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RANKED CHOICE VOTING ELECTIONS BENEFIT CANDIDATES AND VOTERS OF COLOR

About the Authors

The authors of this report are Deb Otis, FairVote senior research analyst, and Nora Dell, FairVote research analyst, with contributions by Chris Zawora and Omar Danaf.

About FairVote

FairVote is a nonpartisan organization seeking better elections for all. We research and advance voting reforms that make democracy more functional and representative for every voter.

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This report examines how voters of various races and ethnicities interact with ranked choice voting (RCV) elections. Previous research has shown that RCV is associated with improved political representation for people of color; this report explores why this is. We studied the question from two perspectives—the candidates and the voters—and found that:

- **Candidates of color benefit from the round-by-round counting process**. Winning candidates of color, particularly those who are Black or Hispanic/Latino, grew their vote totals between the first and final ballot rounds at a higher rate than winning White candidates. Black and Hispanic/Latino candidates who went on to win grew their vote totals by 36% by the final round, compared to 28% among winning White candidates (see Figure 5). This indicates that candidates of color can build strong support among voters outside their traditional political bases (which RCV incentivizes) and benefit from round-by-round counting in RCV races, which translates to more victories for candidates of color.

- **Voters of color tend to rank more candidates than White voters.** In precincts with more voters of color, voters rank a higher percentage of candidates, indicating a willingness among communities of color to engage with the ranked ballot. In the 2020 mayoral election in Berkeley, CA, for example, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) and Hispanic/Latino voters were most likely to indicate their preferences on a majority of available rankings on their ballots. Over 70% of AAPI and Hispanic/Latino voters used a majority of rankings, while only about half of White voters did (see Figure 12).

- **Candidates of color see the strongest gains in districts with a majority of voters of color**, including districts where the largest single bloc of voters is White. This suggests that candidates of color are effectively earning votes outside of their own racial and ethnic groups and building broad support across their districts. Candidates of color won 63% of elections in districts where voters of color outnumbered White voters and in which the largest racial group of voters is White, and 66% of elections in districts where the largest racial group is voters of color (see Figure 3).

- **Candidates pay no penalty when they run against opponents of the same race or ethnicity.** Black candidates are more likely than other candidates to challenge people of the same race or ethnicity, but under RCV they don't pay a penalty for doing so. Instead of dividing community support, Black candidates who run against other Black candidates in RCV elections have a *higher* win rate. Black candidates were elected in 67% of elections featuring multiple Black candidates but only 32% of elections with only one Black candidate. Candidates of other racial or ethnic backgrounds also experienced an increased win rate when they ran against candidates of the same racial or ethnic background (see Figure 4).

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INTRODUCTION

Ranked choice voting (RCV) is a reform that seeks to make elections more fair for voters. Unlike standard election practices, which only allow voters to select one candidate, RCV gives voters the option to rank candidates in order of preference: first, second, third, and so forth. In the single-winner version of RCV, if a candidate receives more than half of voters' first choices, that candidate wins, just like in any other election. However, if there is no majority winner after counting first choices, the race is decided by an "instant runoff." The candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and voters who picked that candidate as "No. 1" will have their votes count for their next choice. This process continues until there is a majority winner, or a candidate who earns more than half of the votes.

Ranked choice voting is used in more than 20 jurisdictions in the United States and interest is growing. In 2020 alone, voters approved RCV ballot measures in Alaska and six U.S. cities,[1] and voters used RCV in presidential primary elections in five states[2]. So far in 2021, Vermont's largest city voted to adopt RCV, at least a dozen Utah cities have adopted RCV, state lawmakers have introduced bills that would expand the use of RCV in 29 states, including one that has already become law,[3] and RCV legislation is advancing at the federal level.

As of April 2021, more than 9.2 million voting-age citizens live in U.S. jurisdictions that either use or have adopted RCV and plan to implement it in their next round of elections. A slew of new RCV elections ison the horizon, including in New York City's mayoral primary race in June 2021, which is anticipated to be the highest turnout RCV election in U.S. history.

This report considers the impact of single-winner RCV (also known as instant runoff voting) on communities of color, including why RCV delivers more representative outcomes than traditional plurality-winner elections.

Previous research has demonstrated that RCV leads to more candidates on the ballot and improved representation for people of color.[4]

Experts have offered many theories to explain this phenomenon. Some suggest that RCV removes the fear of splitting votes with candidates of the same background, which draws more diverse candidates to the field. Some say it lowers the cost of campaigning, because instant runoffs are less expensive than "two-round runoffs" and therefore draw candidates of more diverse means and backgrounds. Some say a contributing factor is that RCV moves the decisive election to the general election, when turnout is highest and most representative. And some say RCV decreases negative campaigning, which creates positive, issue-focused environments that are inclusive of a variety of voices, including those that have been historically underrepresented in public office.

In this report, we identify an additional factor previously unstudied: RCV gains occur due to the way candidates build support between rounds of RCV elections and the way voters use the ranked ballot.

First, we examined RCV from the candidate perspective by measuring how candidates of different races and ethnicities consolidate support through the instant runoff process. For this analysis, we considered all single-winner ranked choice voting races in the United States, which included multiple rounds of tabulation. When candidates earn additional votes from voters' second- or third-choice preferences during the RCV tabulation, we treated those votes as gains because candidates would have been unlikely to earn those votes in plurality-winner elections.

Second, we examined the way voters interact with ranked ballots to measure whether some use more rankings than others or make more errors on the ballot. These factors point to strong engagement with ranked choice voting in communities of color, which builds their political power and improves their representation in public office.

1. FairVote. (2021). Ranked Choice Voting Ballot Measures.
2. Otis, D. (2020). Ranked Choice Voting in 2020 Presidential Primary Elections. *FairVote*.
3. FairVote. (2021). 2021 State Legislation Advancing Ranked Choice Voting.
4. John, S., Smith, H., & Zack, E. (2018). The alternative vote: Do changes in single-member voting systems affect descriptive representation of women and minorities? *Electoral Studies, 54*.

CANDIDATE DIVERSITY IN RCV ELECTIONS

Ranked choice voting has been in use in the United States in its single-winner instant runoff format since San Francisco adopted it in 2004. Since then, 1,422 candidates have run in 398 single-winner RCV elections in 27 jurisdictions across the country. (This figure includes some duplicates because some candidates ran in multiple RCV elections.) The majority (58%) of these candidates identified as White; 16% are Black; 10% are AAPI; 10% are Hispanic or Latino; 3% are Middle Eastern or North African; and 2% are mixed race or another race.

