

April 15, 2024

Dear Chair Dziedzic and members of the Committee on State and Local Government and Veterans,

I am writing to express my support for SF 3868. The organization I direct, [RepresentWomen](#), tracks outcomes for women in jurisdictions with ranked choice voting as part of our mission to support solutions to address the barriers women face in politics.

Our research finds that women have better opportunities to run in and win RCV elections. More women can run for office in RCV elections because, without fear of splitting the vote, there is greater support for women candidates to run. Additionally, campaigns tend to be more civil and more issue-focused, which appeals to women candidates and provides greater incentive for them to run. We also find that when voters have the ability to express their true preferences rather than vote strategically, more women win as a result.

Women hold 53% of city council seats in jurisdictions with ranked choice voting and 12 out of the 32 mayoral seats elected with RCV. Janet Mills, governor of Maine, won the primary with RCV, Senator Lisa Murkowski and Representative Mary Peltola were elected using RCV in Alaska, and, of course, St. Paul elected a historic all-women city council this year using RCV.

Here are a few of our resources that may be of interest:

- a [memo](#) on ranked choice voting & women's representation
- a [dashboard](#) on ranked choice voting stats
- a [toolkit](#) with additional RCV materials

We also released a report in February 2024, [Breaking Barriers for Black Women Candidates](#), that discusses how ranked choice voting creates more opportunities for Black women to run and win.

Please support SF 3868 to authorize jurisdictions to adopt ranked choice voting for local offices and establish procedures for the adoption, implementation, and use of ranked choice voting for local jurisdictions.

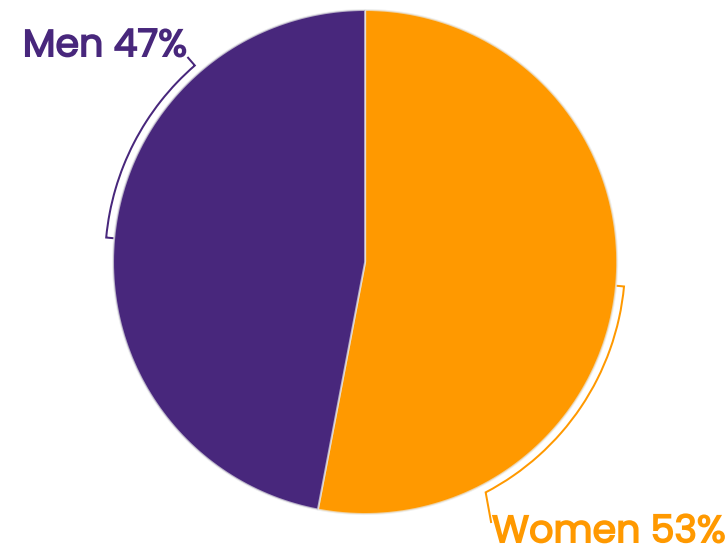
Many thanks,



Cynthia Richie Terrell
Executive Director, RepresentWomen

Local Level Data

Women make up 53% of seats on city councils in RCV cities



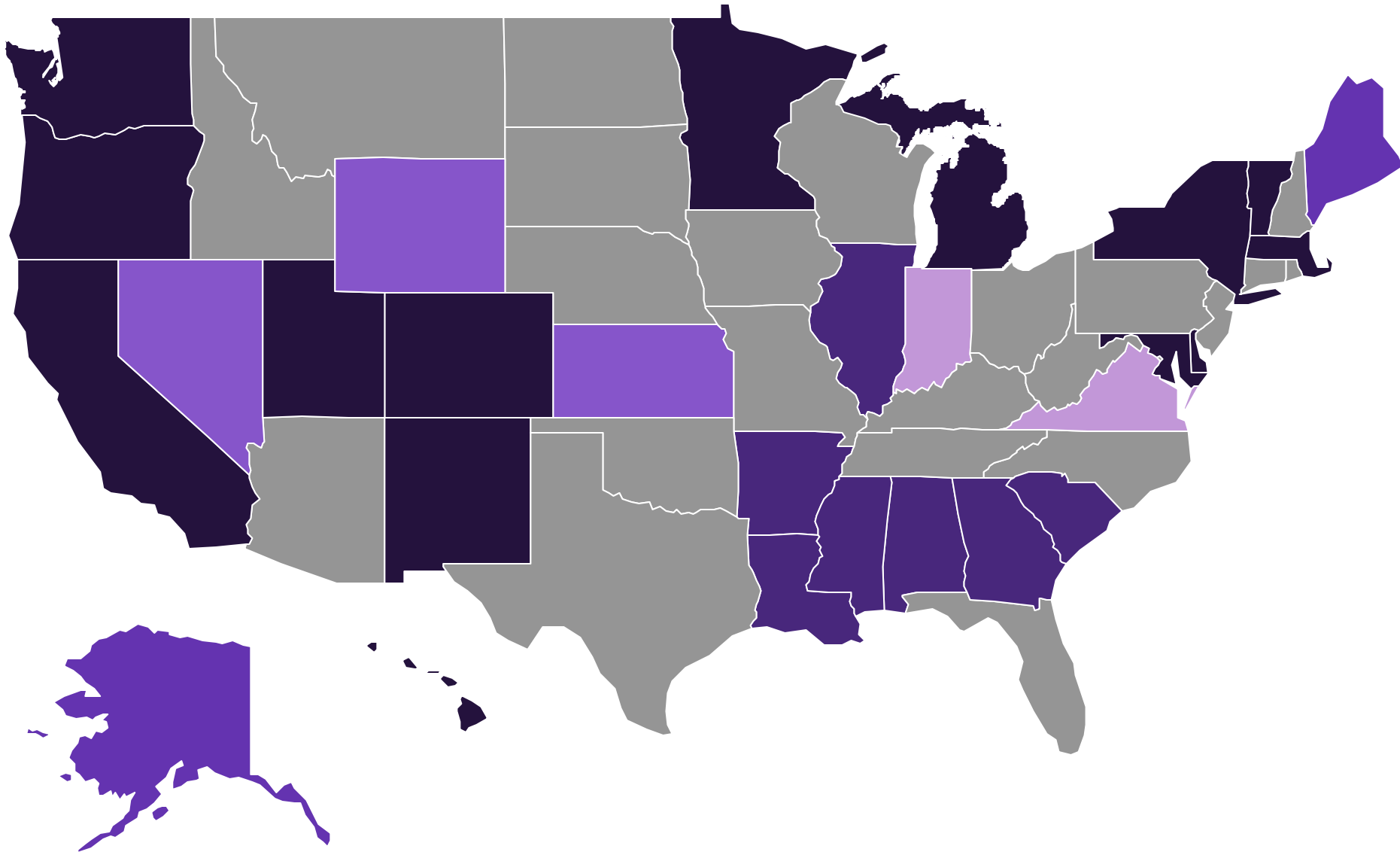
Women represent 12 of the 32 sitting mayors elected in RCV cities



● Women ● Men

Updated January 2024

Where Ranked Choice Voting is Used/Enacted in the U.S

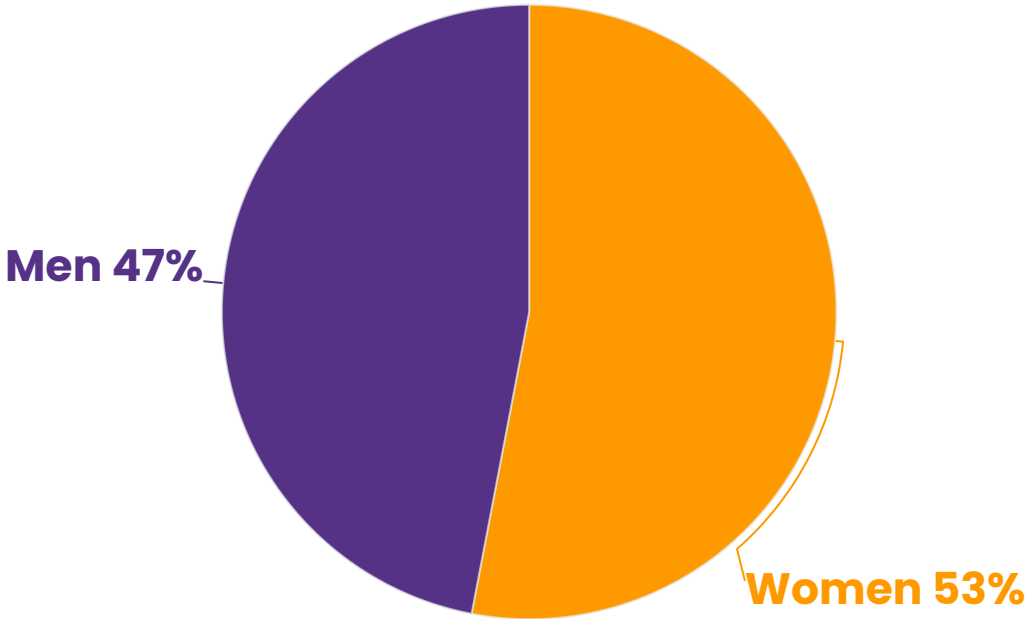


- Used For Military & Overseas Voting
- Used For Statewide & Federal Elections
- Not in Use
- Used For Local Elections
- Used for Party Elections
- Used For 2020 Presidential Primaries

