

THE IMPLEMENTATION AND EFFECTS OF RANKED CHOICE VOTING IN  
CALIFORNIA CITIES

A Thesis

Presented to the faculty of the Department of Public Policy and Administration  
California State University, Sacramento

Submitted in partial satisfaction of  
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF PUBLIC POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION

by

Madeline Alys Henry

FALL  
2016

© 2016

Madeline Alys Henry

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

THE IMPLEMENTATION AND EFFECTS OF RANKED CHOICE VOTING IN  
CALIFORNIA CITIES

A Thesis

by

Madeline Alys Henry

Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Committee Chair  
Edward L. Lascher, Jr., Ph.D.

\_\_\_\_\_, Second Reader  
Steve Boilard, Ph.D.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Student: Madeline Alys Henry

I certify that this student has met the requirements for format contained in the University format manual, and that this thesis is suitable for shelving in the Library and credit is to be awarded for the thesis.

\_\_\_\_\_, Department Chair  
Edward L. Lascher, Jr., Ph.D.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Department of Public Policy and Administration

Abstract  
of  
THE IMPLEMENTATION AND EFFECTS OF RANKED CHOICE VOTING IN  
CALIFORNIA CITIES

by  
Madeline Alys Henry

Electoral systems have a direct impact on elections and their outcomes. Traditionally, local elections in California have used “first past the post” electoral systems. Beginning in 2002, a few cities began to explore other electoral options. San Francisco, Berkeley and San Leandro now use a Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) system; other cities such as Davis have considered but not adopted RCV. This thesis seeks to determine the motivations behind RCV, what makes a city more likely to enact the electoral system, and how it has been implemented.

Using four case studies from cities in California, this research finds that cities are motivated to use RCV in order to improve voter participation and eliminate runoff elections, reducing costs. Through interviews with city officials, I found that highly educated, progressive and innovative cities have been more likely to consider a move to RCV. Cities with an existing charter appear to have an easier time moving to the new voting system. Those cities adopting RCV have seen a reduction in runoff elections and a change in campaign strategies; however, voter turnout has remained stable when compared to previous elections.

RCV is a new system in California, it has only been used in three election cycles, but it has had an impact on the cities where it has been implemented. There is a need for more research to continue monitoring the impacts of RCV in California and to create a better understanding of how it is best implemented. Based on my findings, I recommend that the Secretary of State's Office lead the effort in conducting research on RCV. I also advocate that statewide and local policies be developed to guide cities when they consider RCV and when they implement it.

\_\_\_\_\_, Committee Chair  
Edward L. Lascher, Jr., Ph.D.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my readers, Ted Lascher and Steve Boilard, for guiding me through this process. Thank you for helping me turn an idea into a tangible project, editing countless drafts and most of all, for sticking with me until the end.

I would like to thank the various individuals who contributed their insightful experiences and expertise during interviews. Without your contributions, my thesis would not have been possible.

Thank you to my colleagues at ILG, for your continuous support and encouragement. And to Melissa, for proofing my final draft.

I would like to thank my PPA friends: Kara, Brent and Cory. I can't imagine my graduate school experience without you.

Thank you to my friends: Jessica, thank you for always being optimistic and for all of your support during my first year of graduate school. Rachel, thank you for always encouraging me and lending an ear at any time of day. Laura, I'm glad we were able to persevere through graduate school together. Thanks for always being a source of comic relief and for believing I could finish my thesis even when I thought it was impossible. Savannah, thank you for all of your help with my thesis: from helping me prepare for interviews, editing my draft chapters and celebrating the finished product (and for all of the fun along the way).

Last but definitely not least; I would like to thank my parents. My accomplishments are solely a reflection of the love and support I have received from you.

Thank you for teaching me the value of education, supporting my love of learning and for always encouraging me to follow my dreams.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgements .....	vii
List of Tables .....	xi
List of Figures .....	xii
 Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
San Francisco .....	4
Berkeley .....	5
Oakland .....	5
San Leandro .....	6
Davis .....	6
2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	8
Electoral Reform .....	8
Why Choose Ranked Choice Voting? .....	11
The Impacts of Ranked Choice Voting .....	12
The San Francisco Case .....	14
Conclusions .....	16
3. METHODOLOGY .....	17
Rationale for the Interview Approach to the Research .....	17
General Information about the Interviews .....	18
Interview Questions .....	19
Interview Conditions .....	21

Data Analysis .....	21
Possible Limitations to the Methodology .....	22
Conclusion .....	22
4. FINDINGS .....	23
Ranked Choice Voting in Alameda County .....	23
Motivations Behind Ranked Choice Voting .....	24
The Development of Ranked Choice Voting .....	25
The Implementation of Ranked Choice Voting .....	26
Impacts of Ranked Choice Voting .....	28
Davis .....	30
Conclusions .....	32
5. CONCLUSIONS .....	33
Summary of Findings .....	33
Suggestions for Research .....	34
Policy Implications .....	35
Conclusions .....	36
References .....	37

## LIST OF TABLES

Tables	Page
1. Table 4.1 Voter Turnout in Berkeley and Alameda County.....	29

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figures	Page
1. Figure 1.1 Sample Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) Ballot.....	3
2. Figure 3.1 Interview Questions for Berkeley, Oakland and San Leandro.....	20
3. Figure 3.2 Interview Questions for Davis.....	20
4. Figure 4.1 Ranked Choice Voting Brochure.....	27

## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

By definition, democracy requires participation from constituents, often in the form of voting. The way people vote and the electoral systems that shape the elections they vote in have an impact on the political environment of a democracy. There are a wide variety of electoral systems used to facilitate democracy in different countries, states and cities. In this thesis, I will analyze the electoral systems used by cities in California, the electoral reforms that have occurred and the outcomes they create.

Throughout recent history, there has been a decrease in voter turnout across the nation (Cadelago, 2014). In the 2014 midterm election, the national turnout was 36.3% (The Editorial Board, 2014). In 2014, during a gubernatorial election, California broke a record for its lowest voter turnout with only 42.2% of the eligible voting population showing up on Election Day. This number shattered the previous record of 50.6% set in 2002 (Cadelago, 2014). Following the 2014 election, experts cited a range of factors that contributed to the record low turnout, including: California's changing demographics, shifts in party affiliation, a decline in homeownership and the poor economy.

This problem becomes even worse when looking at local elections. Nationally, less than 20% of eligible voters vote in mayoral elections (Knight Foundation, 2015). Local elections have traditionally seen a lower voter turnout and often struggle to have their elected officials represent the demographic make up of the district. These ultra low turnout levels are threatening many aspects of the democratic process, such as civic

responsibility and participation, motivating reformers to search for ways to increase turnout and participation (Cadelago, 2014).

One way lower voter turnout affects the democratic process is by influencing equality. Low voter turnout can lead to an unequal representation of demographic groups. When demographic groups do not turnout in percentages proportionate to their population, other demographics are overrepresented in the voting population. When this happens, those who vote are not representative of the eligible voting population. Low voter turnout coupled with the common electoral processes in California has raised issues of inequality. In some instances, electoral reform has been used to address these issues.

Cities in the United States, and in California, have traditionally used “first past the post elections”. In California the norm is also to elect city council members on an at large basis, although larger cities tend to elect council members by district. In these at large, “first past the post” systems, elections are won by a simple majority vote, with each citizen casting votes only for their top choice candidate for each available position. The California Voting Rights Act (CVRA) of 2001 has created an incentive for electoral reform in some California cities. CVRA raises questions about the equity of at large elections, and allows racial minorities to challenge these systems. Many cities in California have been switching from at large to district based elections in order to increase turnout and equality and avoid costly lawsuits (Leoni & Skinnell, 2003). However, some cities have chosen to enact larger electoral reform and move to Ranked Choice

Voting (RCV) also known as Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) or an Alternative Vote (AV).

