

# **Consequences of Final-Five Voting for Communities of Color**

**Professor Andrea Benjamin**

University of Oklahoma

The Clara Luper Department of African & African American Studies

**Professor Barry C. Burden**

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Department of Political Science

Elections Research Center

October 22, 2021

We thank Jess Esplin for excellent research assistance in preparing this report. This research was supported in part by grants from the Institute for Political Innovation to The University of Oklahoma and the University of Wisconsin.

Final-Five Voting is an election system that has two key features: (1) a catch-all, nonpartisan primary election from which the top five candidates of any party advance to (2) a general election that uses ranked choice voting (RCV) to select a winner. This means that all voters participate in a single primary featuring candidates who may be of different or the same party affiliation, or of no party affiliation at all, and in which each voter selects a single candidate. Up to five top vote earners then compete in a RCV election in which voters rank the candidates in order of preference and elimination rounds are used as necessary until one candidate has a majority of remaining votes.

This report investigates the likely consequences of Final-Five Voting (FFV) for constituents, voters, political organizations, and candidates from underrepresented minority groups, which we refer to as communities of color. We explore how FFV impacts the participation among, representation of, and government performance on behalf of these communities relative to non-Hispanic whites. We consider these questions in the context of FFV in congressional elections because the interest in implementing the reform is focused at that level.

It is imperative to state at the outset that it is extremely difficult to produce firm conclusions about a reform yet to be implemented. A key challenge to this analysis is that FFV has not actually been used in any jurisdiction in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Without direct evidence about its effects, we must extrapolate from “adjacent” practices that share some characteristics of FFV. The two key adjacent practices are:

- (1) *RCV*, as described above, which is used mostly in partisan primaries, nonpartisan general elections at the local level, or in multimember districts, and is sometimes used in other countries
- (2) the *top-two primary*, from which the two leading vote getters proceed to the general election, used in some form in several states.<sup>2</sup>

We rely heavily on existing scholarship on these neighboring practices and generalize using theoretical understandings and empirical patterns to anticipate how FFV would affect minority communities. We rely most on peer-reviewed articles and books by independent academic researchers rather than materials produced by advocacy groups.

---

<sup>1</sup> Final Four Voting, recently adopted in Alaska, bears the closest resemblance to the FFV election system outlined here. It will be used in elections for statewide executive offices, state legislative seats, and congressional representatives beginning in 2022.

<sup>2</sup> California and Washington use the top-two primary for most statewide and state legislative elections in which candidates of any party affiliations participate. Louisiana uses a similar system, but the first stage election results in a winner without a second stage election if one candidate wins a majority of the vote. Nebraska uses a nonpartisan primary in which the top-two candidates also run without party labels in the general election.

Because FFV has not yet been implemented in any U.S. elections, we try to convey our level of confidence about each of the conclusions reached. To the extent possible, the report will consider the effects of the two elements of FFV – the top-five primary and RCV general election – both separately and in conjunction. For some questions, we are more confident in predicting the effects of one part of FFV than the other. Considering their joint effects is most challenging. The report will also strive to distinguish the short-term effects of FFV from those observed over a longer time period as voters, candidates, policy makers, and campaigns adapt to the reform.

In making these judgments, it is essential to compare FFV to the status quo rather than an imaginary alternative. No election system or voting method is perfect, lacking any negative side effects. We evaluate the likely performance of FFV relative to the election system currently used in congressional elections: single-member district plurality voting. That familiar system is generally based on (1) simultaneous partisan primaries followed by (2) a general election contest among the parties' nominated candidates, most commonly a Democratic candidate versus a Republican candidate, although some races also feature an independent or minor party candidate. The key question is thus how well FFV serves communities of color compared to this status quo.

Our report addresses four areas. We investigate how FFV affects (1) voters of color, (2) the supply of candidates of color, (3) the focus of campaigns on issues of particular salience for communities of color, and (4) substantive policy making that serves constituents of color. As we note in the concluding section of the report, there are surely other ways in which FFV influences the representation of communities of color, but we prioritize these crucial questions because of their normative importance and the existing research that lays the necessary groundwork for this analysis.