Data true as of December 2023, Numbers refer to officeholders as of January 2024

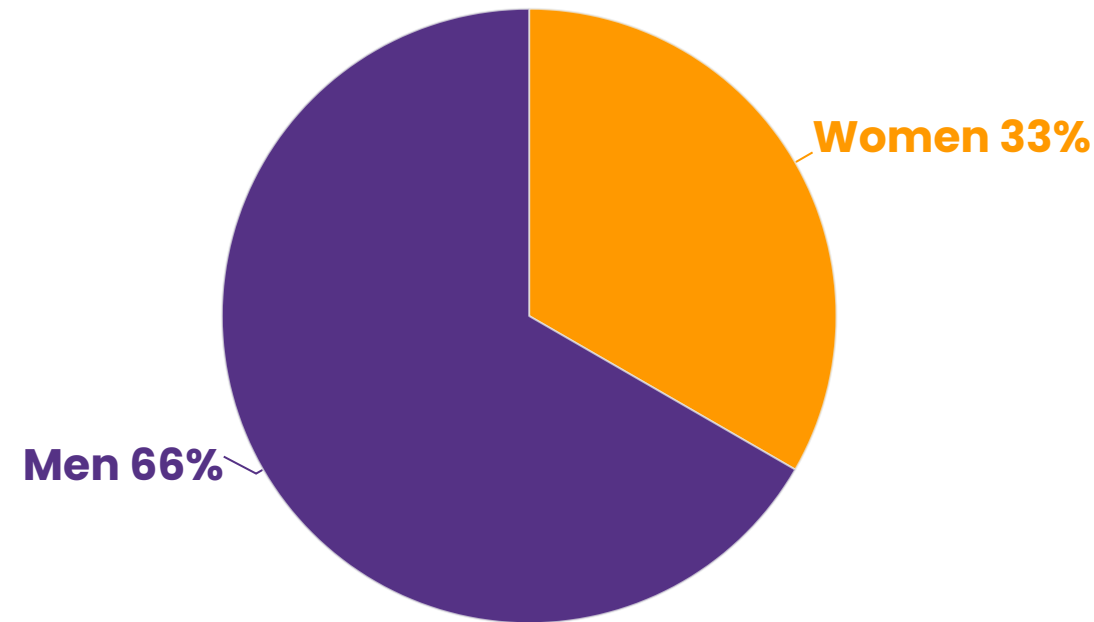
Ranked Choice Voting – City Councils

RCV Elected City Councils



Updated January 2024

City Councils of 100 Largest Cities



Updated January 2023

As of January 2024, 41 cities have used ranked choice elections to elect their sitting city councils. Of the seats, 53% are filled by women while women hold just 33% of all city council seats in the 100 largest cities.

*Note, 45 cities have RCV in place but not all have had 3+ candidate races.

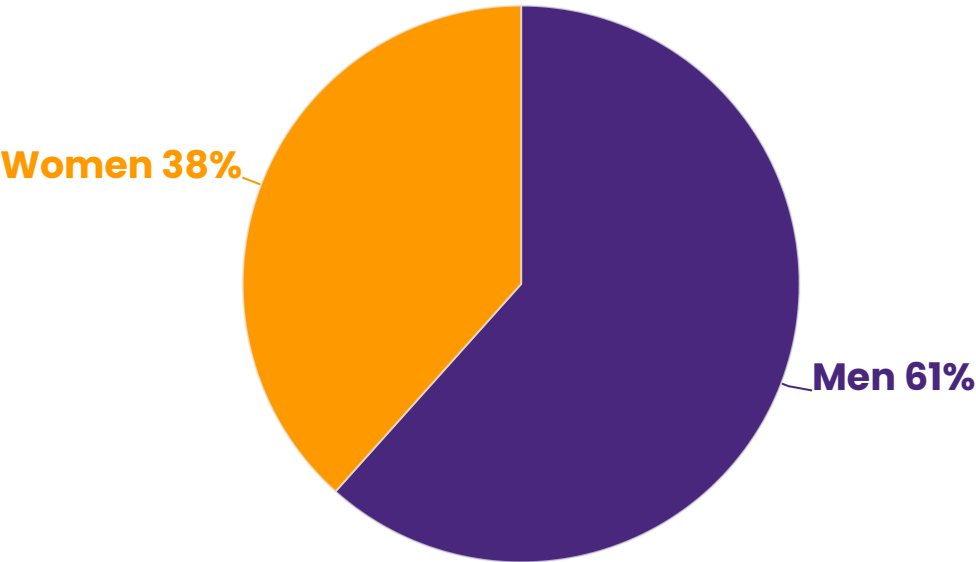
Below is a chart that lists all city councils elected by ranked choice voting.

City	State	% Women	Election Type	Last RCV Election
Albany	CA	25%	General	2022
Berkeley	CA	38%	General	2022
Oakland	CA	63%	General	2022
San Francisco	CA	36%	General	2022
San Leandro	CA	33%	General	2022
Arden	DE	71%	General	2023
Cambridge	MA	56%	General	2023
Easthampton	MA	22%	General	2023
Takoma Park	MD	50%	General	2022
Portland	ME	75%	General	2023
Eastpointe	MI	25%	General	2021
Bloomington	MN	33%	General	2023
Minneapolis	MN	62%	General	2023
Minnetonka	MN	100%	General	2023
St. Louis Park	MN	67%	Primary	2023
St. Paul	MN	100%	General	2023
Las Cruces	NM	83%	General	2023
Santa Fe	NM	75%	General	2023
New York City	NY	61%	General	2023
Corvallis	OR	67%	General	2022
Bluffdale	UT	40%	General	2023

Race/ethnicity breakdowns are unavailable for certain jurisdictions. For more information about race/ethnicity, please contact us : info@representwomen.org

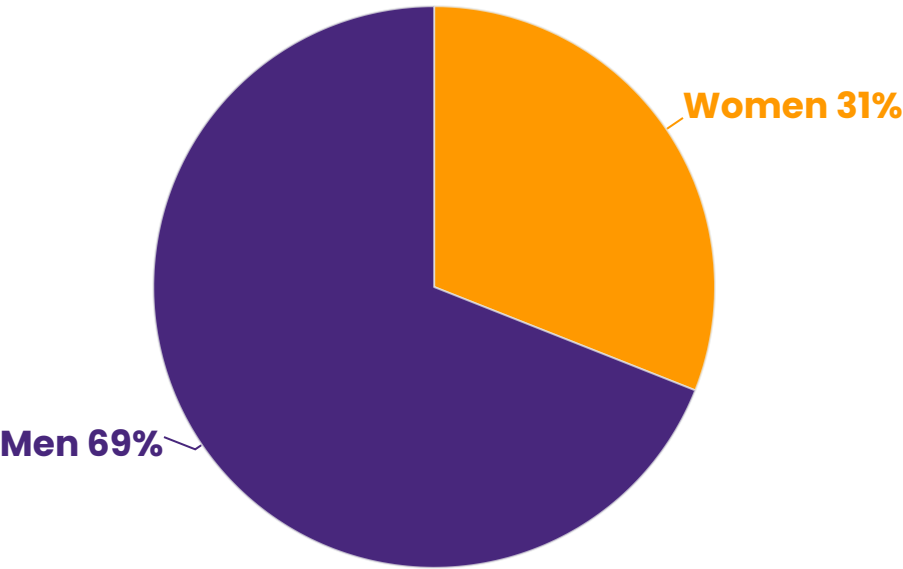
Ranked Choice Voting – Mayors

RCV Elected Mayors



Updated January 2024

Mayors of 100 Largest Cities



Updated January 2023

As of November 2023, 32 cities have used ranked choice elections to elect their sitting mayors. 38% percent of these mayors are women while only 31% of the 100 most populous cities in the U.S. have women mayors.