RCV systems can be used in district based elections and allow voters to rank each candidate for a single office according to their individual preferences. As seen in Figure 1.1, the ballot typically includes multiple columns, signifying a voter's first, second and third choices. The number of columns increases with the number of choices a voter is given.

Figure 1.1 Sample Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) Ballot

<b>CITY AND COUNTY / CIUDAD Y CONDADO</b>		
<b>FAVORITE NATURE SETTING / ESCENA PREFERIDA DE LA NATURALEZA</b>		
<small>Vote your first, second, and third choices / Vote por su primera, segunda y tercera preferencias</small>		

---

<b>1 FIRST CHOICE PRIMERA PREFERENCIA</b>
<small>Vote for One Vote por uno</small>
OCEAN OCÉANO
MOUNTAIN MONTAÑA
LAKE LAGO
FOREST BOSQUE
BEACH PLAYA

<b>2 SECOND CHOICE SEGUNDA PREFERENCIA</b>
<small>Vote for One: Must be different than your first choice Vote por uno: Tiene que ser diferente a su primera preferencia</small>
OCEAN OCÉANO
MOUNTAIN MONTAÑA
LAKE LAGO
FOREST BOSQUE
BEACH PLAYA

<b>3 THIRD CHOICE TERCERA PREFERENCIA</b>
<small>Vote for One: Must be different than your first and second choices Vote por uno: Tiene que ser diferente a su primera y segunda preferencias</small>
OCEAN OCÉANO
MOUNTAIN MONTAÑA
LAKE LAGO
FOREST BOSQUE
BEACH PLAYA

Source: City of San Francisco, 2016

In a ranked choice system if a candidate receives over 50% of first choice votes, that person wins. However, if no one receives over 50% of first choice votes the candidate with the least amount of votes is eliminated. When a voter's first choice is eliminated, their vote then goes to their second ranked candidate. This process continues until one candidate has a majority of the vote (Ellis, Reilly & Reynolds, 2008). RCV systems are

used widely in other countries including: Australia, Fiji, India, Ireland and the United Kingdom. In the United States cities in California, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts and Minnesota have used RCV to elect local officials (Ellis, Reilly & Reynolds, 2008).

This thesis will explore the impacts of Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) in California cities. My research centers on the following questions: What are the characteristics of cities that have implemented electoral reform? How have these alternative electoral systems affected voter turnout and election outcomes? I have identified four cities which have enacted electoral reform in the form of RCV: San Francisco, Berkeley, Oakland and San Leandro; and one city where electoral reform was recommend by an advisory ballot but was not implemented, Davis. I will use interviews with city officials, newspaper records and publicly available documents, to determine what factors make a city more likely to enact electoral reform and what effects electoral reform has had on the cities that have implemented it. In the remainder of this chapter I will provide a brief historical overview of electoral reform in each city that I have identified. I will postpone the consideration of the political culture and demographics of these cities until Chapter Four.

### **San Francisco**

In 2002, San Francisco became the first city in California to pass a measure implementing Ranked Choice Voting. Measure A called for Ranked Choice Voting in all major city offices. They first used RCV in 2004 to elect seven members of the board of supervisors (Hill, 2004). San Francisco's RCV system was challenged in a Federal Court in 2010. The lawsuit argued that because the city limits the number of candidates a voter can rank to three it is unfairly excluding voters who only choose less popular candidates.



The RCV system was upheld in Federal Court and has continued to operate with the three-vote limit (Egelko, 2010). San Francisco has continued to implement other types of reform. In 2010, the city passed the Saturday Voting Act, which requires all polling places to open the Saturday before an election in order to provide more voting opportunity (Branche, 2010). San Francisco has continuously been a leading example of electoral reform in California.

### **Berkeley**

In 2004, Berkeley followed in the steps of San Francisco and passed Measure I, amending its charter to allow for RCV (Kamlarz, 2007). The measure included three conditions that had to be met in order for RCV to be fully implemented. These requirements were: the technical capability to conduct RCV elections and process the ballots, the ability to consolidate elections with other cities in the county and the financial feasibility of the system including: the costs of development, public outreach and conducting the elections (Kamlarz, 2007). In 2010, RCV was used for the first time. Berkeley is one of a three cities in Alameda County that have implemented RCV. Berkeley, along with Oakland and San Leandro, has chosen to implement RCV and together they share a paper-based optical scan system and the fiscal responsibility of reform (Bobier, 2010).

### **Oakland**

Oakland voters passed Measure O in 2006, calling for a move to RCV. However, the system was not implemented until 2010. There were many attempts to block the reform and in 2009 the City Attorney, John Russo, made a statement that it would be

illegal for the city council to block the move to RCV. Following this statement, the city council voted 6-2 to implement RCV in the 2010 election (Simmons, 2010). In 2010, Oakland held its first RCV election to elect a new mayor. This election was controversial, as a candidate with a high number of second and third choice votes won the election narrowly beating out the predicted winner with a 51%/49% split (Elinson & Shih, 2010). The city has continued to use RCV despite the controversy in 2010.

### **San Leandro**

In 2010, San Leandro became the third city in Alameda County to enact RCV with a 5-2 city council vote (Bobier, 2010). The debate surrounding RCV in San Leandro began in 1998 when a mayoral candidate was elected with less than 50% of the vote. In 2000, voters approved Measure F, which required a candidate to receive a majority vote to win the election (Katz-Lacabe, 2010). As a result of Measure F the city began to hold primary and general elections. The city eliminated primaries and has used RCV in all city council and mayoral elections since 2010.

### **Davis**

In 2006, an advisory council in the City of Davis recommended that the city move to RCV elections. That fall, voters approved Measure L, an advisory measure urging the city council to consider implementing RCV (Davis Choice Voting, 2006). In order to implement electoral reform, the city would have had to become a charter city. Ultimately, Davis remained a general law city and did not implement RCV. The city saw another opportunity for electoral reform in 2007, when AB1294 passed in the California legislature. AB1294 would have allowed cities to enact electoral reform regardless of

charter status. The bill was vetoed by the governor, preventing Davis from acting on Measure L (California State Assembly, 2007).

In the next chapter I will discuss the research surrounding RCV and provide insights into its use in San Francisco, the first and most researched case of RCV in California. Then through the use of interviews with city officials I will explore electoral reform in Berkeley, Oakland, San Leandro and Davis.

Over time, many studies have examined Ranked Choice Voting at the national level and the outcomes it creates. However, fewer studies focus on American cities. This thesis will contribute to the overall knowledge surrounding electoral reform and Ranked Choice Voting, by exploring their impact in a new context. This research is timely given the recent trend in electoral reform. When cities in California consider electoral reform they will benefit from a better understanding of its implementation and the impact it has had in other cities within the state.

In the following chapter, I will provide a literature review, evaluating historical and current research on RCV. Next, I will describe my methodology and interview process. In Chapter Four, I will analyze the four cities listed above in order to determine what criteria make a city more likely to implement electoral reform. I will also evaluate the effects of electoral reform within the cities that have implemented it. Finally, I will conclude by discussing the policy implications of this research.