Figure 1: Total Candidates and Winning Candidates in RCV Elections by Race or Ethnicity
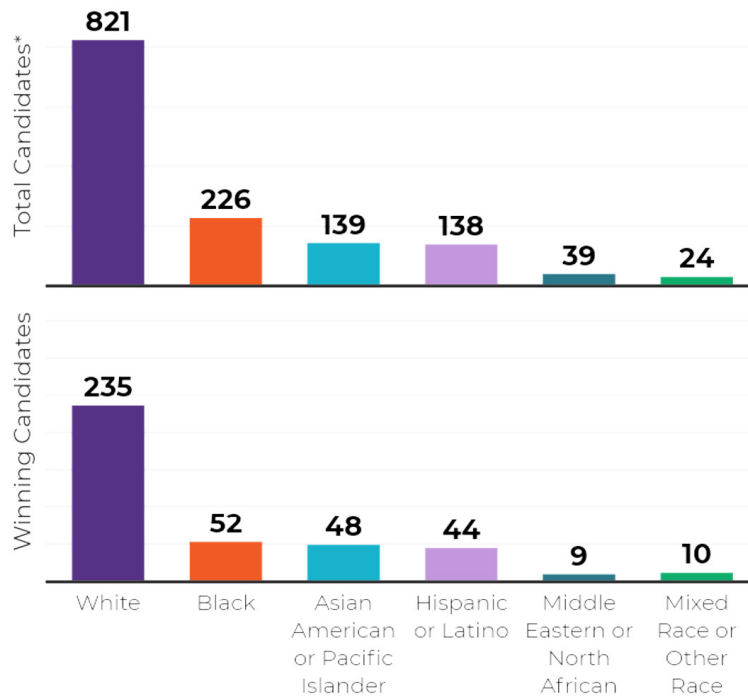
*Does not include 33 candidates for whom we were unable to identify race or ethnicity

The figure below shows the win rate for each racial or ethnic group in our study, considering only elections which contained at least one candidate of the given racial or ethnic group. By this measure, Figure 2 shows small variances in win rate across different racial or ethnic groups, but given the sample size of RCV elections in the U.S., the differences among groups of color are not statistically significant.

Figure 2: Win Rate for Any Candidate of a Given Racial or Ethnic Group n Elections With at Least One Such Candidate
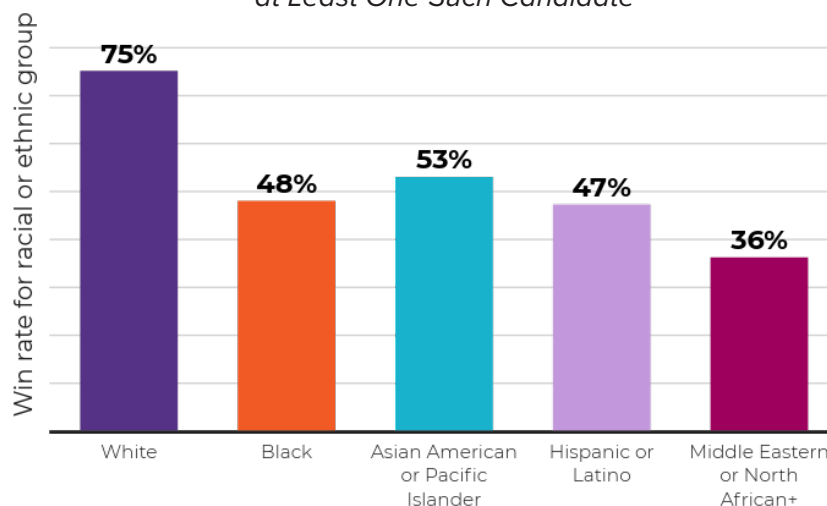

+Sample size is too small to generalize findings to broader population

The win rates for candidates of color in Figure 2 are higher than the win rates in the seven non-RCV "control cities" studied by John, Smith, and Zack (2018), which also found that RCV increases the likelihood of candidates of color winning elections. In those non-RCV cities, Black candidates won 38% of elections they entered, AAPI candidates won 33%, and Hispanic or Latino candidates won 46%.

As win rates under RCV varied, so did the racial and ethnic composition of the districts in which RCV elections occurred. About half of RCV elections (53%) were held in districts where voters of color outnumber White voters, and candidates of color won more elections in these districts. Notably, even in majority-non-White districts where White residents nonetheless comprise a plurality of voters, candidates of color won almost two-thirds of races. This indicates that candidates of color perform well outside of their own racial and ethnic groups.

*Figure 3: Race or Ethnicity of Winners by District Composition*
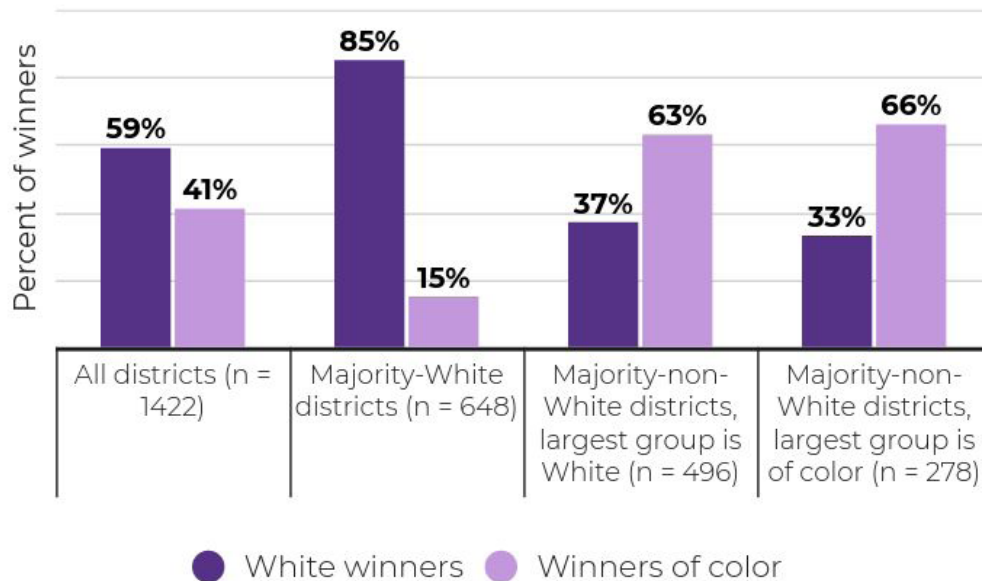
RCV ELECTIONS PREVENT "SPLIT VOTES"

We also tested whether any groups pay a penalty when elections feature multiple candidates of the same racial or ethnic group. This is an important metric because candidates in plurality-winner elections sometimes experience splintered support when running against candidates with similar backgrounds, which can deny representation to their communities.