## **1. How Does FFV Affect Voters?**

Our first area of inquiry is how voters of color respond to FFV. In particular, how does FFV affect voter turnout, support for candidates of different backgrounds, and ballot “exhaustion” among both minority and non-minority voters?

The turnout rates of demographic groups are difficult to measure even in the current electoral system. There is a strong partisan element, characterized by non-white voters having a substantial presence in many Democratic primaries but little involvement in most Republican primaries. Evaluating the FFV top-five primary in comparison to the status quo is challenging and probably highly dependent on local circumstances. For example, the share of non-white voters that participate in a top five primary will likely vary based on the quality of candidates and how organizations such as political parties, interest groups, and political action committees mobilize voters. We discuss these variables in a later section of the report.

In contrast, we have better guidance about how the RCV component of FFV will affect minority voters. Although implemented in a limited number of jurisdictions, most of them urbanized and racially diverse, RCV has been subject to enough study that we can offer firmer conclusions about how it is likely to affect minority voters in congressional elections. There are many studies about the particulars of how voters interact with RCV ballots. We summarize them in terms of how minority constituencies understand and evaluate RCV, how RCV influences voter turnout rates, and RCV effects on racial “polarization” in voting behavior.

## Legitimacy and Understanding

Multiple studies have examined how minority constituents perceive RCV and thus provide useful guidance on how communities of color are likely to evaluate FFV elections where winners are ultimately elected via ranked ballots. Because non-white voters have been shown to be less knowledgeable about politics on traditional questions about national and state government,<sup>3</sup> tend to be more distanced from government,<sup>4</sup> and are sometimes less trusting of the election system,<sup>5</sup> it is possible that an innovation such as RCV could reinforce or even exacerbate disparities between demographic groups.

However, research shows that minority voters do not seem less knowledgeable about RCV or find it harder to navigate than traditional plurality elections. In a simulation of RCV in a 2020 Democratic presidential primary, minority respondents were no more likely than others to describe the process as difficult or to rank fewer candidates.<sup>6</sup> Although surveyed voters in RCV cities find the voting system slightly less easy to understand than their counterparts in traditional plurality-based cities, research finds no difference in ease of understanding between white and non-white voters in RCV cities.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, a study simulating RCV elections found that Black subjects were more likely to mismark their ballots and Asians were more likely to void their ballots, while Hispanic voters did not show a disproportionate tendency to make either kind of error.<sup>8</sup> The study notes that Blacks are less likely to mismark ballots when there are Black candidates on the ballot.

Despite this limited evidence that some minority groups might have more difficulty using RCV ballots, several surveys show there is no consistent difference between white and non-white respondents in their overall support for RCV.<sup>9</sup> Exit polls from the recent Democratic mayor

---

<sup>3</sup> Davis and Silver 2003; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1997; cf., Abrajano 2015

<sup>4</sup> Weaver, Prowse, and Piston 2019

<sup>5</sup> Bullock, Hood, and Clark 2005

<sup>6</sup> Coll 2021

<sup>7</sup> Donovan, Tolbert, and Gracey 2019

<sup>8</sup> Maloy and Ward 2021

<sup>9</sup> McCarthy and Santucci 2021

primary in New York City show that white, Black, Hispanic, and Asian voters described the ballot as “simple” to complete at similarly high rates and large majorities of all four groups said they understood RCV well.<sup>10</sup>

Researchers argue that adequate public education through methods such as voter guides is crucial to alleviate information disparities that may exist between white and minority communities before the adoption of non-traditional voting systems such as RCV.<sup>11</sup> According to the Center for Civic Design, a useful voter guide explains the basics of when and where to vote, provides reliable non-partisan information about the candidates, and includes a sample ballot so voters can prepare in advance.<sup>12</sup> As evidence for this view, New York City recently devoted \$15 million to a public education campaign before its first city-wide RCV election in June 2021. According to an exit poll conducted in New York City, 53% of voters cited the television as their top source of RCV information and almost 40% cited a mailed brochure.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps as a result of the education campaign, about 85% of ballots in the Democratic mayoral primary were still active after eight rounds of reranking despite there being 13 candidates listed on the ballot.