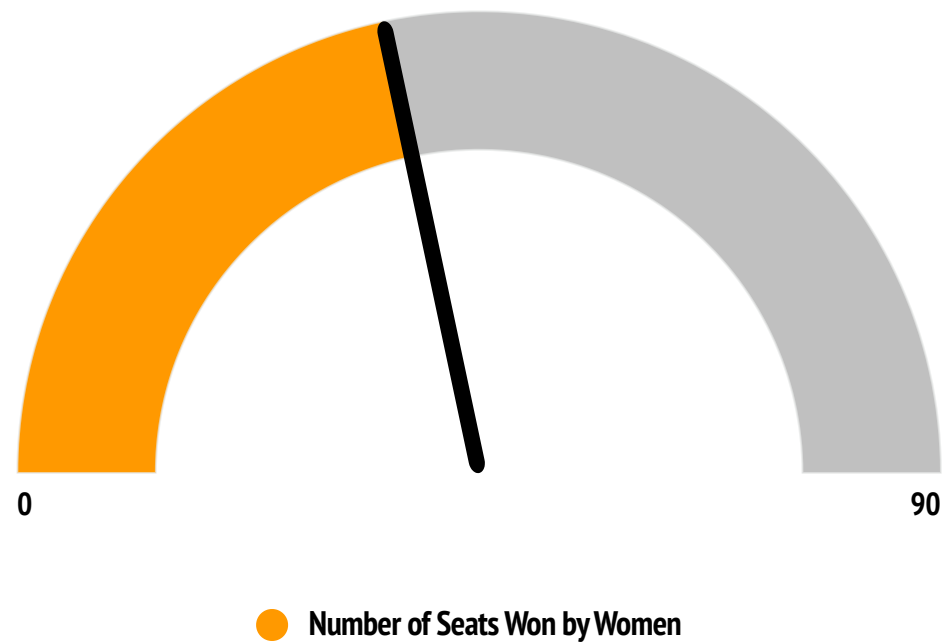
Below is a chart that lists all mayors elected by ranked choice voting as of January 2024.

Mayor	City	State	Woman Mayor?	Person of Color?	Last RCV Election
Jesse Arreguín	Berkeley	CA	No	Yes	2022
Sheng Thao	Oakland	CA	Yes	Yes	2022
London Breed	San Francisco	CA	Yes	Yes	2022
Juan Gonzalez III	San Leandro	CA	No	Yes	2022
Bill Kane	Basalt	CO	No	No	2020
Aaron Brockett	Boulder	CO	No	No	2023
Sumbul Siddiqui	Cambridge	MA	Yes	Yes	2021
Nicole LaChapelle	Easthampton	MA	Yes	No	2021
Talisha Searcy	Takoma Park	MD	Yes	Yes	2022
Mark Dion	Portland	ME	No	No	2023
Tim Busse	Bloomington	MN	No	No	2021
Jacob Frey	Minneapolis	MN	No	No	2021
Brad Wiersum	Minnetonka	MN	No	No	2021
Nadia Mohamed	St. Louis Park	MN	Yes	Yes	2023
Melvin Carter III	St. Paul	MN	No	Yes	2021
Eric Enriquez	Las Cruces	NM	No	Yes	2023
Alan Webber	Santa Fe	NM	No	No	2021
Eric Adams	New York City	NY	No	Yes	2021
Charles	Corvallis	OR	No	No	2022

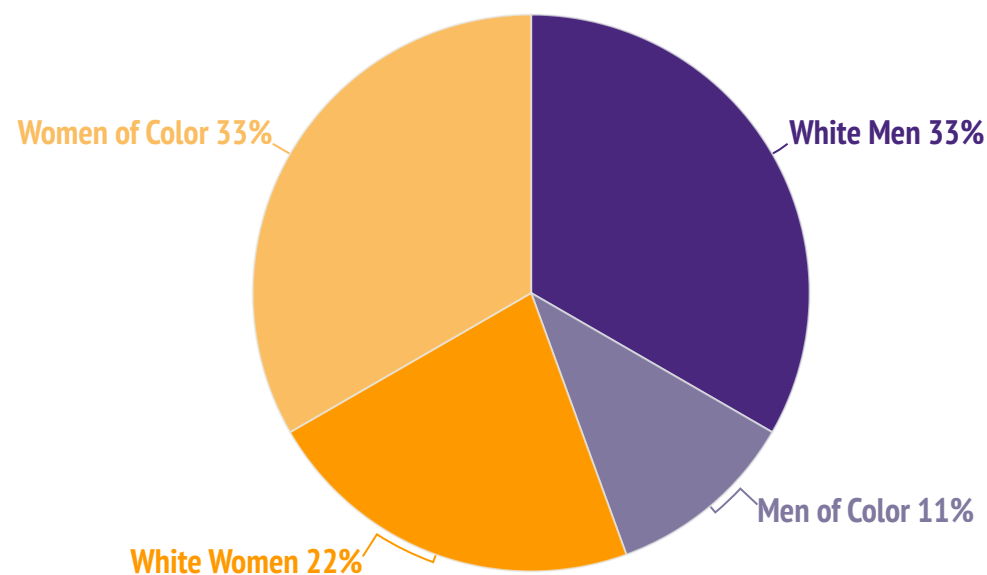
Demographic information for the mayors of the largest cities is courtesy of the Center of American Women and Politics.

2021 Case Study – Cambridge, MA

Number of Seats Won by Women
2010–2021



Gender and Race Breakdown of
2024 City Council



Data true as of January 2024

	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021
Election	Number of Candidates		Women Candidates	Percent Women	Winners	Woman
School Committee	11		4	36%	Alfred B. Fantini	No
					Patricia M. Nolan	Yes
					Alice L. Turkel	Yes
					Mervan Osborne	No
					Richard Harding Jr.	No
					Marc C. McGovern	No
					Leland Cheung	No
City Council	18		4	22%	Timothy	No

History of Ranked Choice Voting in Cambridge, MA

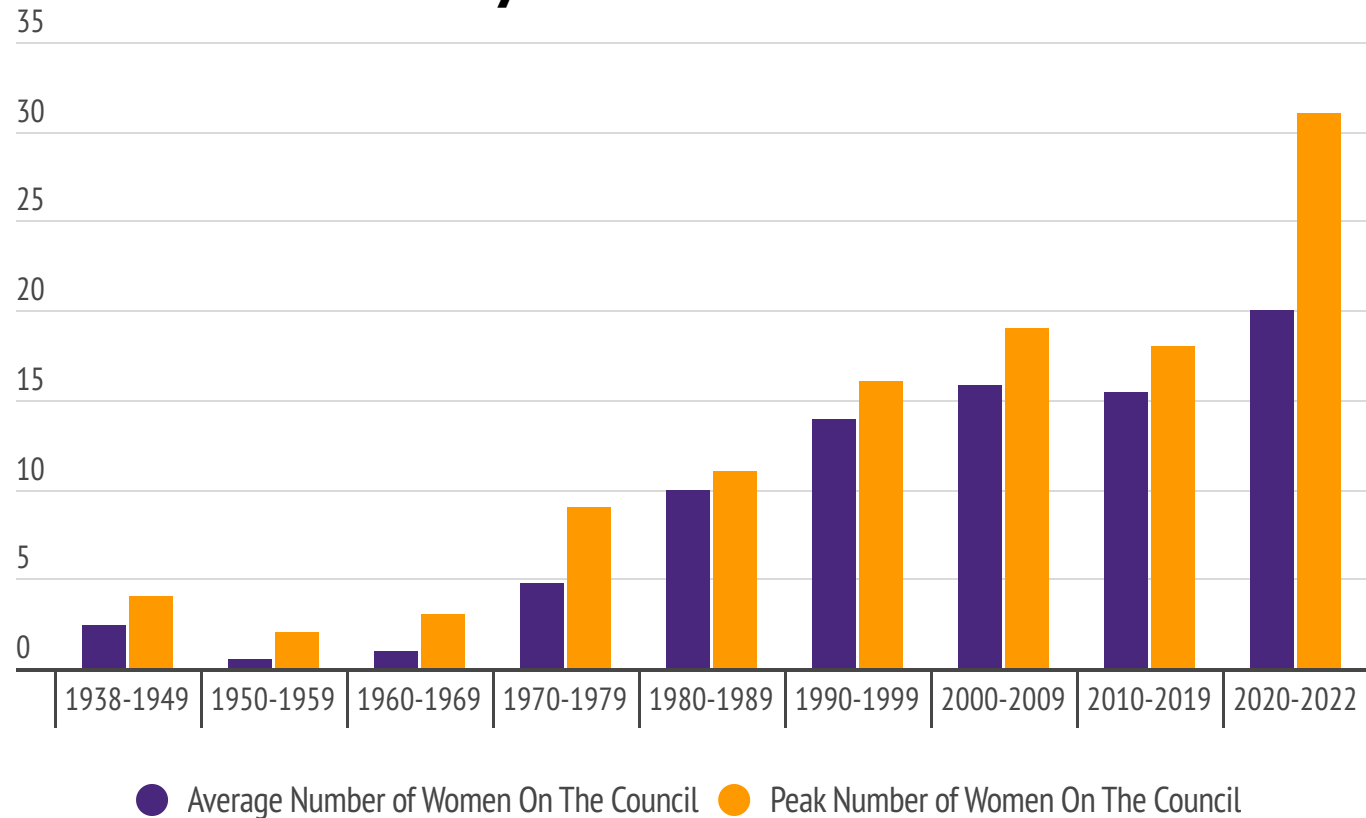
Voters in Cambridge, MA adopted RCV to elect the School Committee and City Council in 1940; and, first used RCV in the 1941 municipal elections.

Cambridge uses ranked choice voting in at-large districts, where candidates must reach a threshold of votes and additional votes are redistributed to the voter's second choice. The threshold is determined by the number of ballots cast divided by the number of seats open + 1.