## Chapter Two

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of electoral systems and their impacts has emerged as an important field in political science. The field started to grow in the 1950s with the work of Maurice Duverger and then grew again in the 1990s with the development of new democracies (Ellis, Reilly & Reynolds, 2008). The field now covers a vast collection of electoral systems and processes. Electoral systems range from plurality systems, where a simple plurality is required to win an election, to proportional representation systems, which convert a party's proportion of votes to the number of their candidates who are elected (Ellis, Reilly & Reynolds, 2008). A large variety of electoral systems, and mixes of them, have been developed and implemented. This has led to an increased interest in research surrounding electoral reform.

This research focuses on Ranked Choice Voting (RCV), also referred to as Instant Runoff Voting (IRV), which allows voters to rank candidates in order of preference. The research was narrowed to focus on RCV because it has been implemented in four California cities and has been considered in others. Because local elections in California are nonpartisan, the electoral systems they can use are limited. In this chapter, I will discuss the existing literature surrounding electoral reform generally, the use of Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) and its implementation in San Francisco.

#### **Electoral Reform**

In this section, I will explore the literature surrounding electoral reform motivations. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries electoral systems began to

evolve, providing democracies with more choice over their electoral structure (Ahmed, 2013). Incidences of electoral reform peaked during the 1940s and 1980s, creating an influx of research (Renwick, 2010).

A large portion of research suggests that political parties shape electoral systems and motivate electoral change. Bawn (1993) uses post World War II Germany as a case study to test a predicted model and to determine the factors that influence electoral reform. He finds that electoral systems are the product of both the interests and institutions that exist. These findings are mirrored in other studies. Benoit (2001 & 2007) argues that electoral laws are both the cause for electoral structures and the result of them. Boix (1999) studied changes in electoral laws from 1875-1990 and also found that electoral systems are influenced by political parties, specifically by ruling parties in order to support their interests.

Ahmed (2013) conducted a historical comparison of 18 democracies and their electoral transformations in the book *Democracy and the Politics of Electoral System Choice*. He determined that electoral reform contributed greatly to the democratization process across countries. However, he found that the electoral reform was often used to establish political order, rather than to promote an inclusive democracy. He lists multiple motivations for electoral reform, including: a desire for a political party to protect their place in government, a demand by socialist parties who wanted a more inclusive government, a response to an increase in the voting population due to suffrage and a response to the structure of political parties or the exiting political structure (Ahmed, 2013).

Renwick (2010) also explores the history of electoral reform and the motivations behind it in his book *The Politics of Electoral Reform*. He argues that electoral structures are not just created by the existing political parties and powers, but are influenced by voters and reform activists as well (Renwick, 2010). He uses historical case studies from all 19 national democracies that have attempted or implemented electoral reform since 1945. He uses these studies to examine when electoral reform is likely, how systems are chosen and who is involved in the process. Ultimately, he argues that politicians have the most influence when it comes to maintaining the status quo or implementing a new system, however, they can be overruled by the mass population's opinion in rare circumstances when there is widespread anger and an organized electorate. He also finds that while the status quo often benefits politicians, it is difficult for them to change the electoral rules in self-serving ways (Renwick, 2010, p. 22). His final conclusion is that electoral reform is rare and is most likely to occur when the electoral systems and its political parties no longer fit together or when a large majority of the population is unhappy with the current system.

In their book, *Helping America Vote: The Limits of Election Reform*, Kropf & Kimball (2012) explore electoral reform in the United States, focusing specifically on its motivations, implementation and its limitations. They explain that reform can happen at many levels in the United States; elections are very decentralized allowing changes at the national, state and local levels. They argue that electoral reform in the United States is a result of "triggering events" such as the controversy surrounding the 2000 presidential election. During this election, the winning candidate received fewer individual votes than

the losing candidate, putting the electoral system into question. Furthermore, they argue that quick changes to the electoral systems as a response to a triggering event can lead to unintended consequences (Kropf & Kimball, 2012).

The existing literature suggests many different motivations for electoral reform. Historically, a large portion of the literature has focused on the impact political parties have on electoral reform. However, more recent studies suggest that more factors contribute, including: changes in the electorate, widespread anger with the current system and triggering events.

### **Why Choose Ranked Choice Voting?**

The previous section explored electoral reform historically and across many democracies. In this section, I will explore the characteristics of Ranked Choice Voting and why it is used as a reform method.

RCV has arisen as an alternative electoral system due to its ability to ensure that the winning candidate has a majority of the popular vote. The RCV system also eliminates the need to hold a runoff election, leading to cost and time savings (Ellis, Reilly & Reynolds, 2008). RCV also reduces the chance of vote splitting, when two similar candidates split the vote of their electorate and allow another candidate to win (Ellis, Reilly & Reynolds, 2008; Hill, 2005; Marron, 2004). RCV advocates such as FairVote, The Committee for Ranked Choice Voting and Californians for Electoral Reform cite these reasons, as well as RCV's ability to make elections more fair, functional and representative (2016).

Hill (2005) argues that RCV addresses the following issues in the United States: nonmajority winners, spoiler candidates, partisan primaries, a loss of moderates and negative campaigns (p. 54). He argues RCV increases political debate, allows voters greater control over their vote and has the ability to empower a larger portion of voters (Hill, 2005).

Bouricius, Kleppner and Richie (2003) argue that RCV elections are cheaper and lead to fairer outcomes. They argue that its popular alternative, “first past the post” voting, allows candidates to win with a small percentage of the vote and leads to an increase in negative campaigning. In some cases, two-round runoffs have been used to address these issues, however, they are costly and can jeopardize voter turnout because voters are asked to participate in multiple elections over a short period of time. They ultimately argue that RCV electoral systems lead to more democratic outcomes and predict an increase in their use throughout the United States.

While RCV has many stated benefits, it is also described as having some disadvantages. The most common disadvantage that is listed when discussing RCV is its complexity. It can be difficult for constituents to understand how their vote is counted and the system often requires complex software to process votes efficiently (Ellis, Reilly & Reynolds, 2008)

### **The Impacts of Ranked Choice Voting**

In the following paragraphs, I will explore the impacts of RCV. The following studies use case studies, models and surveys to determine the impacts RCV has had, or



could have, in various jurisdictions. This research focuses on the system's cost effectiveness, political consequences and the impact it has on voter turnout.

Nielson (2011) used the Omnibus Political Science Survey at the University of California, San Diego to determine the impact of RCV on voter attitudes. The research used the Omnibus Political Science Survey (OPSS) to collect electronic survey data from students. Students were assigned to one of two treatment groups. In the first, they participated in a hypothetical plurality election and in the second they participated in a RCV election. After the hypothetical elections, students took a survey about the election and their attitude towards it. The research found a statistically significant positive relationship between RCV and a voters' confidence that their ballots are counted correctly (Nielson, 2011). The research also found that voters were more likely to cross party lines when given an RCV ballot, a quarter of respondents chose a democrat and a republican for their first and second choices. This research contributes to the literature by exploring the impacts of RCV on voter attitudes. However, it is limited. The research was done using a sample of college students; it is not representative of the general population. It is also hard to replicate authentic voting behavior in a controlled experiment. While this research contributes to the overall knowledge of RCV, it shows that there is room for research on the real life impacts of electoral reform.

In a 2006 article, Jerdonek explored multiple methods for increasing voter turnout. The article explored options such as universal voter turnout, early voting and instant runoff voting. Jerdonek argued RCV elections are a cost-effective way to change voter behavior and increase turnout. In order to reach this conclusion, he studied five

jurisdictions that had implemented RCV including: San Francisco, California; Oakland, California; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Pierce County, Washington and Aspen, Colorado. He found that RCV elections had replaced costly runoff elections in two jurisdictions, and replaced primaries in the other three. Ultimately, the research found that RCV elections had much higher turnout than primary and runoff elections and produced even higher turnout when combined with other reforms (Jeronek, 2006).