RCV elections, on the other hand, enable communities of voters to elect representative candidate(s) even if their top choices differ. Voters don't have to worry about choosing among like-minded candidates and "splitting votes." Their backup choices still count to help elect candidates reflecting the common backgrounds or interests of their communities. Similarly, community leaders don't have to engage in back-room strategizing, pressuring worthy candidates to "wait their turn" in order to prevent vote-splitting. In our analysis, every racial and ethnic group studied increased its win rate in elections featuring multiple members of that group; none experienced vote-splitting. This is a key benefit of RCV elections; in short, RCV elections help communities build power, while traditional elections can divide them.

Black candidates are more likely than other candidates of color to run against other candidates of the same race or ethnicity, but they do not pay a penalty for doing so. A Black candidate won in 67% of elections that featured two or more Black candidates, compared to only 32% of elections with only one Black candidate.

Figure 4: Win Rate for for Racial or Ethnic Groups When Multiple Members of Same Group Compete
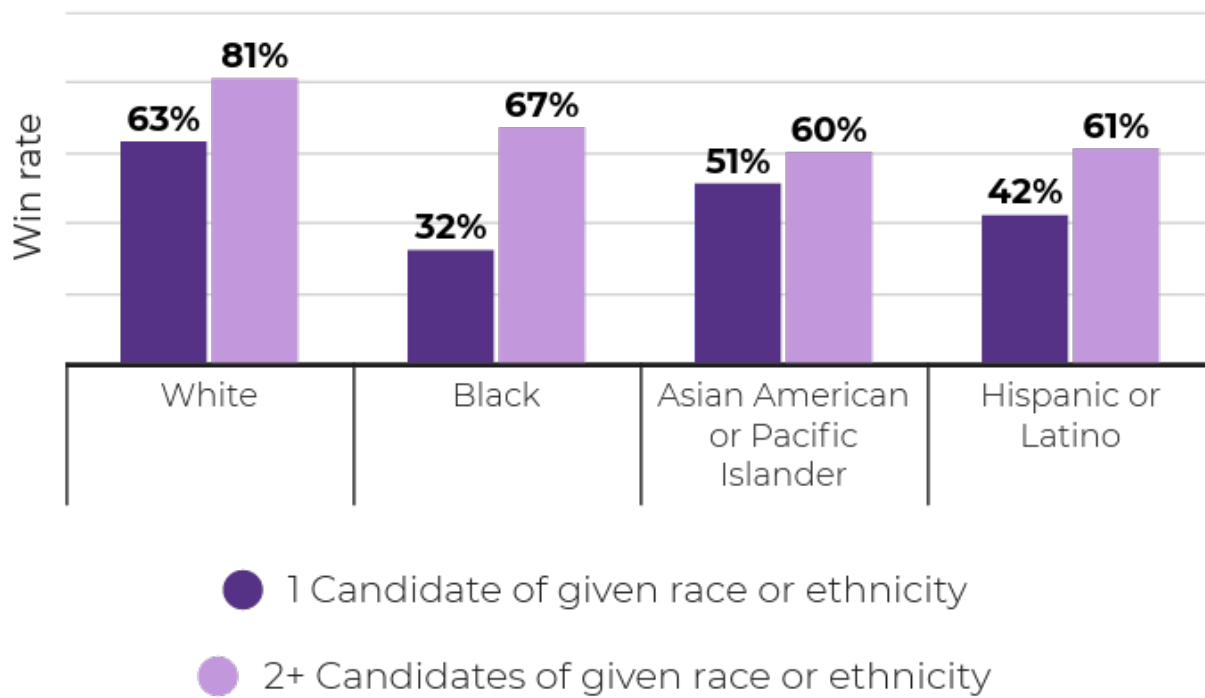
Sample sizes for bars, from left to right, are 108, 218, 58, 54, 65, 25, 71, and 25 elections

MULTI-ROUND RCV ELECTIONS HELP CANDIDATES OF COLOR BUILD COMMUNITY SUPPORT

In addition to measuring victors in RCV elections, we also explored the degree to which candidates increased their vote totals between the first and final rounds to determine which most effectively consolidated support. A greater increase in vote totals between rounds indicates that candidates are able to effectively appeal to other candidates' supporters, as well as multiple constituencies outside of their base or "first-choice" supporters. This is a sign of positive engagement with different communities within a candidate's district. While many RCV elections were decided on first choices alone, more than half (53%) required multiple rounds to identify a winner.

We tallied votes gained between candidates' first and final rounds to assess the degree to which they built support across communities. All candidates who were active for multiple rounds increased their vote totals by an average of 22% beyond their first-round totals; winning candidates increased their vote totals by 31%.

On average, candidates of color increased their vote totals between rounds by a greater percentage than White candidates. The following chart shows the average amount by which winning candidates increased their vote totals

Figure 5: Increase in Vote Totals for Winning Candidates Between First and Final Rounds
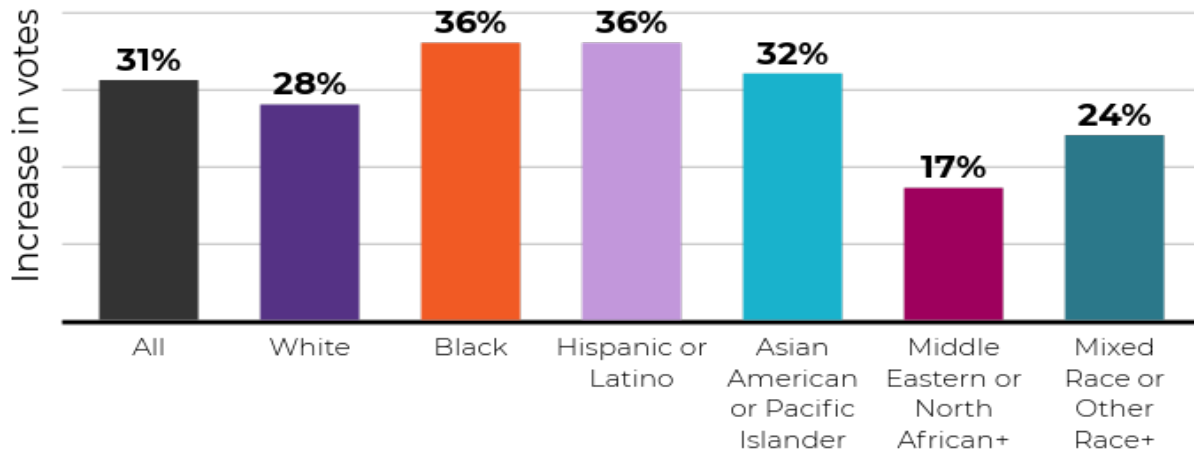
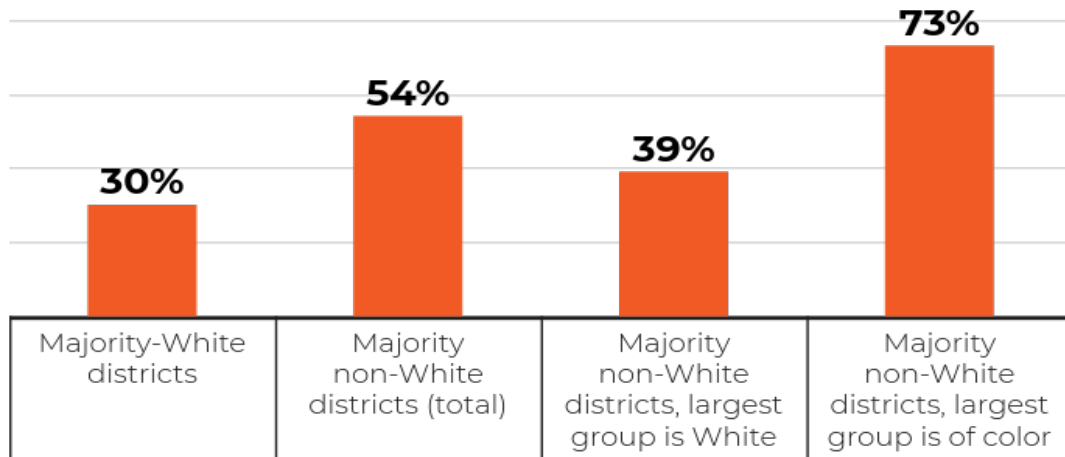+Sample size is too small to generalize findings to broader population