From 2010–2020, women won 35% of the 74 seats up for election. Women of color won 38% of the seats won by women, and 16% of seats overall.

2021 Case Study – New York City, NY

Average and Peak Number of NYC Council Seats Held by Women Since 1939



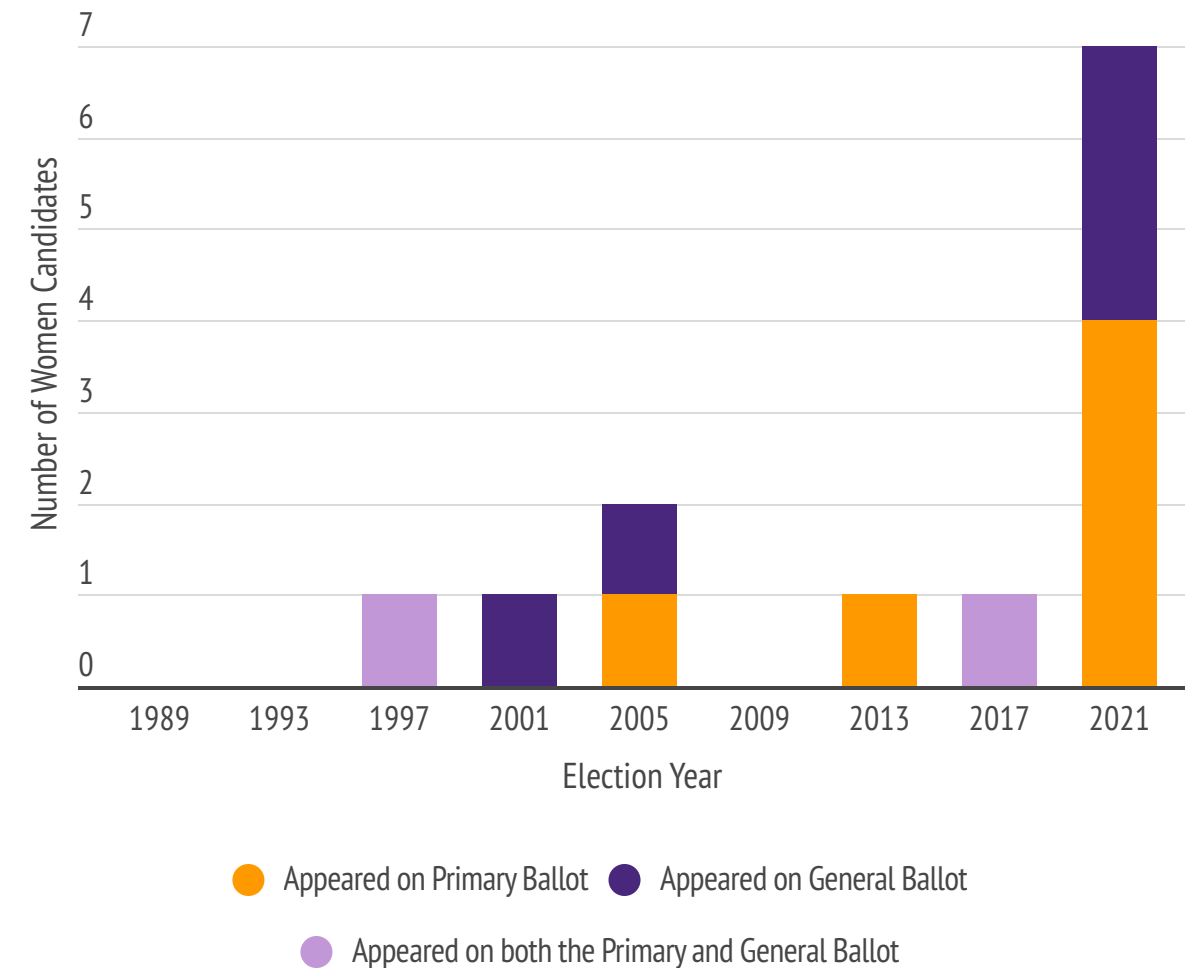
NYC Council Gender Balance as of January 2022



In 2021, history was made when 31 women were elected to the New York City Council – the first time ever the council would have a women majority. Of those women, 25 are women of color. Twenty-six of those women won ranked choice election primaries.

Data true as of December 2022

NYC Women Mayoral Candidates From 1989–2021

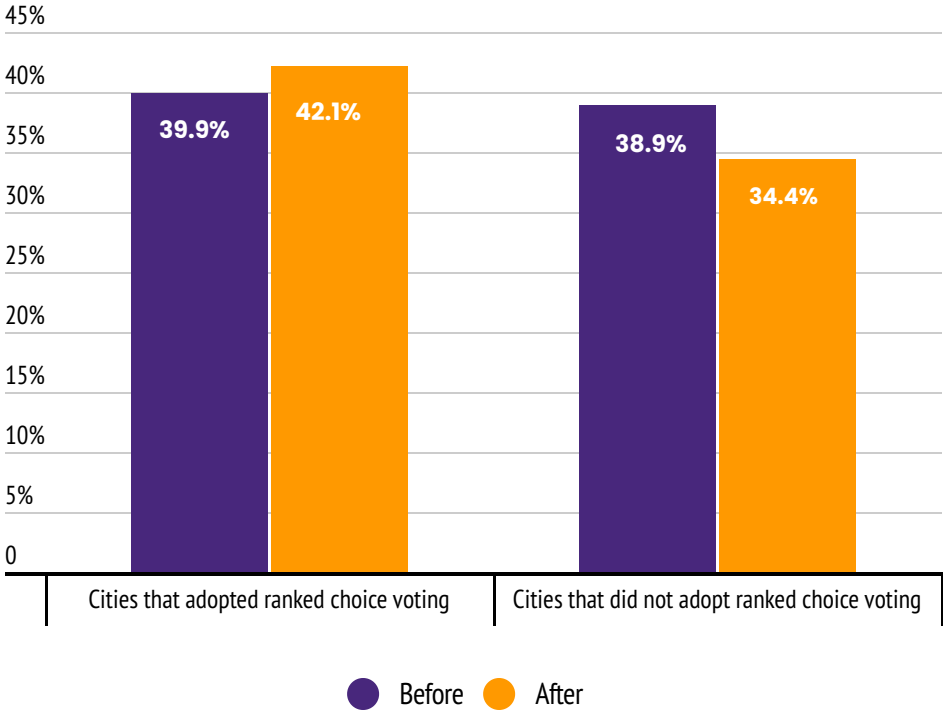


Since 1989, only 13 women have ever appeared on either a primary ballot or on the general ballot in NYC mayoral elections. Seven of those women (54%) ran in 2021. Two women – Kathryn Garcia and Maya Wiley – came within inches of winning the Democratic nomination and likely becoming the first ever woman mayor of NYC.

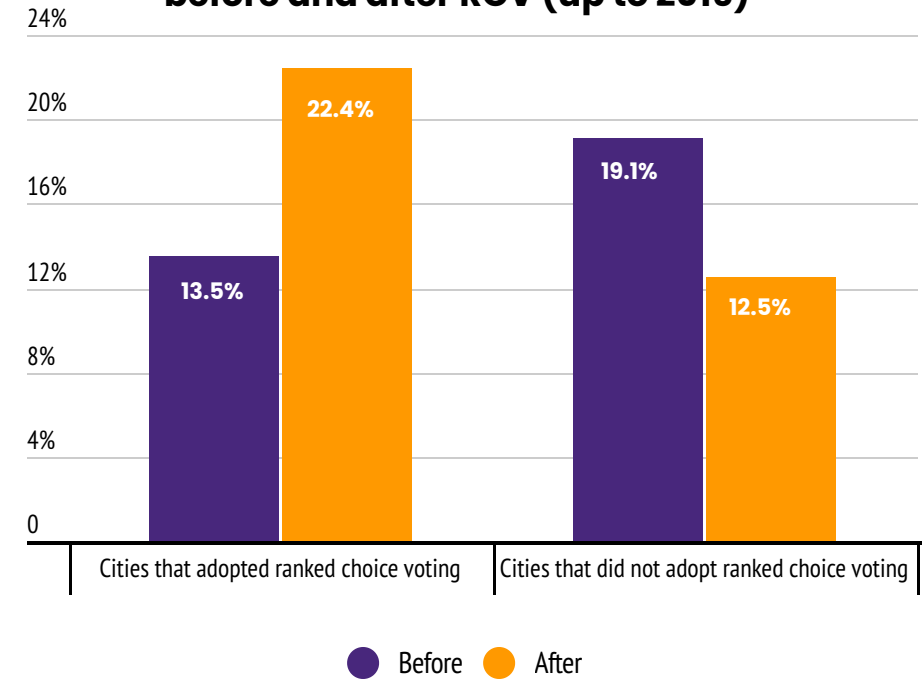
Post election, Maya Wiley published an opinion piece in *The Washington Post* titled, "[Opinion: Maya Wiley: I lost the NYC mayoral race, but women and minorities win with ranked-choice voting](#)"

2016 Case Study – Bay Area

Percentage of Women Winning Office, before and after RCV (up to 2016)



Percentage of Women of Color Winning Office, before and after RCV (up to 2016)



In 2016, RepresentWomen published a report on the use of ranked choice voting in four cities in the Bay Area – Berkeley, Oakland, San Francisco, and San Leandro. RCV was implemented in San Francisco in 2004 and 2010 for the other three cities.