These studies have established a positive relationship between RCV electoral systems and voter turnout; however, more research needs to be done in order to confirm the relationship. These studies focus on the impacts of RCV but do not explore the factors that lead a city to implement RCV voting. While an increase in voter turnout might be one of these factors, it is important to study others as well.

### **The San Francisco Case**

A majority of the research surrounding the implementation of RCV in American cities focuses on San Francisco. This is likely due to the city's early reform efforts. San Francisco was one of the first cities in the nation to implement RCV; because of this, the effects of the reform have been more thoroughly evaluated. My own research stresses the need for similar studies in other cities that have implemented RCV such as Berkeley, San Leandro and Oakland.

As discussed above, Jerdonek (2006) studied the impacts of RCV on voter turnout. This research uses cases from cities across the United States to evaluate voter turnout in various elections. One example used is San Francisco. In 2005, when the city used RCV for the first time, it saw a dramatic increase in voter turnout especially among poor and

racially diverse communities. However, San Francisco also moved elections from December to November, aligning them with state and national elections. Jeronek (2006) argues that the increase in voter turnout was due in part to the move in Election Day. By syncing local elections with state and national elections San Francisco election officials were able to create a greater awareness. This research addresses many important issues surrounding voter turnout, however, its inability to distinguish between RCV and a change in election date prove the need for more RCV specific research.

Hill & Richie (2005) conducted research on San Francisco's first RCV election. They ultimately found the election to be successful due to cost-savings and faster processing of election outcomes. They estimated that the city saved nearly \$1.2 million in 2004 alone, by avoiding a citywide runoff. They also praised the election's efficiency and ability to determine a clear winner. They conclude by deeming the RCV election a success and suggest that it will become more successful as the understanding of RCV increases.

Two studies, Cook & Latterman (2011) and Neely, Blash & Cook (2004), examined voter understanding of RCV in San Francisco. Neely, Blash & Cook (2004), focused on San Francisco's first RCV election. They found that a majority of voters understood RCV and knew that it was being used before coming to the polls. However, those who did not know about RCV, and did not understand it, tended to be less educated and identified with races and ethnicities other than Asian or White. These findings were mirrored in a study done by Neely, Blash & Cook's. They used San Francisco's citywide election for Sheriff, District Attorney and Mayor in order to evaluate voter behavior

including: overvoting, undervoting and ranking of candidates (Cook & Latterman, 2011). They found that a majority of voters in the 2011 election cast valid ballots, signaling that a majority of the electorate understands RCV. However, those who cast invalid ballots tended to be in precincts with higher minority and progressive populations. These findings create a need for more research regarding RCV's impact on minority populations.

RCV is a relatively new concept in the United States; therefore most of the research on RCV in American cities is recent. The studies that have been done in San Francisco can be replicated in other cities such as Berkeley, San Leandro and Oakland. Interest in RCV is growing as more cities begin to implement it, creating a need for a better understanding of the implementation process and impacts of RCV.

## **Conclusions**

The existing research has shown that RCV has impacts on the jurisdictions where it is implemented, specifically on voter turnout. However, these relationships need to be explored in greater detail. In this thesis, I will add to the existing research by exploring new jurisdictions, including: San Leandro, Berkeley, Oakland and Davis. This research will create a greater understanding of RCV in California, the factors that lead a city to enact RCV and the implications that follow.

## Chapter Three

### METHODOLOGY

This study uses in person face-to-face and over the phone interviews to analyze electoral reform in California cities. In order to determine what factors make a city more likely to implement Ranked Choice Voting (RCV), I conducted interviews with city officials from three cities who have successfully enacted the reform, and one where reform passed via an advisory measure but was not implemented. I used these interviews to determine what made each city unique and what contributed to their electoral reform process. Overall, I conducted eight interviews with city officials in four cities. The city officials included a variety of positions, both appointed and elected, and included individuals who currently work within the jurisdictions and those that have in the past.

These interviews allowed me to collect the necessary data to analyze electoral reform in California; the results of this analysis will be discussed in Chapter Four. In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss my rationale for using interviews, provide information about my interviews and interview questions and discuss the possible limitations to my methodology.

#### **Rationale for the Interview Approach to the Research**

For this research, interviews were the best methodology because they provided first person experience and expertise regarding electoral reform in each city. Controlled experiments are often seen as the most effective research method, however, this only applies when relationships are well understood and a specific factor can be isolated and tested. In this study the variables that contribute to electoral reform are not well known.

Because of this, I used interviews to explore a variety of factors that affect a city's likelihood of enacting and implementing electoral reform. I was unable to use a controlled sample because so few cities in California have considered electoral reform. Because of this, my sample was chosen from the cities in California who have implemented Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) and the one other city, Davis, where reform passed as a ballot measure but was not implemented.

Interviews allowed me to explore each case study in greater detail and gain a more in-depth understanding as opposed to surveys and written responses. In this study, they allowed me to explore the rationale behind a city's choice to enact and implement electoral reform more thoroughly. I was able to meet with a majority of interviewees in person. Face-to-face interviews provide an advantage over other methods because they allow the researcher to observe nonverbal cues, ask follow up questions or better explain questions if there is any confusion.

After considering multiple methodologies, I decided interviews would be the best option for this study. They were feasible given my timeline and close location to all four cities and they allowed me to capture a large amount of rich data from each interviewee.

### **General Information about the Interviews**

Throughout my research, I conducted eight interviews with individuals from four cities. I conducted interviews with the cities of Berkeley, Oakland, San Leandro and Davis. San Francisco, the only other city who has implemented RCV in California, was analyzed using existing research in Chapter Two. My sample size was already defined by the history of electoral reform in California; however, I did have flexibility when

choosing city officials. I interviewed two officials from each city; their positions were a variety of: city managers, city clerks, city staff, elected officials and members of appointed groups that were developed to study electoral reform.

In order to conduct my interviews, I worked with individuals to schedule one-hour long meetings to discuss my research questions. A majority of these meetings took place face-to-face, however, three were conducted via phone. The phone conversations occurred for multiple reasons including: last minute conflicts, travel and time restrictions. In some instances, I followed up with interviewees via email or phone to clarify their responses.

Before conducting my interviews, I completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. I submitted a proposal, which included: proposed questions, the rationale for my approach and a discussion of any risks to my participants. My research approach received approval from IRB at the department level. When conducting my interviews, I explained to each participant that I had been through the IRB process and had them sign an informed consent form, stating that they were participating voluntarily and that the potential risks of the study were not greater than those encountered in daily life.

### **Interview Questions**

My first step in developing interview questions was to conduct web and newspaper based research on each city. I searched city websites, local and national newspaper databases and the websites of electoral reform advocates and critics, using keywords such as each city's name, "electoral reform," "ranked choice voting" and "instant runoff voting." This research provided me with background knowledge on each city and a history of their reform efforts.

Next, I developed interview questions to gain a better understanding of each city's electoral reform process and implementation strategy. The interview questions ranged from broad, overarching questions about city culture, to detailed questions regarding implementation. I developed two sets of interview questions, one for cities who have implemented electoral reform (Figure 3.1), and one for Davis (Figure 3.2), the city where reform passed but was not implemented. For the cities that have implemented reform, the questions went a step further and explored the impact that reform has had on election outcomes and civic engagement.

