit the electoral uncertainty for political gain by blaming the RCV process, it could have negatively impacted public trust in RCV elections. Fortunately, both candidates acted and spoke responsibly.

But in a political climate in which attacks on election outcomes have been normalized, responsible actions and comments from candidates cannot be assured. This makes any normal implementation glitch in RCV elections a potential source of erosion of public trust in elections.

### ***3. Ballot exhaustion raises questions***

RCV vote tabulation creates a phenomenon called "ballot exhaustion."<sup>20</sup> A ballot becomes exhausted –

meaning it will not be included in the final tally for or against the eventual winner – if every candidate that a voter ranked has been eliminated and more than two candidates remain in the race. Ballot exhaustion can occur under various circumstances and depends in part on the method of RCV being used.

Ballot exhaustion aids in RCV's goal of producing an election whose victor wins a majority of counted votes. But it also means that exhausted ballots are counted less meaningfully, by not including them in the total votes that the victor must gain a majority of to be declared the winner.

Ballot exhaustion under RCV raises important questions around priorities in election systems. Is it more important to ensure a winner has 50% plus one of the votes, or that every vote be meaningfully counted in the final election results? The possibility that Utahns may say the latter makes ballot exhaustion a potential drawback of RCV.

## **Highlights from the 2021 Sandy RCV mayoral election**

**85% ..... % of voters satisfied with their voting experience**

**21,165 ..... total ballots submitted**

**3,930 ..... total ballots exhausted**

**21 ..... margin of victory for the winner**

Source: "Utah Ranked Choice Voting municipal election survey," Y2 Analytics.

#### ***4. Effectiveness of RCV is susceptible to opposition efforts***

Utahns' familiarity with and acceptance of traditional voting methods are part of what protects elections against efforts to persuade voters that they are problematic. The recent failure to repeal broad access to vote by mail offers an instructive illustration.

Unlike most states, Utahns broadly participated in vote-by-mail elections for multiple election cycles prior to the 2020 elections.<sup>21</sup> Those elections went smoothly, without widespread or significant problems. Recent efforts to gather signatures for a ballot initiative to repeal vote-by-mail elections failed, perhaps in part due to Utahns' experience with vote by mail and the success of that program.<sup>22</sup> Efforts to repeal vote by mail via legislation were also unsuccessful.<sup>23</sup>

RCV does not yet enjoy similarly broad levels of familiarity, acceptance and successful experience among Utah voters; rather, it is facing opposition. An organized effort in Sandy, for example, sought to persuade voters to submit incomplete RCV ballots in a way that likely increased ballot exhaustion there. In the Sandy mayoral race, there were 3,930 exhausted ballots reported in the final results, representing nearly 1 in 5 total ballots submitted in the mayoral election (where the final margin was 21 votes).<sup>24</sup>

Such outcomes could be a basis for persuading Utah voters that RCV is problematic. The possibility for such an outcome is underscored by scholarly research suggesting that many voters question whether RCV produces fair election outcomes.<sup>25</sup>







# Benefits and Drawbacks of RCV in Utah: Expansion of RCV

Some have proposed expanding RCV elections beyond the municipal pilot to partisan primaries as well as state general elections.<sup>26</sup> Expanding RCV to county, state and/or federal elections in Utah merits consideration of the potential benefits and drawbacks.

## Potential Benefits

### ***1. Addresses low plurality winners in primary elections***

Under traditional election methods, a candidate can win with a plurality of votes – winning the most votes but falling short of a majority of votes. RCV is designed to ensure that the winner of an election wins a majority of votes. This means that expanding RCV to county or state partisan primary elections and general elections would eliminate the possibility of a candidate winning a primary or general election with a slim plurality. This takes on the greatest significance in the context of a partisan primary for state office.

In 2020, current Gov. Spencer Cox won the Republican gubernatorial primary with 36.15% of the vote (190,565 votes).<sup>27</sup> This means that nearly twice as many Republican primary voters cast ballots for someone other than the winner – 336,613 votes going to other candidates.