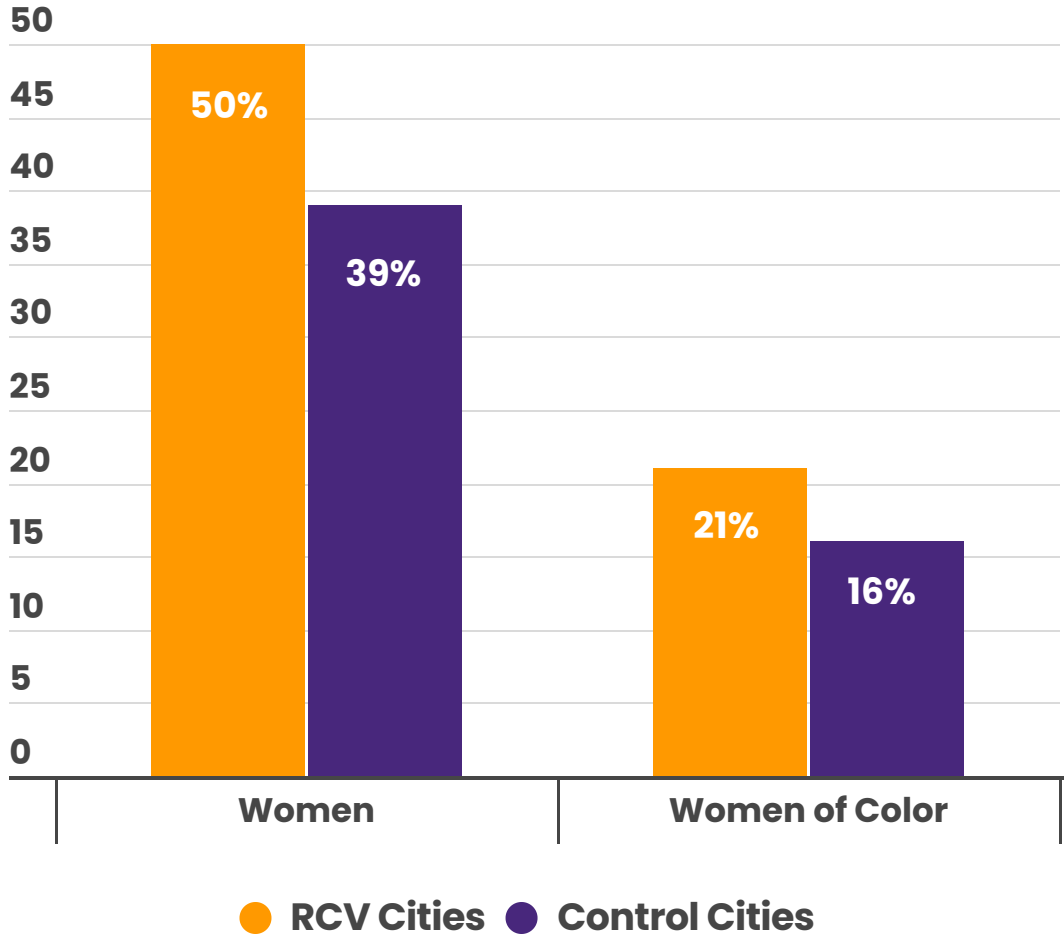
As part of the report, they tested the impact of RCV by studying the percentage of women and women of color that won in those four cities compared to seven control cities in California. The time span of the elections the report studied was from 1995–2014.

Results from that report are reflected in the graphs to the left. As a key:

"Before" references the statistics for elections in the time span before RCV was implemented in the four test cities.

"After" references the statics for elections in the time span after RCV was implemented.

Percentage of Women and Women of Color In Office as of January 2022 (RCV vs Control Cities)



As of January 2022, RCV cities still have a higher percentage of women and women of color on their city councils.

Also true as of January 2022, of the four RCV cities, 3 (75%) have women mayors. Of the seven control cities, only 2 (28.6%) have women mayors.