Figure 3.1 Interview Questions for Berkeley, Oakland and San Leandro

1. Background Questions
  - a) In your opinion, what are the core values of your city? What makes it unique?
  - b) Were you directly involved with the reform process? If yes, what was your role? If no, when did you become involved with the city/elections?
  - c) How long did the reform process take? Please give a brief background on the reform efforts and how they were passed in the city.
  - d) Who did you see the most support and opposition from?
2. Implementing Ranked Choice Voting
  - a) In your opinion, why was electoral reform possible in (city name)?
  - b) What issues did the city face when they implemented Ranked Choice Voting? How did they inform citizens and conduct the first elections?
3. Effects of Ranked Choice Voting
  - a) Did the implementation of Ranked Choice Voting change the political culture of the city? More specifically, has the city experienced a change in civic engagement and voter turnout?
  - b) Have you noticed a shift in campaigning, voter turnout or election outcomes?
4. Wrap-Up
  - a) Is there anything else you would like to add?

Figure 3.2 Interview Questions for Davis

1. Background Questions
  - a) In your opinion, what are the core values of your city? What makes it unique?



- b) Were you directly involved with the reform effort? If yes, what was your role? If no, when did you become involved with the city/elections?

## 2. The Process

- a) What process did the city use to consider electoral reform?
- b) What were the key issues that were raised on both sides? Who did you see the most support and opposition from?
- c) What issues did the city face when they considered electoral reform?
- d) In your opinion, why was electoral reform unsuccessful?

## 3. The Future of Elections in Davis

- a) Do you think electoral reform could happen in Davis now? Eventually?
- b) What would need to change for Davis to enact electoral reform?

## 4. Wrap-Up

- a) Is there anything else you would like to add?

### **Interview Conditions**

The interviews took place in multiple locations including: the individual's offices, cafes and over the phone. Each interview lasted between 30 to 90 minutes. In most cases, individuals were excited to participate in the study and discuss reform efforts. However, in some instances individuals preferred to talk about electoral reform more generally rather than attributing their insights to a particular city. I had the most difficulty when scheduling interviews. Due to busy schedules that were exacerbated by this year's local and presidential elections, I had difficulty scheduling interviews with election officials. These obstacles slowed down my data collection process. However, once scheduled, my interviews went smoothly and provided me with valuable information to analyze.

### **Data Analysis**

In order to analyze my data, I began by sorting my interview notes into themes based on each question. Once I determined the main findings from each city I began to look at all of the responses as a whole. This allowed me to see the commonalities and differences across the cities. While preparing for my interviews, and during my analysis, I

looked to historical documents such as newspapers and voter turnout records. These materials supplemented the main findings from my interviews and are integrated into my analysis.

### **Possible Limitations to the Methodology**

As with any methodology, interviews do pose several limitations. First, finding the right individuals within each city proved challenging. For most cities the electoral reform process started over a decade ago. Some individuals who worked for the city during that time have since moved on to new positions. In order to account for this I was able to conduct interviews with a few individuals who had since moved onto other opportunities. This added another layer to my interview process, and provided a greater overview of both the reform efforts and the implementation process.

By conducting interviews, I was able to gain an in-depth insight into each city's history and electoral reform process, however, this was limited to the experiences of two individuals from each city. Other methods, for example surveys, would have allowed me to collect information from a larger sample; however, the information would have been less in-depth, and perhaps less useful.

### **Conclusion**

Ultimately, using interviews allowed me to collect the necessary data to analyze electoral reform in California cities. Each interviewee provided a vast amount of information about their city; it's culture, electoral history and political processes. These results will be discussed and analyzed in the following chapter.

## Chapter Four

### FINDINGS

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings from my interviews with city officials. The chapter is separated into two parts. The first, combines interviews with city officials in Berkeley, San Leandro and Oakland, where Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) has been implemented since 2010. The second provides a comparison with the City of Davis where RCV was not implemented. In the conclusion I will discuss the main findings, comparisons between the cities and summarize themes that emerged during the interviews.

#### **Ranked Choice Voting In Alameda County**

In 2010, Berkeley, San Leandro and Oakland, three cities in Alameda County, implemented RCV. Each of the three cities share similar traits and are in the same geographical region. When asked to describe the core values and traits of their cities, many answers were repeated including: activism, innovation, diversity and a highly educated population.

In each of the four sections below I have combined the findings from each city in order to discuss trends and themes. The first section focuses on the motivations behind the move to RCV and the arguments that supported and opposed the reform. Next, I will discuss how they designed their RCV systems. I will then discuss how they approached the implementation of RCV and the educational outreach that was developed. Finally, I will discuss the effects RCV has had on the cities, their elections and political environments.

### **Motivations Behind Ranked Choice Voting**

Each city discussed many motivations for implementing RCV. For some cities, such as San Leandro, the discussion around RCV began after a controversial election. In this instance, a winning candidate received less than 50% of the popular vote triggering a series of electoral reforms. Others hoped that RCV would increase voter turnout because the use of RCV would mean that a city could hold fewer elections. Multiple elections would still be held on occasion for statewide and national primaries; however, citywide elections would only take place once a year. They would hold one election in November, rather than an initial election in June with the possibility of a runoff in November. By having one election for city offices, which was held at the same time as statewide and national general elections, the cities hoped more voters would turnout on Election Day.

The advocates for RCV also hoped that it would make voters feel more enfranchised because their vote would count even if their first choice lost by a significant margin. Another motivation stressed in the interviews was the hope to alter campaigns. Because RCV allows for multiple votes for the same seat, advocates hoped that it would ease negative campaigning and encourage candidates to work together.

The most emphasized motivation was to avoid runoffs. Previously, each city would hold elections in June and if a single candidate did not receive over 50% of the vote they would hold runoff elections in November. This second election imposed extra costs on the cities, lengthened the campaign season and created a burnout among voters. The cost of runoff elections was a big motivation behind the move to RCV (Metinko, 2010). Advocates argued that the costs of implementing RCV would be less than the costs

of runoff elections. Even if a city has to hold statewide or national primaries, or special elections, Ranked Choice Voting would eliminate the cost of primaries for local offices. One local official summarized motivations in their city by saying “RCV is more about what you avoid, runoffs, than what you get.”

### **The Development of Ranked Choice Voting**

The cities began to develop their RCV system by first deciding to implement the same system and share the cost. They began by developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Alameda County Registrar of Voters (ROV) and each of the three cities. The MOU divided the costs of developing and upgrading RCV software, developing educational materials, conducting voter outreach and training for poll workers. The MOU went into effect in 2010 and each city continues to pay a share of the costs proportionate to the size of their eligible voting population, not to exceed \$1,500,000.00. The MOU also requires any additional voting jurisdiction that chooses to implement RCV in the future to join the MOU and reimburse Oakland, San Leandro and Berkeley for their share of the setup costs (Russo, 2010).

The County ROV contracted with Sequoia Voting Systems to develop the necessary RCV software and ballot counting program. The model used was based off of San Francisco’s RCV system. This was in large part due to the fact that San Francisco was the only other RCV system in California at the time. Once a system was developed it needed to be approved by the Secretary of State. There was a lot of uncertainty over the system requirements and the impacts that RCV would have in San Francisco. For these reasons, the system took more time to be developed and approved. Secretary of State

Debra Bowen approved the County's RCV system on December 22, 2009 for first time use in November 2010 elections. The 2010 implementation timeline gave the ROV enough time to ensure that the system was reliable and gave each city enough time to prepare candidates and voters for the change.