Black and Hispanic/Latino candidates grew their vote totals the most between rounds; AAPI candidates also beat the average. These candidates' larger increases suggest that they build consensus between rounds by appealing to other candidates' supporters and, by proxy, multiple constituencies and communities. In other words, RCV enables candidates of color to consolidate support and increase their communities' political power; on average, they earn a greater share of votes in RCV elections than in choose-one elections.

SPOTLIGHT ON BLACK CANDIDATES IN RCV ELECTIONS

Black candidates' ability to achieve and maintain political power, particularly as it relates to majority rule, has been a key discussion when considering implementing RCV. Some leading political voices have expressed concern that the majority rule principle, which suggests that every candidate for a single office should win with more than 50% of the vote, has resulted in elections that galvanize votes around White candidates who would have otherwise split the vote and prevent Black candidates from being elected. These concerns are primarily raised in discussion of runoff elections but have been extended to the ranked choice voting debate as well.

To date, 226 Black candidates have run in RCV races; together, they represent 16% of all RCV candidates, the second-largest group of candidates by race or ethnicity. About four in five (79%) Black candidates ran in districts where voters of color collectively outnumbered White voters, whereas only 36% of White candidates did. Overall, Black candidates won 23% of the contests they entered and 48% of contests with at least one Black candidate resulted in a Black winner. However, Black candidates' win rate varies by district composition. Figure 6 shows they had the greatest success in districts with more voters of color than White voters and whose largest group was a community of color.
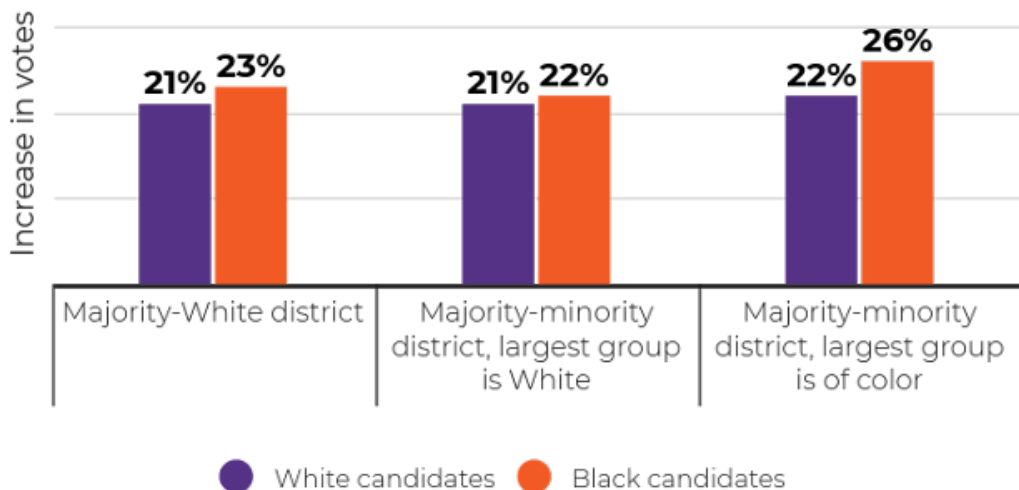
Figure 6: Likelihood of an Election Resulting in a Black Winner, by District Composition

	30%	54%	39%	73%
	Majority-White districts	Majority non-White districts (total)	Majority non-White districts, largest group is White	Majority non-White districts, largest group is of color

Sample sizes for bars, from left to right, are 27, 81, 44, and 77 candidates

Most RCV elections in majority-non-White districts (58%) go to multiple rounds, while only 47% of elections in majority-White districts do. Districts where voters of color outnumber White voters also have more diverse voters, as measured by the number of racial or ethnic groups that make up at least 10% of the district. Elections in these diverse districts were less likely to result in an outright majority winner in the first round. This explains the larger vote increases among Black candidates, 79% of whom ran in diverse districts with a majority of voters of color, and reflects Black candidates' ability to build power across varied constituencies.

Figure 7: Increase in Vote Total for Black and White Candidates by District Composition

Increase in votes

	Majority-White district	Majority-minority district, largest group is White	Majority-minority district, largest group is of color
White candidates	21%	21%	22%
Black candidates	23%	22%	26%

● White candidates   ● Black candidates

Sample sizes for bars, from left to right, are 525, 47, 213, 85, 83, and 94 candidates

CASE STUDY: BUILDING COMMUNITY POWER IN NEW YORK CITY

New York City voters overwhelmingly approved an RCV ballot measure in 2019 with particularly strong support from Black and Hispanic/Latino voters, and the city held its first RCV elections in the spring of 2021. This case study examines an open-seat race for the 31st district City Council seat in Queens, one of the city's five boroughs. Nine candidates sought the office, and no clear winner emerged from first choices alone, but first-round leader Selvena Brooks-Powers went on to win a strong majority after candidate eliminations.

Brooks-Powers began with a narrow lead of 38% of voters' first choices, only three points ahead of her nearest competitor, Pesach Osina, who had garnered 34% of first choices. As trailing candidates were eliminated and their ballots were transferred, Brooks-Powers increased her vote total by 36%, while Osina's vote total increased by only 7%.