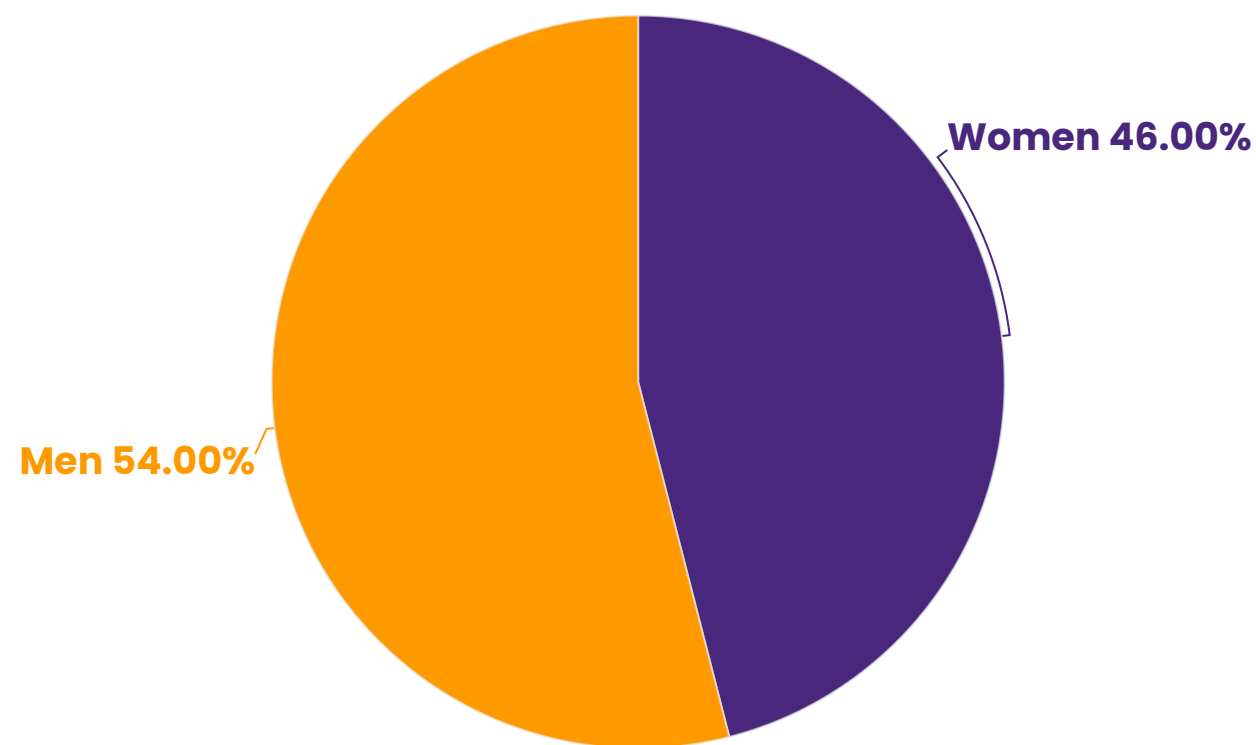
Data true as of December 2022

Case Study - Utah

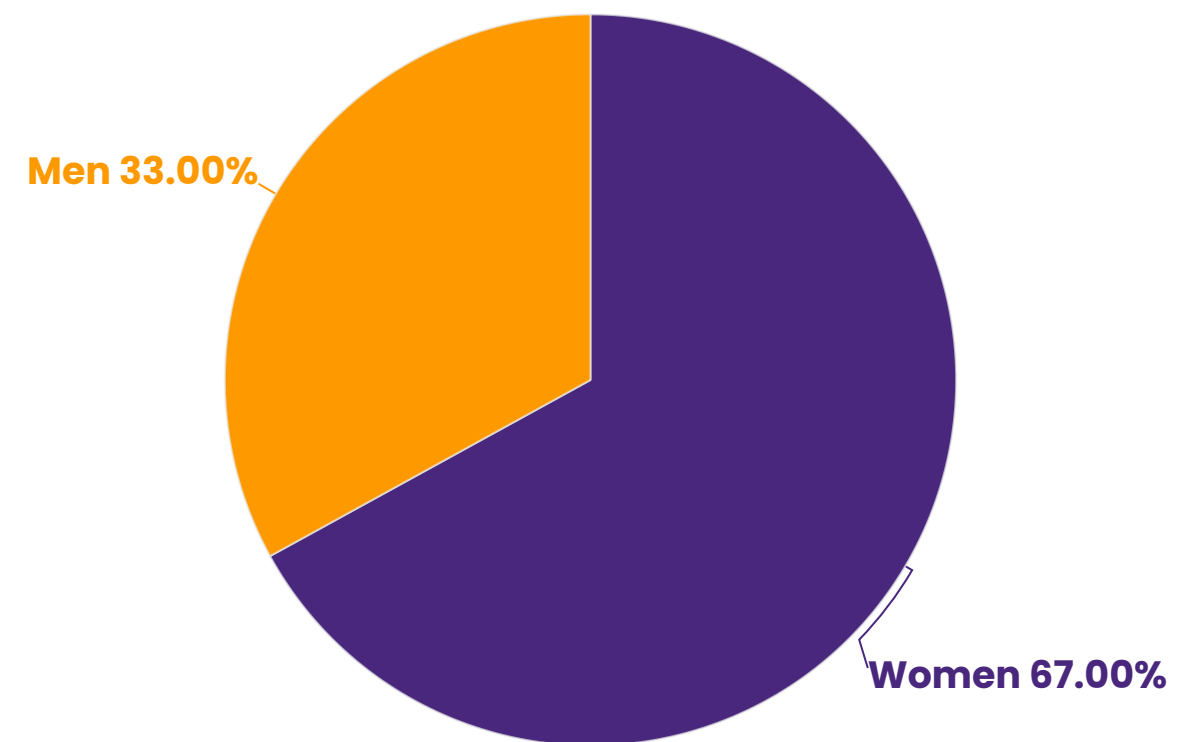
In 2021, 23 cities in Utah opted into a pilot program to use ranked choice voting for local elections. Of the 23, 20 actually held ranked choice elections (elections with 3+ candidates) with 19 cities using the system for the first time.

Women made up 32.5% of the candidates that ran to fill 46 seats that had races that used ranked choice voting (had 3+ candidates). Women won 37% of all RCV seats, but when looking at only the races that had women candidates, women won **46%** of them. **67%** (4 of 6) of mayoral seats that were contested by women were won by women.

**Gender Breakdown of All RCV Seats
Contested by Women (2021)**

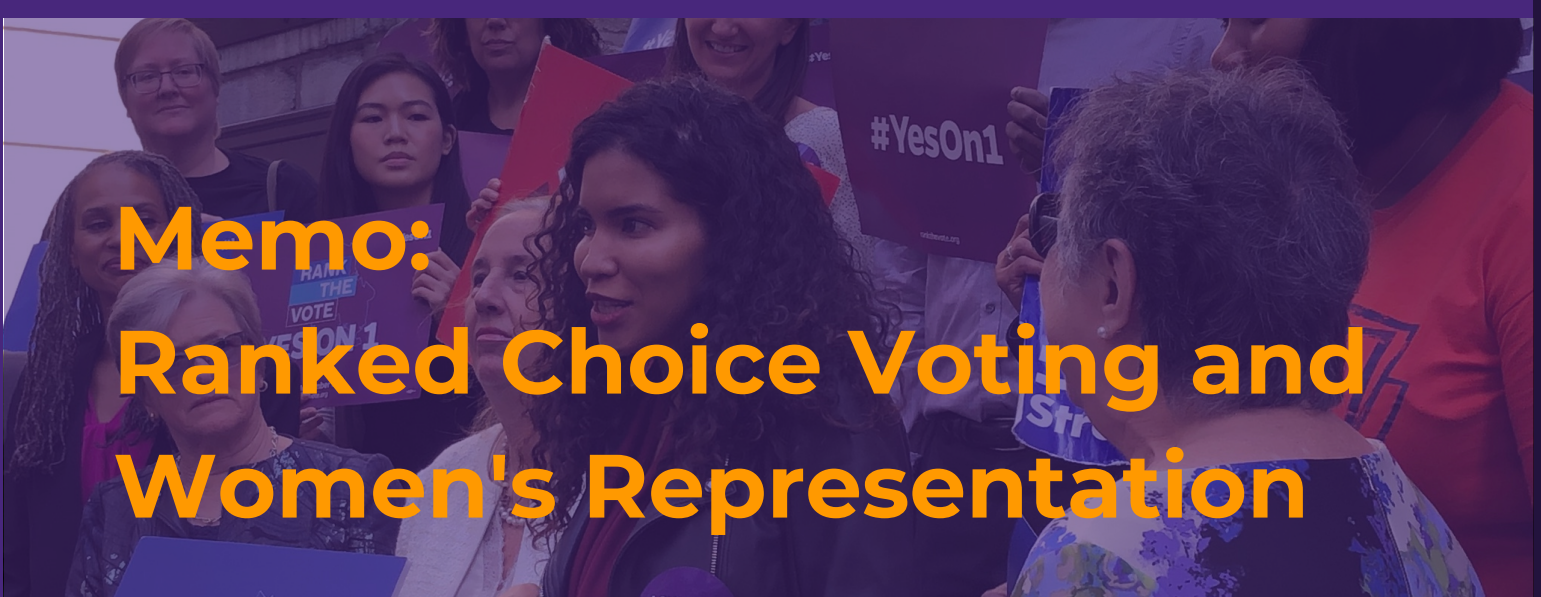


**Winners of Mayoral Races
Contested By Women (2021)**



Of the 17 Utah cities that held RCV elections for their city councils, women make up 40% of their city councils.

Data true as of December 2022





To: Interested Parties

From: Courtney Lamendola, Marvelous Maeze, and Steph Scaglia

RE: Voting Design and Women's Representation: Ranked Choice Voting

Date: January 23, 2023

Introduction

As of January 2023, women hold less than one-third of all elected positions in the United States. Though it is true that women have made gains in politics over the last few years, progress overall has remained slow and uneven. According to our research, barriers to women's representation and leadership emerge at every stage of the electoral process and tend to persist throughout women's political careers.¹ As a result, the U.S. is unlikely to achieve parity in politics without systemic change.

Notably, jurisdictions that adopt systems-level strategies, like ranked choice voting (RCV), experience accelerated progress toward gender-balanced governance. Over the last few years, our team has found that women fare better in jurisdictions that use RCV in the United States. In 2016, we found that women's representation was significantly higher in the California Bay Area's RCV cities than in control cities.² In 2020, we found that approximately half of all mayors and council members elected by RCV were women, compared to one-third of all local electeds in non-RCV cities.³

Overall, we have found that women continue to fare better in jurisdictions that use ranked choice voting than in cities with plurality voting systems. Of the 30 cities that use ranked choice voting to elect their executives (mayors), 12 (39%) are currently represented by women.⁴ In the 41 cities that use ranked choice voting to elect their legislatures (councils, boards), almost half of all electeds (147 of 300, or 49%) are women.⁵ RCV remains one of the most promising tools for advancing women's representation in the United States.

The following memo presents an update to our analysis of voting systems in the U.S. and their impact on women's representation. For more information about our work and the resources we provide, please visit our website at www.representwomen.org or contact our team at info@representwomen.org.

¹ Courtney Lamendola, Steph Scaglia, and Paige Chan. "The 2022 Gender Parity Index," RepresentWomen ([July 2022](#)).

² Sarah John et al. "The Impact of Ranked Choice Voting on Representation" FairVote and Representation2020. ([August 2016](#)).

³ Cynthia Richie Terrell and Courtney Lamendola, "In Ranked Choice Elections, Women WIN," RepresentWomen ([July 2020](#)).

⁴ "RCV Mayors - Gender," RepresentWomen ([January 2023](#)).

⁵ "RCV Council Members - Gender," RepresentWomen ([January 2023](#)).

Introducing the Link Between Voting Systems and Women's Representation

Election rules and systems shape opportunities for women in politics. Some, like reserved seat quotas, directly create opportunities by setting a minimum threshold for women's representation. Others, like ranked choice voting, indirectly create opportunities for women by leveling the playing field for all candidates. While quotas are used widely in other countries, most election reform advocates in the United States favor changing the voting system over adopting gender quotas.

Ranked choice voting (RCV), a system that allows voters to rank candidates in order of preference, is the fastest-growing electoral reform in the United States. At the start of 2022, 51 jurisdictions had adopted ranked choice voting. Over the course of the last year, four more jurisdictions used RCV for the first time, and an additional eight passed ballot measures to implement RCV in future elections.⁶ As of January 2023, 63 jurisdictions have adopted ranked choice voting, including two states, Alaska and Maine.⁷ Nevada voters voted in favor of final-five RCV in 2022 and must vote again in 2024 to pass the new system into law.⁸

Although a variety of systems-level and candidate-level factors may independently affect women's representation in politics, our research has found that the adoption of ranked choice voting compliments candidate-focused initiatives and, together, yields better representation outcomes.⁹ Following the adoption of RCV in NYC, for example, The New Majority NYC, a women's candidate group, stepped up to ensure their endorsed candidates were prepared to use the system to its full potential. As a result of their efforts and RCV, women's representation on the city council doubled.¹⁰

The Problem with Plurality Voting

Plurality voting is the "status quo" voting system in the United States. In plurality elections, voters select their preferred candidate for each seat on the ballot. When the votes are tallied, the person with the most votes is declared the winner - even if they receive less than 50% of the vote. The threat of losing to the opposing party makes voters compromise on their ideals, often choosing the lesser of two "evils" on a primary ballot to increase their party's likelihood of victory in the general election. This winner-take-all election system creates inequity and constructs a culture that disincentivizes voters from taking part in the electoral process. This can lead to public disillusionment with both the voting process and electoral outcomes, posing a long-term threat to democracy.¹¹

⁶ "2022 Ranked Choice Voting Year in Review" FairVote. ([January 2023](#)).

