

Executive Summary

RANKED CHOICE VOTING ELECTIONS BENEFIT CANDIDATES AND VOTERS OF COLOR

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).