Further, in heavily Republican Utah, the winner of the Republican gubernatorial primary is highly likely to become the next governor. Following this logic, in 2020, it meant that roughly 11% of all

registered voters in Utah – those who voted for Gov. Cox in the Republican gubernatorial primary – had an outsize influence on the choosing of Utah's next governor.<sup>28</sup>

RCV would address any concerns caused by plurality winners in primaries by ensuring that the eventual winner gains majority support. After eliminating candidates with fewer first-place votes (or first- and second-place votes, or first- and second- and third-place votes, etc.) and reallocating their vote according to their rankings.

### ***2. Representation by elected officials is improved***

Because RCV elections eliminate candidates with low numbers of first- and second-place votes and distributes those votes to other candidates, it creates additional information for elected officials regarding where their support comes from. In other words, it potentially allows them to better understand – using actual voting, rather than opinion or exit polls – not only their primary base of support (voters who ranked them first) but lower levels of support as well (voters who ranked them second and whose first-place vote was eliminated).

In theory, this information could help elected better calibrate their policy positions and statements to reflect who put them in office. In other words, it could allow elected officials to better represent the coalition of voters that viewed them as their first, second or third choice.



Additionally, this information could allow voters to better understand the perspective an elected official takes on a particular policy, through the lens of where their political support comes from.

### ***3. Experience with RCV increases support for RCV***

According to the Y2 Analytics poll, 50% of voters that used RCV in 2021 said they believed RCV should be used for more elections, such as for governor or Congress.<sup>29</sup> Among non-RCV voters, support for expanding RCV was 36%. This suggests that as more Utah voters gain experience with RCV, their support for its expansion may significantly increase.

### ***4. Fewer votes are wasted***

In modern partisan primaries – especially presidential primaries – votes can be wasted by a candidate dropping out of the race after some ballots have been cast, but before the primary election day.<sup>30</sup> For instance, a voter could turn in their ballot with their vote for a party’s presidential candidate 10 days before primary election day, and then that candidate could drop out of the race seven days before primary election day. The voter’s ballot would be wasted because they had voted for someone who would not be in the race on primary election day.

In the 2020 presidential primaries, it is estimated that “almost four million ballots were ‘wasted’ in the 2020 presidential primaries because candidates dropped out between the time a voter mailed their ballot and the day of the election.”<sup>31</sup> RCV solves this

problem by allowing a voter’s ballot to go to their second choice, should their first choice drop out of a race.

## **Potential Drawbacks**

### ***1. Unanswered policy questions surround RCV expansion***

The possibility of expanding RCV to state elections raises important policy questions.

One set of questions connects to election administration under RCV. Tabulation of final election results under RCV occurs in a central location. While ballots can be scanned in each county to populate a database with raw data on candidate rankings for each voter, the raw voter data will be sent to a single location to tabulate final election results using RCV tabulation software.

The likely candidate for this duty in statewide RCV races would be the office of the Utah lieutenant governor (LG), who oversees elections at the state level. This contrasts with the current system, where counties tabulate vote totals from raw data and send those totals to the LG, who combines county totals and reports final election results.

Expanding RCV to state races in this fashion would modify the role of the LG in elections, because tabulating election results from raw voter data is a different role than combining aggregated vote totals tabulated from raw data by counties. RCV proponents see these differences as insignificant, while some RCV opponents disagree.

Does it impact public trust in elections for the LG, who serves under the governor and is not independently elected, to be responsible for tabulating election results from raw voter data in the gubernatorial election? Does it create additional security risks for raw voter data? Do the answers to these questions point to the need for additional election policy changes?

A second set of policy questions focuses on whether RCV is the best system for every election: state, county, municipal, primary, general, partisan and nonpartisan. For example, an alternative approach to elections, called final five voting, uses RCV for some elections and traditional voting methods for others. Under final five, traditional voting methods are used in a primary election that includes all candidates for an office (regardless of political party affiliation) – the results of which narrow the list of potential candidates to five. RCV is then used in the general election to determine the winner.

Do the merits of the final five approach raise the possibility that RCV is best used selectively, rather than for all elections? Since policymakers may be hesitant to follow one significant election policy change with another due to the difficulty and confusion that can create for voters, should Utah be considering final five voting for some elections instead of RCV for all elections?