Not only was Brooks-Powers the first-round leader, but she also demonstrated a strong breadth of support across the district by the final round. Her largest gain occurred in the final round when Manny Silva was eliminated. Silva voters' ballots transferred to Brooks-Powers at a rate four times higher than they did to Osina, propelling Brooks-Powers to a 59% – 41% win in the final round.

Figure 8: Round-by-Round Results from New York City's 31st Council District, 2021

Candidate	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5	Round 6	Round 7	Round 8	Round 9
Selvena Brooks-Powers	38%	39%	39%	39%	40%	41%	44%	48%	59%
Pesach Osina	34%	34%	34%	34%	34%	35%	35%	37%	41%
Manny Silva	10%	10%	10%	10%	11%	12%	13%	15%	
LaToya Benjamin	5%	5%	5%	6%	6%	7%	8%		
Sherwyn James	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%			
Shawn Rux	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%				
Nancy Martinez	2%	2%	2%	2%					
Latanya Collins	1%	1%	2%						
Nicole Lee	1%	1%							
Write-in candidates	0.3%								

This election, held in a predominantly Black district, attracted seven Black candidates; two others—Osina and Nancy Martinez—are Orthodox Jewish and Latina, respectively. New York City's prior voting method could have led to vote-splitting among the Black candidates because they appealed to a similar base of support, and could have caused a candidate of a different race to win, denying political representation to the community. Thanks to RCV, candidates were free to run without fear that their presence would harm their community by dividing its support. In the end, Brooks-Powers took office with a clear majority mandate and the knowledge that she has the full support of her community.

"Just because someone had a different number one, that's okay," Brooks-Powers said. "Because it's about the community and coming together."

CASE STUDY: A COME-FROM-BEHIND WIN IN SAN FRANCISCO

A diverse field of seven candidates in the race for San Francisco's 7th district Board of Supervisors led to a unique outcome: a winner who began in third place, a come-from-behind victory that has only occurred once before in U.S. RCV history. In this case study, we examine how RCV led to the election of a consensus candidate that other voting methods would have rejected.

On Election Day, Myrna Melgar gradually built support over a series of rounds, regularly increasing her vote total by more than that of her opponents. In the first round, she earned 20% of first-choice preferences, narrowly trailing Joel Engardio (24%) and Vilaska Nguyen (21%). Melgar moved into second place in the fourth round after capturing the most transfer votes from supporters of Emily Murase. Two rounds later, Nguyen was eliminated, and nearly two-thirds of her transfer ballots went to Melgar. She finally won with 53% of active votes.

Figure 9: Round-by-Round Results From San Francisco's 7th District, 2020

Candidate	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5	Round 6
Myrna Melgar	20%	20%	28%	28%	32%	53%
Joel Engardio	24%	24%	27%	30%	39%	47%
Vilaska Nguyen	21%	21%	22%	26%	30%	
Stephen Martin-Pinto	12%	12%	14%	16%		
Emily Murase	13%	13%	14%			
Ben Matranga	9%	9%				
Kenneth Piper	2%					

As discussed later in this paper, Hispanic/Latino voters and Black voters in the 7th district ranked more candidates than White voters. This high level of ranking-usage by voters of color likely helped Melgar build enough support to win—and become the first Latina elected to the Board of Supervisors without first being appointed.

Melgar is what is known as a "Condorcet Winner," meaning she was preferred to every other candidate in a hypothetical head-to-head matchup. When compared to any other candidate in the race, Melgar was ranked higher by most voters who expressed a preference between the two. This is a case in which RCV identified the Condorcet Winner and elected a winner with broad community support, when neither a plurality election nor a two-round runoff would have done so.

VOTER DEMOGRAPHICS EXPLAIN VOTER BEHAVIOR

The two case studies below focus on RCV elections in 2020 to identify how different racial and ethnic voters interact with RCV ballots.

Because we do not know which voters cast which ballots, we used statistical analysis to draw conclusions about the behavior of different groups; specifically, we compared precinct demographics to the types of ballots cast in each precinct.

This section considers the cities that held citywide RCV elections or RCV elections in at least half of their districts and for which we have precinct-level ballot data. This leaves us with elections in four cities to consider: the mayoral election in Berkeley, CA; the at-large City Council election in Oakland, CA; the at-large City Council election in Eastpointe, MI; and an aggregate of the five district-level Board of Supervisors elections in San Francisco that included three or more candidates.

Ballot data were provided by election administrators in the form of "cast vote records," a method in which devices, like ballot scanners, produce election results. Demographic data is based on citizen voting age population (CVAP) data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau.

CASE STUDY: ENGAGING WITH THE RANKED BALLOT IN 2020

Voters in RCV races may rank as many as they choose. In practice, voters typically express multiple preferences when given the option. In all U.S. RCV races, a median of 68% of voters used multiple rankings,[5] indicating an understanding and enthusiasm for the ranked ballot among voters in general. However, ranking usage varied, depending on voter demographics and other factors. Figure 10 shows how precincts' racial and ethnic demographics relate to the number of candidates ranked on precinct ballots.