⁷ "Where is Ranked Choice Voting Used?" FairVote. ([Accessed 13 January 2023](#)).

⁸ "Nevada Top-Five Ranked-Choice Voting Initiative" Ballotpedia. ([Accessed 20 January 2023](#)).

⁹ Courtney Lamendola and Steph Scaglia, "Women's Representation & the Twin-Track Ecosystem in the 100 Largest Cities," RepresentWomen ([October 2022](#)).

¹⁰ Courtney Lamendola, Steph Scaglia, and Paige Chan. "Why Women Won in 2021: How a Twin-Track Approach Advanced Women's Representation on the New York City Council" RepresentWomen ([September 2022](#)).

¹¹ "As Partisan Hostility Grows, Signs of Frustration With the Two-Party System" Pew Research. ([9 August 2022](#)).

Single-winner plurality voting also incentivizes exclusive gatekeeping tactics for favored candidates. “Establishment” candidates are more likely to win due to the increased monetary support they receive from political parties, wealthy donors, and PACs. As a result, third-party and non-establishment candidates are left to rely on small donor contributions. This disproportionately discourages women, especially women of color,¹² from running for office, which yields non-diverse candidate pools and further sets back progress toward representative governance.

Plurality elections can also lead to the “spoiler effect,” where third-party candidates with little to no support can significantly impact the outcome of an election. Plurality voting in a primarily two-party system is inherently coercive. It violates the rights of the majority to be fairly represented, silencing the vox populi in exchange for party loyalty.¹³ RCV puts the power back in the hands of the people, restores civility in the election process, and safeguards democracy for all citizens.

The Benefits of Ranked Choice Voting

Ranked choice voting creates more opportunities for women to run and win by:

1. **Mitigating vote splitting and the spoiler effect.** Women, more often than men, are told to “wait their turn” and are viewed as less electable by party leaders in plurality elections.¹⁴ In RCV elections, multiple women can run without splitting the vote and spoiling an election.
2. **Increasing campaign civility.** Positive campaigning benefits both candidates and voters. When candidates are less focused on launching or defending negative attacks from competitors, they can spend more time campaigning on issues that matter to voters to earn broader support.¹⁵
3. **Removing a need for costly runoff elections.** Runoffs are often expensive and lead to lower voter turnout. RCV mitigates this by acting as an “instant runoff” where voters’ second and third choices are counted immediately.¹⁶ For women candidates, who often need to outraise men to win, RCV helps them focus on what matters most: connecting with voters.
4. **Increasing candidate-voter engagement and voter turnout.**¹⁷ In ranked choice voting elections, candidates are incentivized to seek broader support in the form of first-, second-, and third-choice votes. This approach results in voters feeling they have more of a stake in the election, boosting turnout.

¹² Sarah John et al. “The Impact of Ranked Choice Voting on Representation” FairVote and Representation2020. ([August 2016](#)).

¹³ Matthew H. Graham and Milan W. Svobik, “Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States,” *American Political Science Review*, ([23 April 2020](#)); Deb Otis and Rania Khamees, “Plurality Wins in 2020: A Violation of America’s Majority Rule Principle,” FairVote ([4 June 2020](#)).

¹⁴ Julianne Malveaux. “No More ‘Wait Your Turn’ Politics,” *Richmond Free Press* ([13 July 2018](#)).

¹⁵ Todd Donovan, Caroline Tolbert, and Kellen Gracey, “Campaign civility under preferential and plurality voting,” *Electoral Studies* 42 ([June 2016](#)).

¹⁶ Stephen Wright, “Voter Turnout in Runoff Elections,” *The Journal of Politics* 51(2) ([May 1989](#)).

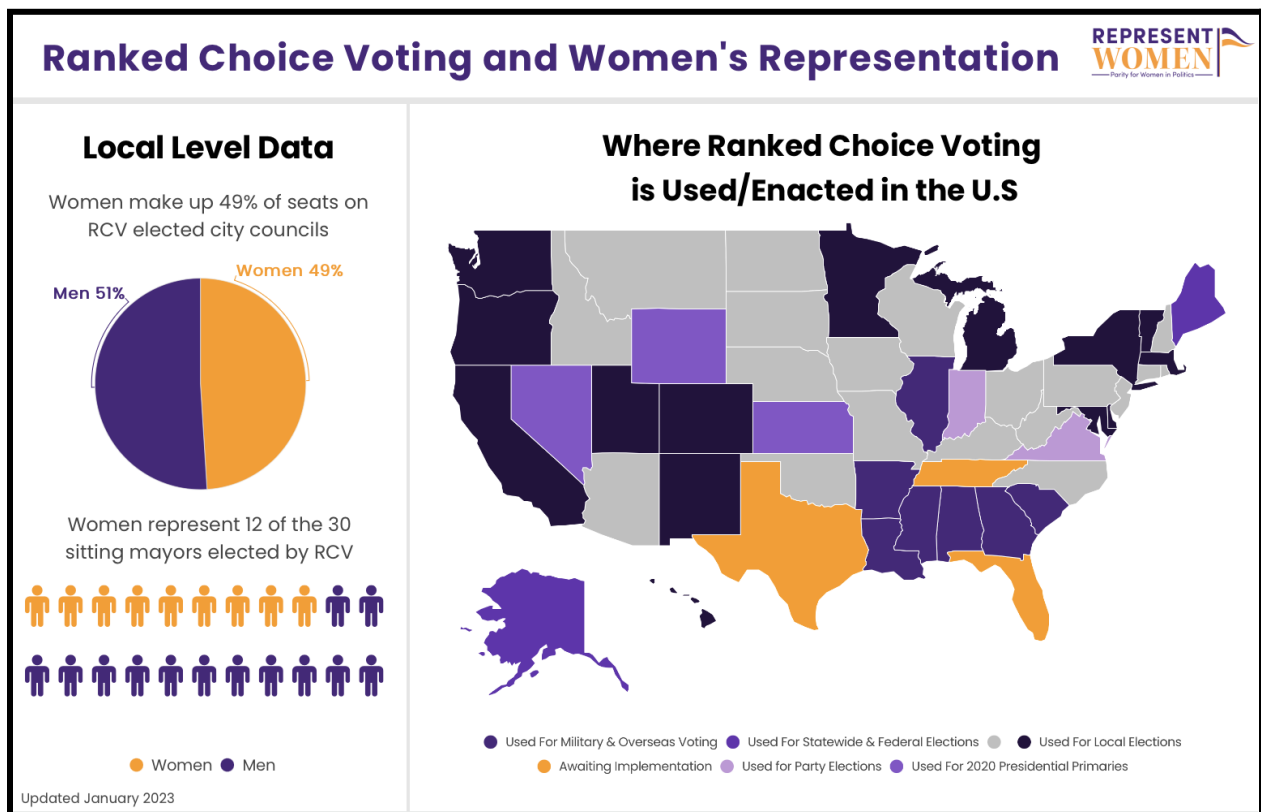
¹⁷ FairVote, “RCV Primer” ([March 2022](#)).

An election system that creates barriers for women candidates will not yield a representative democracy. In both theory and practice, ranked choice voting eliminates the barriers women face in plurality elections, which creates more opportunities for women to run successfully.

Women's Representation in RCV Cities

The impact of RCV on women's representation is best demonstrated at the local level, which has long been the testing ground for new voting systems.¹⁸ Of the 31 mayors in RCV cities today, 12 (39%) are women, nine are people of color (29%), and four are women of color (13%). In city councils, 147 of 300 RCV seats (49%) are held by women, 96 by people of color (32%), and 55 (18%) by women of color. Comparatively, women held 32% of all municipal seats as of March 2022.¹⁹

Of all ranked choice municipalities, the Las Cruces Council stands out because it is entirely represented by women. An additional 16 RCV councils across nine states are at or above perfect parity (50%). This means over half (56%) of RCV councils have achieved gender balance as of January 2023. Prominently, this includes New York City, which had its first RCV election since the Progressive Era in 2021.