These are important policy questions that deserve deliberation, which may require extra time to arrive at satisfactory answers.

## ***2. Higher-profile elections mean higher risks for public trust in elections***

The use of RCV in municipal elections has drawn organized opposition efforts that could risk harming public trust in elections. The stakes get higher for higher-profile elections.

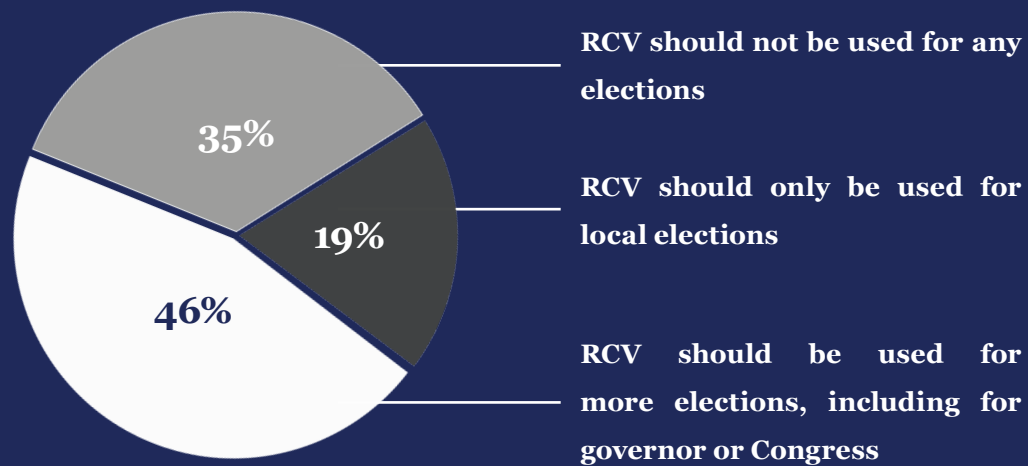
For instance, what if those opposed to RCV saw the effect of their efforts in the Sandy mayoral race and decided to engage in similar efforts in a Republican gubernatorial using RCV? The potential negative impact is much higher for a gubernatorial versus a mayoral election because the former is spread across the entire state.

## ***3. Current levels of public support for RCV expansion are questionable***

The Y2 Analytics poll found that 46% of all Utah voters polled supported expanding RCV to state elections, while a combined 54% disagreed (19% thought that RCV should only be used in municipal elections and 35% said it should not be used in any elections in the state).<sup>32</sup> Among voters who used RCV for 2021 municipal elections, support for RCV expansion increased to 50%, but that also means 50% of Utah voters with experience in RCV voting in 2021 disagreed with the idea of using RCV in elections for governor or Congress.

Significant disagreement among the public about expanding RCV beyond municipal elections may suggest that expanding RCV to elections for

## 46% of Utah voters supported expanding RCV to state elections, while 54% disagreed



Source: "Utah Ranked Choice Voting municipal election survey," Y2 Analytics.

governor or Congress is premature. Given that experience using RCV seems to improve voters' views about it as a voting method, this would point to expansion of RCV beyond municipal elections as something to consider after more Utah voters gain experience with RCV through the municipal pilot program.

### ***4. Election administration costs are unlikely to decrease***

Savings to taxpayers from municipal use of RCV occurs because it does away with the need for a municipal primary election. Similar savings may not occur at the state level, however.

Discussions of RCV at the state level have included using RCV in partisan primary elections, rather

than using RCV to eliminate primary elections. This would require a change in the administration of primary elections, which could generate additional election administration costs as administrators migrate from traditional systems to RCV systems (e.g., extra training for administrators on use of RCV software, security risks and solutions, etc.).

At the very least, RCV at the state level seems unlikely to generate significant cost savings because it will not eliminate primary election costs. That, combined with the costs that nearly always materialize in government when switching from one system to another, make the potential benefit of RCV in the municipal context a potential drawback at the state level.

# Conclusion

The potential benefits of RCV suggest there is merit in continuing the Municipal Alternate Voting Methods Pilot Project. However, the potential drawbacks of RCV should not be ignored. They merit thorough consideration when considering expansion of RCV to all municipalities (i.e., making RCV mandatory for cities and towns) or to county and state elections.