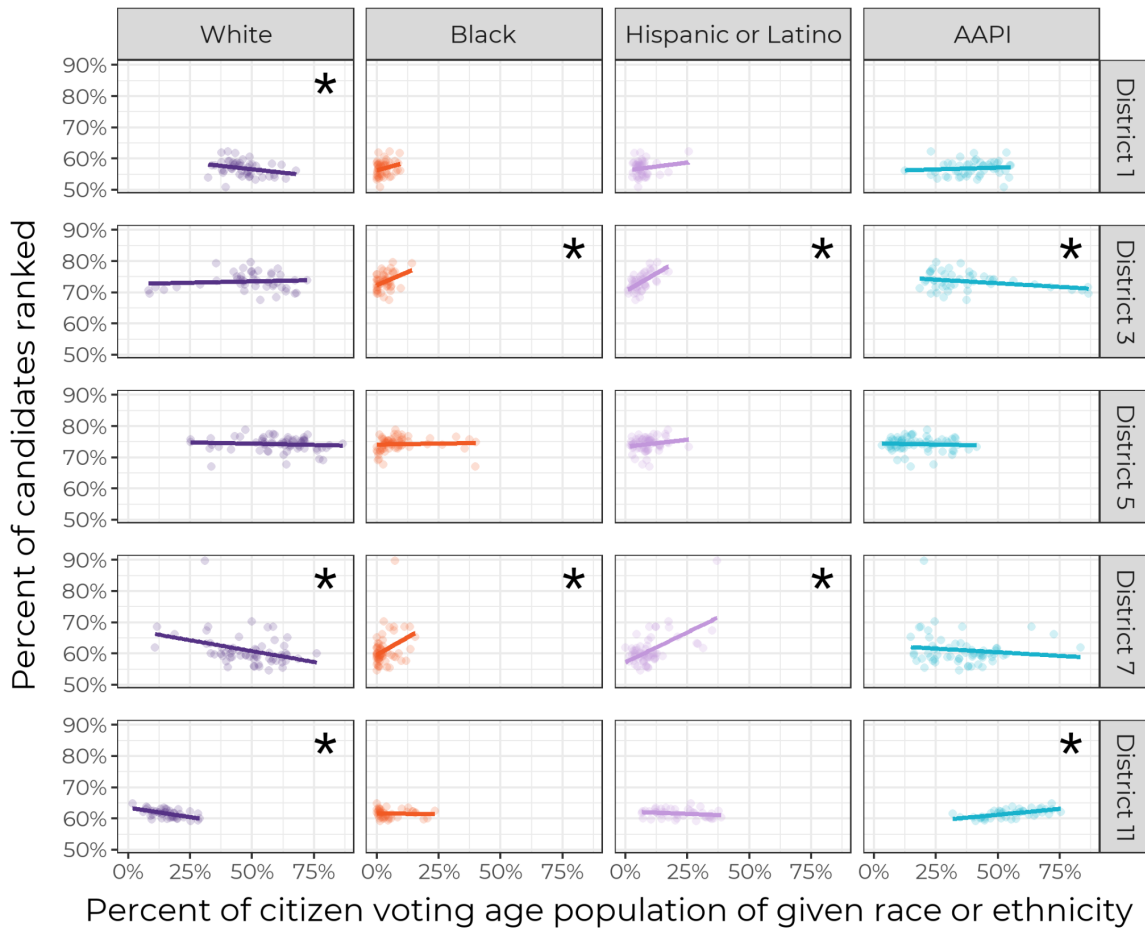*Figure 10: Percent of Candidates Ranked by Precinct Demographics*
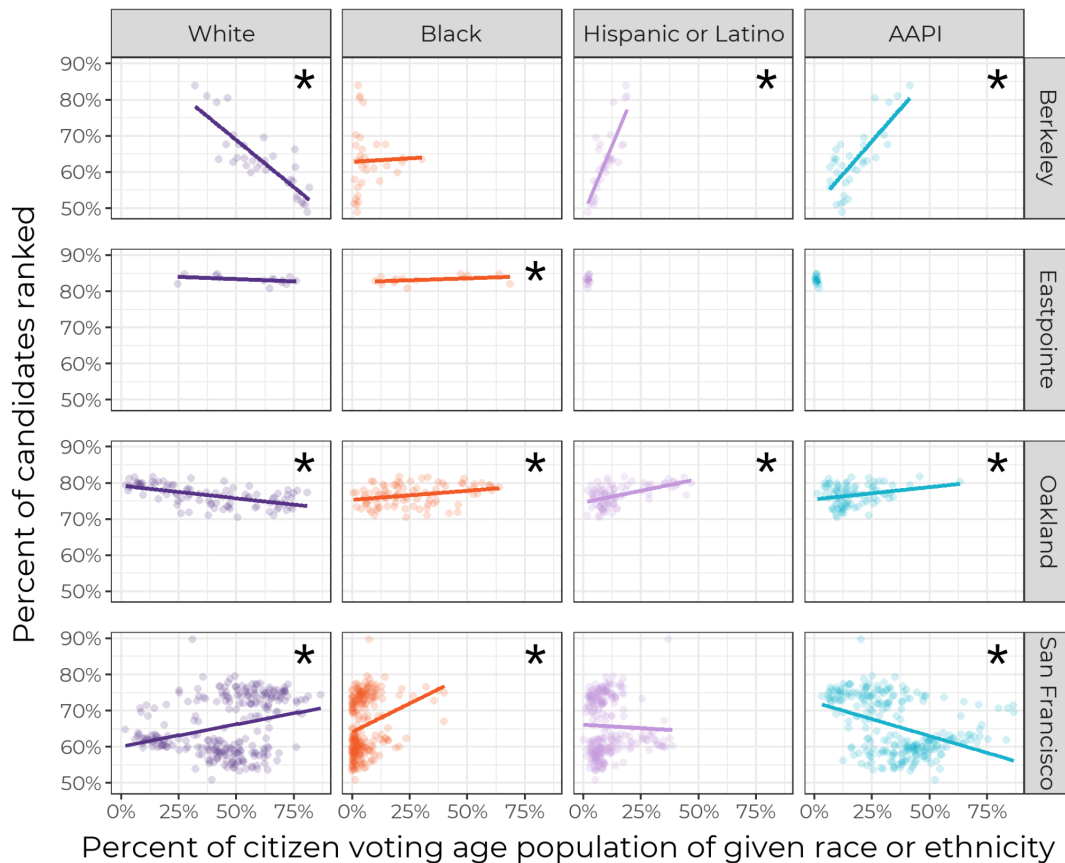
*Asterisks indicate statistical significance at p < .05, which means the pattern likely applies to the broader population

The points in the figure above represent the relationship between a precinct's demographics and the voter behavior in that precinct. The lines are linear regressions, or the best fit of the data points to a straight line. Dark purple lines represent the behavior of White voters, where downward-sloping lines indicate a negative relationship, meaning that voters in precincts with a *higher* share of White residents tend to rank *fewer* candidates on their ballots.

Conversely, other racial and ethnic groups exhibit a positive relationship. Ballots from precincts with more Black voters (shown in orange), for example, rank *more* candidates, as indicated by the upward-sloping lines. Note that only relationships indicated with an asterisk are considered statistically significant and are therefore generalizable to the broader population. We recognize that the findings shown above are complicated by the fact that we're comparing across more than two racial or ethnic groups, but we believe this is still a useful measurement. Additionally, we drilled further down into the San Francisco results. Above, Figure 10 depicts an aggregate of the five Board of Supervisors districts that held elections with at least three candidates. Figure 11, meanwhile, examines district-by-district behavior in each of those elections.

5. FairVote. Ballot Use with RCV. Retrieved April 2021.

Figure 11: Percent of Candidates Ranked in San Francisco District Elections

*Asterisks indicate statistical significance at p < .05, which means the pattern likely applies to the broader population

The results varied across districts, likely because of the unique dynamics of each election. AAPI voters, for example, behaved differently in districts 1 and 3 (as noted in light blue above). That may be because four AAPI candidates ran in District 1, including two Chinese American candidates who cross-endorsed each other using the race-based appeal, "We both want to fight for our Chinese American community." That may have caused AAPI voters in District 1 to rank more candidates than they did in District 3, where no AAPI candidates were on the ballot and where there is a significant downward trend in precincts with larger AAPI populations.

Ultimately, the charts above show that ranking behavior by racial and ethnic groups depends on the context of each election; overall, though, voters of color are likely to use more rankings than White voters, as indicated by the positive relationships above.