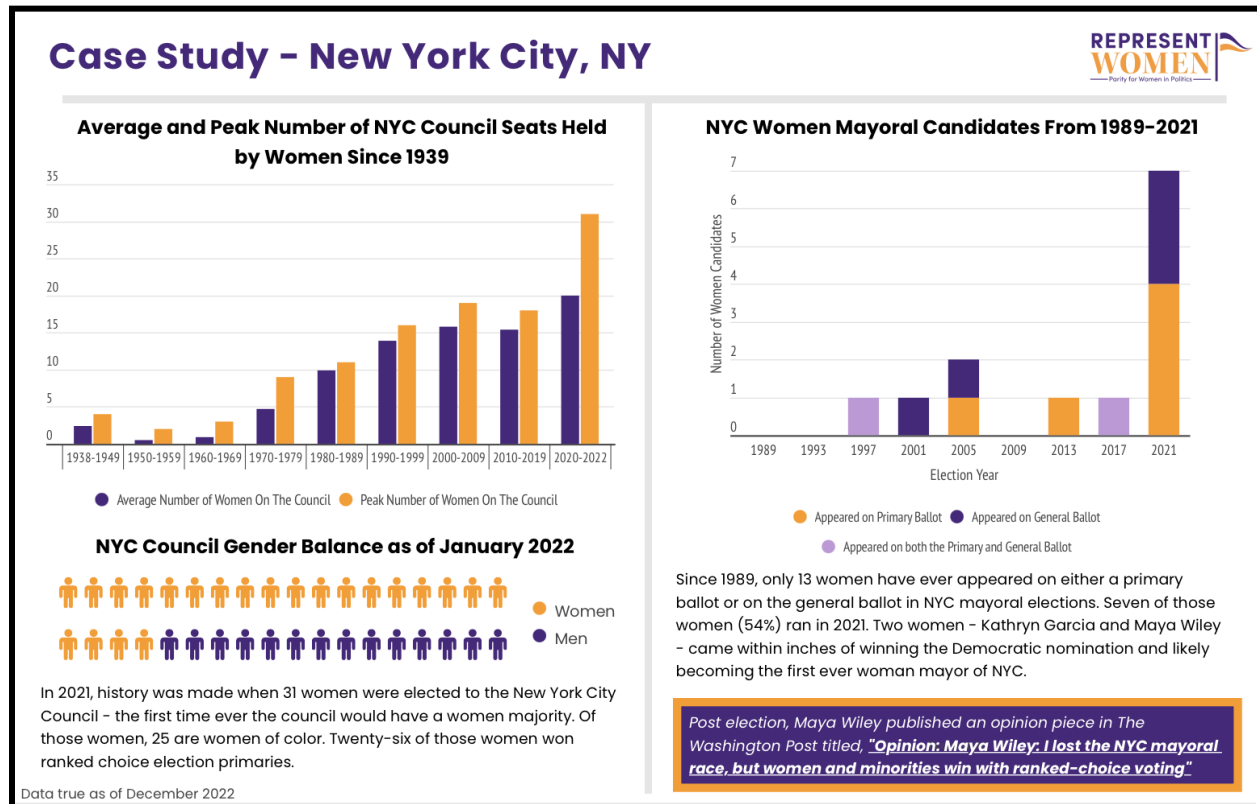
"Ranked Choice Voting Dashboard," RepresentWomen ([Updated January 2023](#)).

¹⁸ Cynthia Richie Terrell, Courtney Lamendola, and Maura Reilly. "Election Reform and Women's Representation: Ranked Choice Voting in the U.S." *Politics and Governance* ([15 June 2021](#)).

¹⁹ Center for American Women and Politics. "2022 Women in Municipal Office," ([March 2022](#)).

New York City - 2021

In New York City, women's representation approximately doubled following the implementation of ranked choice voting in 2021. According to our research, a combination of factors, including the implementation of ranked choice voting and candidate-focused strategies (led by The New Majority NYC), complemented one another in a unique and powerful way, yielding parity for the first time in the council's history.²⁰



“Ranked Choice Voting Dashboard,” RepresentWomen ([Updated January 2023](#)).

The benefits of RCV were not lost on the women candidates themselves. For example, Councilwoman Amanda Farias of District 18 spoke about how RCV incentivized her to seek broader support from her constituents by seeking their second-choice votes, in addition to appealing to her own base:

“If I saw a lawn sign for someone else, I would go to the house and be like, “Hey! I agree with them on that. Will you rank me second? Something I would’ve never done in a non-RCV election.”²¹

²⁰ Courtney Lamendola, Steph Scaglia, and Paige Chan. “Why Women Won in 2021: How a Twin-Track Approach Advanced Women’s Representation on the New York City Council,” RepresentWomen ([September 2022](#)).

²¹ Amanda Farias, “RCV in NYC” New York City ([26 September 2022](#)).

Councilwoman Crystal Hudson of District 35 showed how the system encourages coalition building between candidates, even those running in the same district:

*“Ranked choice voting got us here in many ways...What we saw throughout the campaign cycle was camaraderie and collaboration in a way that you don't normally see on campaigns, both within districts and across districts.”*²²

Due to redistricting, all 51 seats on the NYC Council will be up for re-election in 2023, beginning with another round of ranked choice primaries in June - many of which are already projected to be competitive.²³ This will present a good opportunity for our team to test our findings from the 2021 cycle.

Women's Representation in RCV States

In addition to local uses of ranked choice voting, RCV is currently used at the state-level in two states, Maine and Alaska. Maine became the first state to use ranked choice voting in 2018. That same year, Janet Mills became the first woman governor of Maine and first governor elected by ranked choice voting following the state's first ranked choice primary. In other statewide offices, there was a 6.4% increase in women candidates and 9.3% increase in women winners from the 2014/16 non-RCV elections to the 2018/20 RCV elections. Correspondingly, Maine's parity score in our annual Gender Parity Index has steadily risen since RCV was first introduced.²⁴ Alaska's first use of RCV took place in 2022.

Alaska - 2022

In August 2022, a special ranked choice election was held to fill a vacancy in the state's U.S. House delegation, leading to the election of Representative Mary Peltola. Upon winning, Peltola made history as the first Alaska Native in Congress, only Russian Orthodox representative, and first woman elected to Congress via ranked choice voting.²⁵ In November 2022, Peltola was re-elected to her Congressional seat in a second ranked choice election, following her victory, she endorsed RCV:

*“Ranked choice voting is gaining popularity because it's giving people a better voice in their democracy. People can vote for the candidates they align with instead of being forced to vote defensively every election. RCV makes our democracy stronger. That's why I support it.”*²⁶

Peltola's win signifies the evolving nature of representation in elected state office. As an election framework, RCV increases opportunities for historically marginalized candidates. By allowing voters to rank their preferred candidates, RCV elections are likely to present a more diverse pool of candidates to the voters.

²² Crystal Hudson, “RCV in NYC” New York City ([26 September 2022](#)).

²³ Samar Khurshid. “A Step Into the 2023 City Council Elections as Campaign Finance Board Approves First Public Funds Payment of Cycle,” *Gotham Gazette* ([15 December 2022](#)).

²⁴ Courtney Lamendola, Steph Scaglia, and Paige Chan. “The 2022 Gender Parity Index,” RepresentWomen ([July 2022](#)): 20.

²⁵ Azi Paybarah. “Who is Mary Peltola, the first Alaska Native in Congress?” *The Washington Post* ([1 September 2022](#)).

²⁶ Mary Peltola. Twitter ([17 November 2022, Accessed 20 January 2023](#)).

Implementing Ranked Choice Voting

Ranked choice voting has clear benefits. In addition to creating a more level playing field for all candidates and creating opportunities for women to run successful campaigns, RCV does a better job at engaging voters than plurality voting. However, making the switch to an RCV system can be daunting for election officials, candidates, and voters alike. Potential challenges, including the initial cost to switch and how to audit, should be considered. However, these challenges also exist under the current winner-take-all system and can be more manageable under RCV.

As was the case in New York City, where candidates, advocates, and city officials alike worked to provide resources to voters and engage them in using the new system, local organizations, nonprofits, and state governments all have a role to play in helping voters become more familiar with RCV. Specifically, local officials are responsible for providing voters with clear and concise information as well as well-designed ballots to ensure that they are prepared to vote using RCV. Accessible accountability methods to the vote tabulation process and materials should also be readily available following elections to ensure transparency in the voting process.²⁷

Conclusion

Systems-level strategies, like ranked choice voting, advance gender parity in governance by creating a level playing field for all candidates and eliminating the opportunity barriers that exist under plurality voting. Though women are underrepresented at every level of government in the United States, holding less than one-third of all elected positions, women in ranked choice jurisdictions are better-represented. As more cities and states begin to adopt ranked choice voting, we will continue to track outcomes for women and test to see whether these findings hold over time.

Furthermore, while women of color candidates bear the brunt of gendered stratification in non-RCV jurisdictions, systems-level strategies like ranked choice voting create more opportunities for them to be represented, as has been the case in both the California Bay Area RCV cities and New York City. As is the case with our data and research on gender-based outcomes under ranked choice voting, we will continue to test how RCV and other systems impact candidates according to both gender and race in the coming years.

²⁷ Deb Otis, “Best Practices for Releasing RCV Election Results,” FairVote ([December 2022](#)).



Parity for Women in Politics

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