### **The Implementation of Ranked Choice Voting**

During the implementation of RCV everyone involved faced a learning curve. City officials and the County ROV had to become educated on the system and its impacts. Candidates had to learn how to adjust their campaigns to focus on single election and to adjust campaign tactics to fit a RCV system. However, the voting population was arguably the most important group of people who faced a learning curve.

The cities understood that a large educational campaign was needed to inform voters and ensure that they understood the new system and used it correctly. Each city hosted community events to explain RCV and attended meetings hosted by community groups, festivals and neighborhood outings to connect with voters. The cities emphasized the variety of approaches that were used with the hope of reaching all populations. This in person outreach was coupled with digital materials such as videos and online FAQs, as well as mailers that went out to each registered voter. The cities had to be cognizant of language barriers during their outreach. They translated materials into multiple languages including: Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Korean and Chinese.

A large part of the initial outreach was the development of a comprehensive pamphlet. The pamphlet, shown in Figure 4.1, includes a brief overview of RCV, Frequently Asked Questions, a sample ballot and contact information for each language.


Figure 4.1 Ranked Choice Voting Brochure

**WHAT IS RANKED-CHOICE VOTING?**  
Ranked-Choice Voting (also known as instant runoff voting) allows voters to rank a first, second and third choice candidate for a single office. This makes it possible to elect local officials by majority vote without the need for a separate run-off election.

**WHO IS ELECTED USING RCV?**  
Starting in November 2010, voters in Berkeley, Oakland and San Leandro used Ranked-Choice Voting to elect most local officials. Ranked-Choice Voting does not affect the election of County, State and Federal officials or the adoption of ballot measures.

**HOW DOES RCV WORK?**  
To start, all first choice votes are counted. Any candidate who receives more than 50% of the first choices is declared the winner. If no candidate receives more than 50% of the first choices, a process of eliminating candidates and transferring votes begins (second choice ranking counts only when a first choice candidate is eliminated):

- Step One:** The candidate who received the fewest number of first choices is eliminated from the race.
- Step Two:** Voters who selected the eliminated candidate as their first choice will have their vote transferred to their second choice.
- Step Three:** All the votes are recounted.
- Step Four:** If any candidate receives more than 50% of the votes, he or she is declared the winner. If no candidate receives more than 50% of the votes, the process of eliminating candidates and transferring votes is repeated until one candidate has a winning majority.



**Registrar of Voters**

**THE RANKED-CHOICE VOTING BALLOT**  
This brochure shows a sample Ranked-Choice Voting Ballot. To review the official ballot, please see your voter information pamphlet or go online to [www.acgov.org/rov](http://www.acgov.org/rov)

**HOW TO FIND OUT MORE**  
For more information on Ranked-Choice Voting, please contact the Registrar of Voters Office.

Alameda County  
Registrar of Voters  
1225 Fallon Street, Room G-1  
Oakland, CA 94612


English: (510) 272-6973  
Spanish: (510) 272-6975  
Chinese: (510) 208-9665  
Tagalog: (510) 272-6952  
Vietnamese: (510) 272-6956  
TDD: (510) 208-4967

**VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT:**  
[www.acgov.org/rov/rcv](http://www.acgov.org/rov/rcv)

**Ranked-Choice Voting**  
Voting made easy

**Ranked-Choice Voting**

**“Voting Made Easy”**



## How to Mark the Ranked-Choice Ballot

**First Column**  
Mark your **first choice** candidate by completing the arrow pointing to your choice.

**Second Column**  
To indicate a **second choice**, select a **different** candidate in the second column by completing the arrow pointing to your choice.

**Third Column**  
To indicate a **third choice**, select a **different** candidate in the third column by completing the arrow pointing to your choice.


**Keep In Mind:**  
Your **second choice** will be counted only if your **first choice** candidate has been eliminated. Your **third choice** will be counted only if both your **first choice** and **second choice** candidates have been eliminated.

**If you select the same candidate in more than one column, your vote for that candidate will count **ONLY ONCE**.**

NONPARTISAN	
CITY	
FOR MAYOR	
<b>1</b>	<b>FIRST CHOICE</b>
<small>Vote for One</small>	
ELEANOR ROOSEVELT	←
BOOKER T. WASHINGTON	←
DIEGO RIVERA	←
ARTHUR MILLER	←
SHIRLEY HORN	←
BRUCE LEE	←
	←

NONPARTISAN	
CITY	
FOR MAYOR	
<b>2</b>	<b>SECOND CHOICE</b>
<small>Vote for One</small>	
ELEANOR ROOSEVELT	←
BOOKER T. WASHINGTON	←
DIEGO RIVERA	←
ARTHUR MILLER	←
SHIRLEY HORN	←
BRUCE LEE	←
	←

NONPARTISAN	
CITY	
FOR MAYOR	
<b>3</b>	<b>THIRD CHOICE</b>
<small>Vote for One</small>	
ELEANOR ROOSEVELT	←
BOOKER T. WASHINGTON	←
DIEGO RIVERA	←
ARTHUR MILLER	←
SHIRLEY HORN	←
BRUCE LEE	←
	←



**To Vote:**  
Connect the arrow as shown here.

**Write-In Candidates**  
If you wish to vote for a qualified write-in candidate for any of your three choices, write the person's name on the blank line provided and complete the arrow pointing to your choice.

Source: Alameda County Registrar of Voters, 2012

A majority of the educational outreach was conducted in the 2010 and 2012 elections. Because city council seats are split between two election cycles, only half of each city's population voted in each local election. After 2012, every jurisdiction had participated in at least one RCV election. In 2014, the cities did not ask for additional outreach from the county; however, they did continue using the previously developed materials and shared them with voters.

### **Impacts of Ranked Choice Voting**

Ranked Choice Voting has impacted the political environment and culture within the cities. First, it has accomplished its intended purpose to avoid runoff elections. San Leandro avoided runoff elections during the 2010 and 2014 mayoral races, the 2012 District 2 and District 4 city council races and the 2014 District 1 city council race. Berkeley has avoided runoff elections in the 2010 District 7 city council race and the 2014 District 8 race. Oakland has avoided ten runoffs, including the 2010 and 2014 mayoral races, the 2010 District 4 and District 6 city council races, the 2012 District 1, District 3, District 5 and at-large city council races and the 2014 District 2 and District 6 city council races (Alameda County Registrar of Voters, 2016). Overall, RCV in the county has eliminated the need for 17 individual runoffs over three election cycles.

Despite the success in reducing runoff elections, there has been some controversy surrounding RCV. In the 2012 San Leandro City Council election for District 2, an election winner received 38% of first choice votes while the runner up had 42.4%. After RCV, the winner had 50.3% of the vote and the runner up had 48.7%. The fact that the runner up had more first place votes than the winner was controversial and caused some



people to be skeptical of RCV. The City of Oakland faced a similar controversy. During the first RCV election in 2010, Oakland elected a mayor who had less first choice votes than the runner up. Because this was the first election using RCV there was a lot of backlash against the system and it gained attention nationally (Elinson and Shih, 2010). However, the city has continued to use RCV with fewer controversies.

The cities have not seen a drastic change in voter turnout. Table 4.1 shows the voter turnout rates for Berkeley and for Alameda County as a whole. Voter participation has continued to follow past trends, and peaked during presidential election years. During interviews it was stated that Oakland saw some changes in turnout during the 2012 election; however, they attributed the turnout to the presidential race.