Based on the evidence, it seems prudent to continue with the municipal election pilot project to its 2026 completion date. This will likely allow more Utah voters to gain experience with and familiarity with RCV, as more municipalities participate in the pilot program over time. This additional experience should produce more and better evidence about RCV in Utah and its potential impact on things like public trust in the institution of voting.



## Benefits and drawbacks of using RCV in municipal elections

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### Potential Benefits

1. Municipal policy decisions may better align with voter policy preferences.
2. Taxpayer funds are saved in municipal election administration.
3. More civility is observed in election campaigns.
4. Voters report a positive experience.

### Potential Drawbacks

1. Election criticisms are amplified in the current political climate.
2. Implementation issues harm public trust in elections.
3. “Ballot exhaustion” raises questions.
4. Effectiveness of RCV is susceptible to opposition efforts.

## Benefits and drawbacks of expanding RCV to state elections

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### Potential Benefits

1. Addresses low plurality winners in primary elections.
2. Representation by elected officials is improved.
3. Experience with RCV increases support for RCV.
4. Fewer votes are wasted.

### Potential Drawbacks

1. Unanswered policy questions surround RCV expansion.
2. Higher-profile elections mean higher risks for public trust in elections.
3. Current levels of public support for RCV expansion are questionable.
4. Election administration costs are unlikely to decrease.

# Appendix: Scholarly Literature Review

Todd Donovan, Caroline Tolbert and Kellen Gracey, “Campaign civility under preferential and plural voting,” *Electoral Studies* 42 (June 2016): 157-163.

**Findings:** (1) Voters in cities using preferential voting were significantly more satisfied with the conduct of local campaigns than voters in cities with plurality elections; (2) voters in RCV cities are nearly twice as likely to say that local campaigns were less negative than other recent contests.

Lindsay Nielson, “Ranked choice voting and attitudes toward democracy in the United States: Results from a survey experiment,” *Politics and Policy* 45 (August 2017): 535-570.

**Findings:** (1) Adopting RCV elections more broadly would require a fundamental shift in the way local governments administer elections and how voters express their preferences; (2) RCV may not significantly change election outcomes and has no positive impact on voters’ confidence in elections or the democratic process; (3) voters prefer plurality election over RCV and do not see RCV as producing a fairer outcome.

Caroline J. Tolbert and Daria Kuznetsova, “Editor’s introduction: The promise and peril of ranked choice voting,” *Politics and Governance* 9 (June 2021): 265-270.

**Findings:** (1) Extreme polarization places the U.S. at a tipping point of voting reform, and

RCV, also known as instant run-off voting, may be a solution; (2) RCV is a compromise between the current plurality system in the U.S. and pure proportional representation systems found in other countries.

Benjamin Reilly, “Ranked choice voting in Australia and America: Do voters follow party cues?” *Politics and Governance* 9 (June 2021): 271-279.

**Findings:** (1) Australia, a two-party federal democracy similar to the U.S., has used RCV since 1907 – however, voting is also compulsory, removing the need to “get out the vote” and enabling greater inter-party coordination; (2) candidate and party endorsements over time promote reciprocal ranking exchanges between parties, building support for the process; (3) 2015 Australian survey results – most voters followed the how-to-vote recommendations of their favored party, but there is partisan variation reflecting how close the contest is anticipated to be (closer contests create more like-minded party coordination); (4) in 2018, Maine’s 2nd Congressional District RCV race between Bruce Poliquin (R) and Jared Golden (D) went to a second round, resulting in a Golden win after Poliquin dismissed the logic of RCV (and rejected the reciprocal preference flow from excluded candidates); (5) while RCV has been shown to ameliorate political polarization and party interaction in Australia, the absence of compulsory rankings (voting)

in American politics makes cross-partisan commitment less likely to develop.

Martha Kropf, “Using campaign communications to analyze civility in ranked choice voting elections,” *Politics and Governance* 9 (June 2021): 280-292.

**Findings:** (1) RCV doesn’t necessarily increase civility on Twitter – all results from comparisons of Tweet content from candidates were inconclusive, likely due to being less direct or used for other purposes; (2) RCV does reduce negativity around campaigning - analysis of newspaper articles for campaign tone shows RCV city articles have significantly more positive than negative words.

