

Ranked Choice Voting and Multi-Seat Races

Editor:

You've probably seen some of the growing momentum for adopting ranked-choice voting. Ranked-choice voting (RCV) is now used in Alaska, Maine, Virginia, and in New York City where Eric Adams won the Democratic nomination via RCV. Several other states and cities are in various stages of adoption. We've also seen growing momentum in Alameda with the League of Women Voters joining the movement. And I've enjoyed reading the supportive letters in our local papers.

Those letters have made a strong case that RCV enables voter preferences to be better expressed in single-seat elections, especially when many candidates are running for the seat.

I'd like to describe how RCV is even more valuable for multi-seat elections, like Alameda's City Council election, where voters make two choices and the two candidates with the most votes win the seats.

With the current system, it's possible for a small percentage of voters to have their two votes choose the winners, while most voters have neither of their two votes assigned to winning candidates. This can enable niche political slates to win without earning a significant proportion of voter support.

In RCV, each voter ranks the candidates in order of preference instead of selecting two. In the first, and possibly only round, the first-choice votes are tabulated. If two candidates each get more than a third of the vote, they are the winners. If not, there is a series of instant run-offs, based on the voter preferences, until two candidates each get a third of the vote. (With each run-off, votes for the bottom candidate are replaced with that voter's next choice — and this process is repeated until two candidates win more than a third.)

The result of this process is two winners who will be more representative of the entire voting base. Typically, at least two-thirds of the voters in a ranked-choice election will have their vote make a difference in the election. There are some great resources on the internet to help visualize RCV.

The Alameda County Registrar of Voters has the capability to tally votes using a ranked-choice election system since other cities in the county — Oakland, San Leandro, Berkeley, and Albany — have started using it. All voters have to do is choose candidates by order of preference on our ballots.

If you have questions or would like to get involved, reach out to the Alameda League of Women Voters at www.lwvalameda.org/ranked-choice-voting.html

We're seeing democracy under attack around the world and in the United States. Let's strengthen democracy here in Alameda with Ranked Choice Voting!

Paul Beusterien

~ Alameda Sun, Alameda Post, Mar 21, 23, 2022