Next, we explored this data using ecological inference, a method typically used in the voting rights context to determine whether racial and ethnic groups behave differently from one another. This method attempts to extrapolate individual behavior from aggregate data, and we used it here because it allows us to compare individual-level estimates for each racial and ethnic group. With this method, we examined the likelihood that voters would rank at least half of the candidates on their ballots.

Figure 12: Ecological Inference Estimates for Voters Ranking at Least Half of Candidates
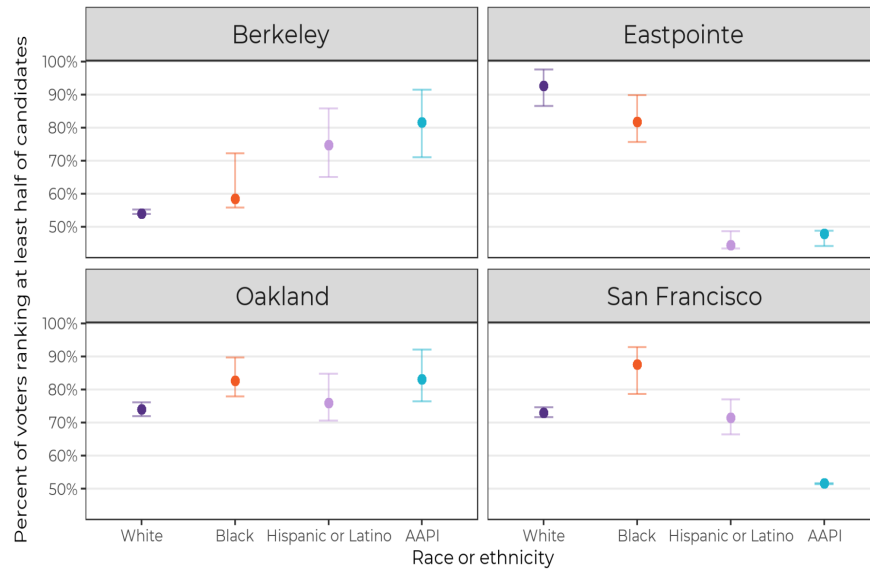
The points represent our best estimates for the percentage of voters of each racial and ethnic group that ranked at least half of the candidates. The vertical bars represent 95% credible intervals, (*i.e.*, 95% of likely values fell within that range). Based on this method, use of rankings is context-dependent, though White voters rarely, if ever, make the most use of the ranked ballot.

Both methods above indicate that voters of color are likely to use more rankings on their ballots than White voters, demonstrating a strong understanding of how to use a ranked ballot and a willingness to engage with the RCV process. This behavior is a key factor in improved representation in RCV elections.

CASE STUDY: BALLOT ERROR RATE IN 2020

Ballot error rates help measure how well voters understand voting methods and whether they are able to cast ballots that count for their intended candidates.

For this case study, we examined "first-round overvotes," which occur when ballots indicate more multiple candidates as first choices. (The rate of overvotes in RCV elections is the most comparable metric to the rate of overvotes in single-choice elections). In most RCV jurisdictions, including all cities in this case study, ballots with first-round overvotes were immediately disqualified because voters' intent cannot be determined.

Previous research has found differing rates of ballot error among racial and ethnic groups. Political scientists Francis Neely and James McDaniel found[6] in 2015 that while overvotes appear disproportionately in precincts with more Black residents, the pattern of overvoting by race is similar to the pattern of overvoting in non-RCV elections. On the other hand, a study conducted by political scientist Jason Maloy in 2020[7] found the opposite: that ranked ballots produce more valid votes than choose-one ballots and are associated with smaller discrepancies in error-proneness by race and ethnicity.

This case study examines the same RCV elections studied in our multiple-rankings analysis to determine the error-proneness of voters in 2020 elections. Figure 13 shows that the pattern of first-round overvotes by race or ethnicity varies depending on context, with patterns of overvoting by race and ethnicity appearing in some but not all cities.

6. Neely, F., & McDaniel, J. (2015). Overvoting and the Equality of Voice under Instant-Runoff Voting in San Francisco. California Journal of Politics and Policy, 7(4).
7. Maloy, J. (2020). Voting Error Across Multiple Ballot Types: Results from Super Tuesday (2020) Experiments in Four American States. SSRN.

Figure 13: Rate of First-Round Overvotes by Precinct Demographics
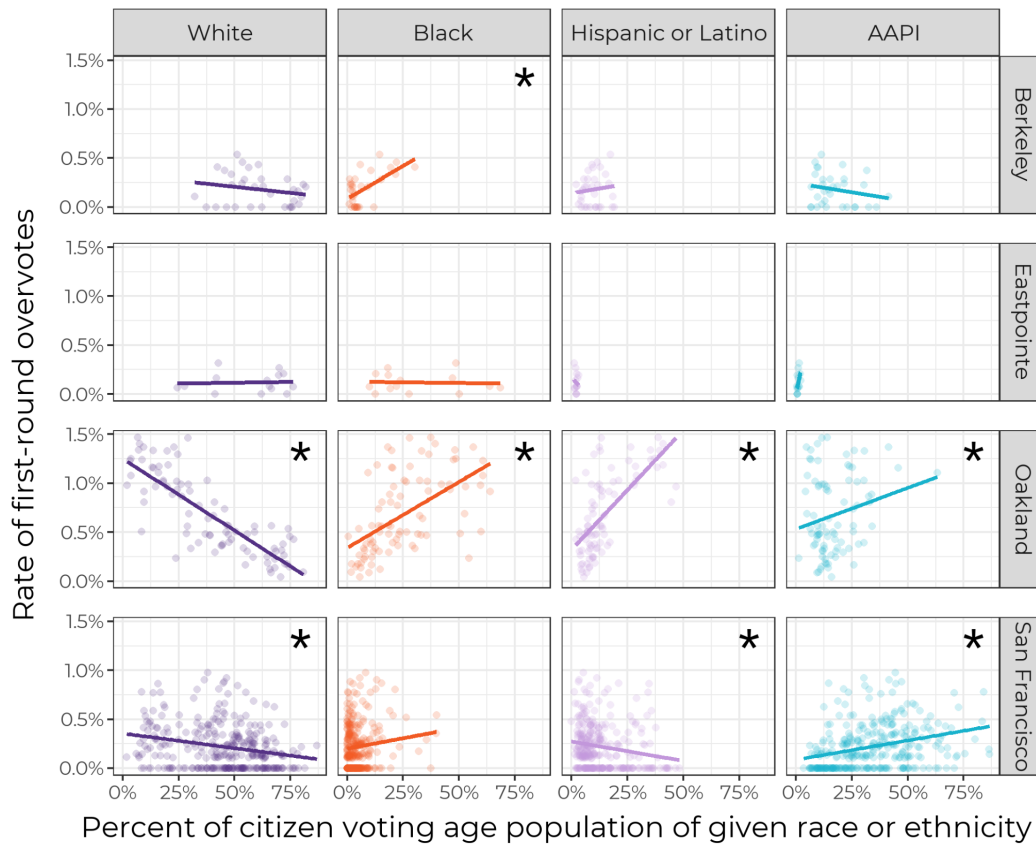
* *Asterisks indicate statistical significance at p < .05, which means the pattern likely applies to the broader population.