Joseph A. Coll, “Demographic disparities using ranked-choice voting? Ranking difficulty, under-voting and the 2020 Democratic primary,” *Politics and Governance* 9 (June 2021): 293-305.

**Findings:** (1) most demographic groups, including racial and ethnic minorities, find ranking candidates easy – the exceptions are older, less interested, and more ideologically conservative individuals; (2) 12% of respondents under-voted with few identifiable patterns across groups; (3) older individuals have increased difficulty, but are less likely to under-vote on their ballots; (4) results challenge the assumption that racial and ethnic groups are disadvantaged by RCV.

J.S. Maloy and Matthew Ward, “The impact of input rules and ballot options on voting error: An experimental analysis,” *Politics and Governance* 9 (June 2021): 306-318.

**Findings:** (1) The distinction between rules violations and fully invalid votes, which is not applicable to single-mark ballots, became more identifiable in RCV; (2) despite the increase in probability of a violation of voting instructions, having more complicated input rules or more candidates did not raise the probability that a voter would cast a void vote.

Courtney L. Juelich and Joseph A. Coll, “Ranked choice voting and youth voter turnout: The roles of campaign civility and candidate contact,” *Politics and Governance* 9 (June 2021): 319-331.

**Findings:** (1) Young Americans who are increasingly pessimistic towards politics and reliant on mobilization for participation respond positively to the increased campaign civility and mobilization offered by RCV; (2) though there is no significant difference in voting rates between RCV and plurality cities for the general public, younger voters are more likely to vote in RCV cities; (3) the civility of campaigns was less of a mediational effect than increased candidate contact, indicating young voters respond more to mobilization efforts.

Cynthia Richie Terrell, Courtney Lamendola and Mara Reilly, “Election reform and women’s representation: Ranked choice voting in the U.S.,” *Politics and Governance* 9 (June 2021): 332-343.

**Findings:** (1) Various cities adopting proportional representation for local elections in the early part of the 20th century saw an increase in minority representation (in both gender and race) which threatened the white male hegemony of previous plurality systems,

and party elites made concentrated and successful efforts to repeal these proportional systems by linking them to the rising Red Scare; (2) in modern elections, the percentage of women candidates dropped more steeply in cities with plurality systems and women experienced improved outcomes under RCV systems; (3) as of 2020, women’s average representation is 11 points higher on city councils elected using RCV compared to an overall average city of similar population; (4) these successes seem to continue to other municipalities and mayorships across the country.

Jack Santucci, “Variants of ranked-choice voting from a strategic perspective,” *Politics and Governance* 9 (June 2021): 344-353.

**Findings:** (1) There are five primary versions of RCV that have been used or proposed in the U.S.: alternative vote, single transferable vote, block-preferential voting, the bottoms-up system, and alternative vote with numbered posts; (2) in each, political strategists must consider the problems of majority reversal, owing a seat to voters from a different party, and

undisciplined third-party voters; (3) in RCV, voters don’t need to make complicated strategic calculations, choose the lesser of two evils, or be concerned that their votes might be wasted because they can express multiple preferences; (4) existing party elites may oppose reform if their candidates fail to consistently win under the new rules.

Rob Richie, Benjamin Oestericher, Deb Otis and Jeremy Seitz-Brown, “Lessons from the use of ranked choice voting in American presidential primaries,” *Politics and Governance* 9 (June 2021): 354-364.

**Findings:** (1) In 2020, more than 280,000 Democratic primary voters cast ranked choice ballots in five states, indicating it may be a successful way to eliminate “wasted votes” for candidates early in the presidential nomination process; (2) both parties have reason to expand the use of RCV in 2024 presidential primaries due to its success leading up to the 2020 election; (3) RCV primary elections are more likely to result in a widely acceptable leader with a broader base of support, but it is not a guarantee.







# Endnotes

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The potential benefits of RCV suggest there is merit in continuing the Municipal Alternate Voting Methods Pilot Project. However, the potential drawbacks of RCV should not be ignored: They reinforce the importance of a thoughtful, deliberate approach to any expansion of RCV.



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