Table 4.1 Voter Turnout in Berkeley and Alameda County

City of Berkeley Turnout		Alameda County General Election Turnout	
Year	Voter Turnout	Year	Voter Turnout
1996*	60.00%	1996*	Unavailable
1998	60.00%	1998	Unavailable
2000*	75.60%	2000*	Unavailable
2002	58.90%	2002	53.44%
2004*	77.30%	2004*	76.51%
2006	66.20%	2006	61.23%
2008*	77.50%	2008*	78.27%
2010	63.10%	2010	61.17%
2012*	73.68%	2012*	74.30%
2014	50.42%	2014	45.04%
* Indicates presidential election		* Indicates presidential election	
Shading indicates RCV election		Shading indicates RCV election	
Source: City of Berkeley, 2016)		Source: Election Schedule/Results, 2016)	

Many city officials reported that it is harder to predict RCV election outcomes. In some cases, this draws more attention to the campaigns and changes campaign efforts. For example, if a voter has already established a first place vote the candidates are focusing on getting their second or third choice ranking. Some candidates have started to work together and campaign for each other by telling voters whom to put second and third. This behavior occurs more often when there are a high number of candidates running for one seat.

RCV has had significant impacts in Alameda County. It has helped to avoid runoff elections in 17 circumstances and it has altered campaign strategies. Voter turnout has remained steady with the implementation of RCV, suggesting that it has neither encouraged nor discouraged voter participation. The impacts of RCV will continuously evolve as it is used in future elections.

### **Davis**

The City of Davis considered a move to Ranked Choice Voting in 2006. The city developed an advisory council, the Governance Task Force, to look into the change. The advisory council recommended RCV, and an advisory measure was placed on the ballot. The measure passed with 55.4% of the population urging the city council to implement RCV (Yolo Elections Office, 2006). However, the city could not implement RCV without also adopting a charter. Ultimately, due to the charter's lack of specificity and structure, it was not adopted and the city remained a general law city with "first past the post" elections.

Davis shares similar traits with the cities in Alameda County. During interviews the city was described as being: politically liberal, ahead of trends and having a highly educated and activist community.

A majority of support for RCV came from interest groups, community members and the advisory council. Advocates supported RCV with the hopes that it would help disenfranchised voters who are eliminated from the election when their first choice candidate loses. They also believed it could ease the disenfranchisement on small groups and populations, discourage strategic voting, encourage cooperation among candidates and reduce election costs (The City of Davis Governance Task Force, 2005). The advisory council understood that RCV was more complex than the current system, but they found the benefits to outweigh the risks.

In Davis, the push for RCV did not focus on its cost-saving aspects like it did in Alameda County. This is because Davis operated using at large elections, which eliminate the need for a runoff election. In at large elections with multiple seats a majority of the vote is not necessary to win a seat. Therefore, runoff elections did not exist in Davis.

The city saw opposition for RCV that focused on its complexity, its cost and the need for a city charter. Community members were upset that RCV could allow for a winner who had less first choice votes than the runner up. Ultimately, the opposition argued that the system was complex and unnecessary.

The move to RCV hinged on the city adopting a charter. The charter did not pass, halting efforts to make the switch to RCV. The city saw less of an effort to adopt the charter, in part because it lacked structure and specificity. The case was not made that a

charter was needed and that its intended impacts were necessary. The city could reconsider a move to RCV if they adopt a charter in the future. As more of the population becomes comfortable with alternative voting methods and city structures, the possibility could become more likely. However, other forms of electoral reform might be better for the city depending on its current needs and political environment.

### **Conclusions**

Each of the four cities discussed in this research share similar traits, suggesting that highly educated, progressive and innovative cities are more likely to consider electoral reform in the form of RCV. The main difference between Davis and the three cities in Alameda County is the fact that Davis was not a charter city. The cities each shared similar motivations and wanted to use a RCV system to improve voter participation and eliminate runoff elections in order to reduce costs.

## Chapter Five

### CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this thesis I have discussed the history and impact of electoral reform and have discussed new findings related to Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) in city elections. In this chapter, I will begin by summarizing the key findings of my research. Next, I will offer suggestions for future research in this field. I will then discuss the policy implications of my findings and offer final conclusions.

#### **Summary of Findings**

Through interviews with city officials I was able to determine characteristics that make a city more likely to consider and adopt RCV. Each city that was evaluated in this study identified itself as having a highly educated and progressive or innovative population. These cities had a history of activism and thought of themselves as leaders of change both politically and socially. The key factor that set Davis apart from the other cities and prevented the city from implementing RCV was the fact that it was not a charter city.

The cities that have implemented RCV have experienced changes in their political environment and culture. The changes that have surfaced in this research should be studied in more detail to create a better understanding of RCV and its impacts.

With the use of RCV, these cities have been able to avoid 17 runoff instances over three election cycles. RCV has also changed the structure of campaigns in these cities. Candidates have started to adjust to the new system and are starting to work together on campaigns. Candidates have requested that voters who put them as their first choice

candidate also put another candidate as their second or third choice. This is an interesting change for local government elections in California. Local elections in California are nonpartisan so candidates typically run alone and do not work together. Berkeley, Oakland and San Leandro have only used RCV for three general election cycles, yet the impacts of RCV have already emerged. These impacts will continue to evolve as the cities continue to use RCV.

### **Suggestions for Research**

As I discussed in Chapter Two, the research on Ranked Choice Voting is limited. A majority of the existing research focuses mainly on cases of RCV in other countries, and the limited amount research that has been done in the United States is restricted to early examples such as San Francisco. This thesis has looked into newer cases of RCV in order to explore the motivations behind electoral reform, as well as its implementation and impact.

RCV in Alameda County is still being used and its impact will continue to develop. Future research should continue to track its use and measure the impact it is having on each city, as well as on other cities throughout the world. There is a need for quantitative research to explore RCV's impact on voter turnout and larger qualitative projects can evaluate RCV from the experience of the voter rather than through city officials.

As technology develops it may become easier to collect data on voting patterns and motives. This may lead to new forms of electoral reform as well as new research tools and developments throughout the field.

## **Policy Implications**

There are many policy implications that can stem from this research. First, laws such as AB1294, which was vetoed in 2007, could be enacted to allow general law cities to enact electoral reform without having to adopt a charter and make the switch to being a charter city (California State Assembly, 2007). Currently, only 121 of California's 482 cities are charter cities (League of CA Cities, 2016). A bill similar to AB1294 would allow 361 other cities in California to consider electoral reform. This would allow each city to decide which electoral system meets its needs.

Statewide or national policies can inform RCV systems. San Francisco and Alameda County each had to have their processes approved by the Secretary of State's Office. This was a lengthy and costly process. Because these cities were the first to implement RCV there were no systems in place to copy. Now that multiple cities in California are using RCV, and it has been used in multiple elections, the state can develop guidelines to expedite the approval process for other cities.

There is also a need for more research and education surrounding RCV. The Secretary of State's Office should facilitate this research and its dissemination. The office is responsible for overseeing elections and electoral processes throughout the state. The office should work with nonpartisan academic institutions and nonprofits, through a request for proposal (RFP) system, to conduct the necessary research and provide technical assistance to cities interested in electoral reform. This would eliminate any biases and partisan influence within the research. This research could explore the

following: the impacts of RCV, its consequences and benefits, how it is best implemented and best practices on informing residents of the change in electoral system.

Policies can also be developed at the state and local levels to guard against unintended consequences of RCV. One example of this would be a statewide law requiring cities that switch to RCV to continuously provide educational information about RCV and how to use this system. At the local level, cities can implement policies to guide their RCV process and elections. For example, cities can implement campaigning policies and offer information to candidates participating in RCV for the first time. RCV has only been used in a few cities throughout California. Because of this, there is a need to research the electoral system and to develop policies around it.