Downward-sloping lines are desirable here because they represent racial and ethnic groups whose overvote rates appear to decrease as their share of the population increases. White voters (indicated in purple) made fewer overvotes than members of other racial or ethnic groups in Oakland and San Francisco but not in Eastpointe or in Berkeley.

In Eastpointe, which has a much larger share of Black voters than other cities in this analysis, Black and White voters were roughly equally error-prone; the populations of other racial and ethnic groups in the city, meanwhile, are too small to make meaningful comparisons.

Next, we used ecological inference to estimate how many voters in each racial and ethnic group made first-round overvotes. Figure 14 estimates the likelihood of first-round overvotes by racial and ethnic group.

Figure 14: Ecological Inference Estimates for First-Round Overvotes
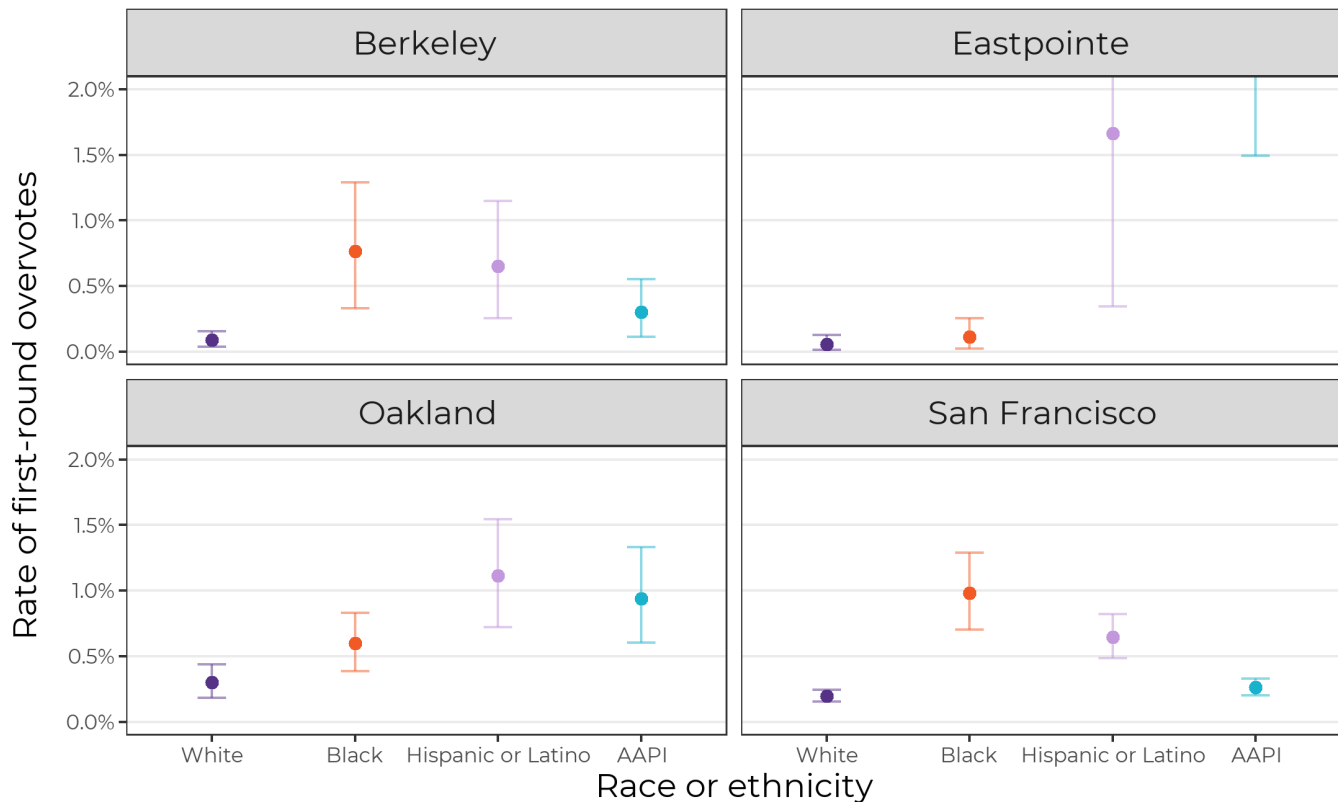
Again, error rate depended on context. There appears to be no statistically significant difference between the error rates of White and Black voters in Eastpointe and Oakland, but there are differences in Berkeley and San Francisco although all error rates are small in absolute terms.

Note: Please treat Eastpointe estimates for AAPI and Hispanic/Latino voters with extreme caution. The confidence intervals extend beyond the borders of the chart because these populations are too small to make a precise estimate.

CONCLUSION

Americans have embraced ranked choice voting on an exponential scale, with massive potential for even more Americans ranking their ballots next year. The number of voters with access to ranked choice voting ballots has increased seven times over since 2010. Given more than 60 local bills for ranked choice voting across at least 29 states, millions more voters may have access to ranked choice voting ballots in 2022.

Further, more candidates of color are empowered to run for office than ever before. A record number of Black women—-130—ran for congressional office in 2020.[8] The Associated Press made note in 2020 that "the Deep South is fielding more Black candidates than it has since Reconstruction."[9] This is an encouraging trend; more candidates of color should feel empowered to run for office. However, the benefits of a competitive field with multiple candidates of color—-a stronger marketplace for debate, more choices for voters—could also yield the downsides of a crowded field. Standard plurality elections threaten to split the vote among multiple candidates.

If more candidates of color are running for office, and more communities are embracing ranked choice voting, this report's findings indicate a national embrace of the reform is well-timed; it will even the playing field for candidates facing competitive elections, and it will empower voters to make determinations based on their values and ideals, rather than calculate electability, in the voting booth.

Additional research will be vital to ensure the benefits of ranked choice voting are consistently favorable to communities of color across different geographic regions and over time, especially as ranked choice voting is implemented in more cities with diverse constituencies and as it evolves from a novel reform to standard practice.

8. Black Women Candidates in 2020. (2020, August 5). Rutgers Eagleton Institute of Politics.
9. Kinnard, M. (2020, October 29). In South, most Black Senate candidates since Reconstruction. AP News.

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