## **Conclusions**

Democracy is a vital part of American politics. The way we conduct elections and the methods we use to collect voter input have a strong impact on political environments and outcomes. This research has looked into four cases to evaluate RCV and electoral reform throughout local governments in California. I have found similarities across the cities that have considered implementing electoral reform. Additionally, a switch to RCV has had significant impacts on the electoral processes and the political environments of each city. I hope my research inspires other cities to assess their current electoral systems and creates more conversation about electoral reform at the local level.



## References

- Ahmed, A. (2013). *Democracy and the politics of electoral system choice: engineering electoral dominance*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Alameda County Registrar of Voters. (2012). *Ranked-choice voting* [Brochure]. Retrieved from <https://www.acgov.org/rov/rcv/media.htm>
- Alameda County Registrar of Voters. (2016). *Election schedule/results*. Retrieved from <https://www.acgov.org/rov/elections/schedule.htm>
- Bawn, K. (1993). The logic of institutional preferences: German electoral law as a social choice outcome. *American Journal of Political Science*, 37 (4), 965-989.
- Benoit, K. (2001). District magnitude, electoral formula, and the number of parties. *European Journal of Political Research*, 39(2), 203-224.
- Benoit, K. (2007). Electoral laws as political consequences: explaining the origins and change of electoral institutions, *Annual Review Political Science*, 10, 363-90.
- Bobier, B. (2010). Berkeley moves forward with instant runoff voting. *New America Foundation*.
- Boix, C. (1999). Setting the rules of the game: The choice of electoral systems in advanced democracies. *The American Political Science Review*, 93(3), 609-624.
- Bouricius, T., Kleppner, C., & Richie, R. (2003). Instant runoffs: a cheaper, fairer, better way to conduct elections. *National Civic Review*, 89, 95-110.
- Branche, A. (2010, November 1) San Francisco goes to the ballot box for electoral reform [Web log post]. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/afton-branche/san-francisco-goes-tothe\\_b\\_777255.html,%20http://](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/afton-branche/san-francisco-goes-tothe_b_777255.html,%20http://)

Caldelago, C. (2014, December 1). California's record-low voter turnout stirs anxieties.

*Sacramento Bee*. Retrieved from <http://www.sacbee.com>

California State Assembly. (2007). AB1294. Sacramento, CA. Retrieved from

[ftp://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/asm/ab\\_1251-1300/ab\\_1294\\_bill\\_20070425\\_amended\\_asm\\_v97.html](ftp://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/asm/ab_1251-1300/ab_1294_bill_20070425_amended_asm_v97.html)

Californians for Electoral Reform. (2016). What is Instant Runoff Voting? Retrieved

from <http://www.cfer.org/learn/aboutpg1.php>

City of Berkeley. (2016). Election information: General election voter turnout history.

Retrieved from [http://www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/Clerk/Elections/Election\\_\\_Voter\\_Turnout\\_History.aspx](http://www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/Clerk/Elections/Election__Voter_Turnout_History.aspx)

City of San Francisco. (2016). Demonstration ballot. Retrieved from [http://sfgov.org/](http://sfgov.org/elections/sites/default/files/Documents/VoterEducation/SF%20Demo%20Ballot%202015%20EN-SP.pdf)

[elections/sites/default/files/Documents/VoterEducation/SF%20Demo%20Ballot%202015%20EN-SP.pdf](http://sfgov.org/elections/sites/default/files/Documents/VoterEducation/SF%20Demo%20Ballot%202015%20EN-SP.pdf)

Cook, C. & Latterman, D. (2011). Ranked choice voting in the 2011 San Francisco

municipal elections: final report. *McCarthy Center Faculty Publications*, Paper 2.

Davis Choice Voting (2006, November 8). 55% Davis voters say yes! [web log post].

Retrieved from <http://www.davischoicevoting.org/>

Egelko, B. (2010, April 20). S.F. instant-runoff voting upheld. *SF Gate*. Retrieved from

<http://www.sfgate.com>

Elinson, Z. & Shih, G. (2010, November 11). The winning strategy in Oakland:

concentrate on being 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> choice. *New York Times*. Retrieved from

<http://www.nytimes.com>

- Ellis, A., Reilly, B., Reynolds, A. (2008). Electoral system design: the new international IDEA handbook. *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*
- FairVote. (2016). Ranked choice voting. Retrieved from <http://www.fairvote.org/rcv#rcvbenefits>
- Hill, S. (2004, October 11). S.F. takes lead with instant-runoff voting *SF Gate*. Retrieved from <http://www.sfgate.com>
- Hill, S. & Richie, R. (2005). Success for instant runoff voting in San Francisco. *National Civic Review*, 94, 65-68.
- Jerdonek, C. (2006). Bringing the election to the voters with instant runoff voting. *National Civic Review*, 95, 48-53.
- Kamlarz, P. (2007). Status update- instant runoff voting for municipal elections. *Office of the City Manager, City of Berkeley*.
- Katz-Lacabe, M. (2010, January 4). What is ranked choice voting? [web log post]. Retrieved from: <http://www.sanleandrobytes.com/archives/009315.html>
- Knight Foundation. (2015). Why millennials don't vote for Mayor. Retrieved from <http://www.knightfoundation.org/features/votelocal/>
- Krompf, M. & Kimball D. (2012). Helping America vote: the limits of electoral reform. New York, NY; London, UK: Routledge.
- League of CA Cities. (2016). Charter cities. Retrieved from [https://www.cacities.org/Resources-Documents/Resources-Section/Charter-Cities/Charter\\_Cities-List](https://www.cacities.org/Resources-Documents/Resources-Section/Charter-Cities/Charter_Cities-List)

- Leoni, M. & Skinnell, E. (2003). The California voting rights act. League of California Cities.
- Marron, B. (2004). One person, one vote, several elections? Instant runoff voting and the Constitution. *Vermont Law Review*, 28(2), 343-372.
- Metinko, C. (2010, November 13). San Leandro to look at future of ranked-choice voting. *Inside Bay Area*. Retrieved from <http://www.insidebayarea.com>
- Neely, F., Blash, L., & Cook, C. (2005). An assessment of ranked-choice voting in the San Francisco 2004 election. *Public Research Institute*.
- Nielson, L. (2011). Instant-runoff voting and attitudes on democracy in the United States: results from a laboratory experiment. *University of California, San Diego, Department of Political Science*, 1-24.
- Renwick, A. (2010). The politics of electoral reform: changing the rules of democracy. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press
- Russo, J. (2010). Report and resolution authorizing the city administrator to negotiate and execute a memorandum of understanding between the County of Alameda and the Cities of Oakland, Berkeley and San Leandro regarding ranked choice voting. Retrieved from <http://clerkwebsvr1.oaklandnet.com/attachments/23906.pdf>
- Simmons, L. (2010). Status report on ranked choice voting. Retrieved from <http://clerkwebsvr1.oaklandnet.com/attachments/23870.pdf>
- The City of Davis Governance Task Force. (2005). Final report to the Davis City Council.

The Committee for Ranked Choice Voting. (2016). *FAQ*. Retrieved from

<http://www.rcvmaine.com/faq>

The Editorial Board. (2014, November 11). The worst voter turnout in 72 years.

*New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com>

Yolo Elections Office. (2006). Davis Measure L. Retrieved from

[http://www.yoloelections.org/election-returns/archives/20061107/davis\\_1](http://www.yoloelections.org/election-returns/archives/20061107/davis_1)