A common concern about RCV is that some voters do not fully utilize the ranking slots available to them and that this tendency may be more pronounced among some less advantaged populations. Such behavior could result in an intentional form of “bullet voting” in which a voter selects one candidate in a multicandidate field.<sup>14</sup> However, bullet voting is more likely in an at-large district where multiple candidates have similar levels of support and a voter wants to concentrate their support on a single candidate, perhaps one of the same race or ethnicity. At-large elections, which are common in the local context, elect candidates on a city-wide or district-wide basis, as opposed to electing based on wards or districts, and are known to reduce representation for African Americans.<sup>15</sup> The incentive for this kind of strategic behavior by minority voters in at-large multicandidate should dissipate under RCV. RCV allows a voter to prioritize a single candidate by ranking that person first without harming their second choice candidate as it would under the current system. Further, there is evidence to suggest that voters may use bullet voting strategically under RCV. If they think their first choice candidate will win, they may decide not to rank more candidates.<sup>16</sup> Not using all of the rankings available may also stem from a lack of information about the full set of candidates that leads some voters to rank fewer candidates.

---

<sup>10</sup> Common Cause NY 2021

<sup>11</sup> Boudreau, Colner, and MacKenzie 2020; Maloy and Ward 2021

<sup>12</sup><https://civicdesign.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/FOCE-how-voters-get-information-final-14-1015.pdf>

<sup>13</sup><http://readme.readmedia.com/RANK-THE-VOTE-NYC-RELEASES-EDISON-RESEARCH-EXIT-POLL-ON-THE-ELECTION/17989282>

<sup>14</sup> Atsusaka and Landsman 2021

<sup>15</sup> Hajnal and Trounstein 2005

<sup>16</sup>[https://www.fairvote.org/rate\\_of\\_bullet\\_voting\\_depends\\_on\\_candidate\\_strength\\_party\\_cues\\_and\\_other\\_factors](https://www.fairvote.org/rate_of_bullet_voting_depends_on_candidate_strength_party_cues_and_other_factors)

Either way the phenomenon is worrisome because a voter who ranks less than a full complement of candidates could end up not having their ballot be included in the round that chooses the winner. This is known as “ballot exhaustion.” Ballot exhaustion can be significant – ranging between 10% and 27% in several local elections<sup>17</sup> – but research has yet to document a systematic disparity in the ballot exhaustion rates of white and minority voters. Errors in voting when using RCV are sometimes more common among voters of color, but it is not clear that this problem is more severe than in traditional elections.

A study of RCV in San Francisco finds that “undervoting” (not making any selections in the RCV contest) was less common in areas with large minority populations but that “overvoting” (voting for more candidates than allowed in a contest, a more serious and pervasive problem) was more common in such areas with large minority populations.<sup>18</sup> However, the disparity in overvoting was also apparent in non-RCV races in those same communities, suggesting that the RCV voting rules were not the reason for the higher rate of rejected ballots in heavily minority precincts.<sup>19</sup> Other research shows little effect of RCV on relative “residual vote” rates (cases where ballots are voided due to errors) between predominantly Black and predominantly white wards in Minneapolis.<sup>20</sup> One review finds rankings in minority-heavy areas of Minneapolis were less complete and were more likely to be spoiled than in areas with smaller minority populations, but the study does not compare those disparities to the ones that existed under-traditional plurality rules to determine if the problem was exacerbated or mitigated by RCV.<sup>21</sup>

FFV mitigates all of these problems by limiting the number of general election candidates to five. In such a limited field, all five candidates are likely to get some media attention, appear in debates, and generally be recognized widely enough that pervasive lack of familiarity with candidates should be uncommon. Limiting the general election to five candidates also guarantees that the RCV process will never last more than four rounds, and this reduces the degree to which ballots might be exhausted. The general election under FFV also allows partisan labels, which is not the case in many of the local elections where RCV has been used. Congressional, senatorial, gubernatorial, and presidential elections are considered higher-information elections when compared to local elections, mostly because local elections lack partisan labels.<sup>22</sup> With the possible exception of mayoral races in the country’s biggest cities, the public also knows more about congressional, senatorial, gubernatorial, and presidential candidates because those races see more

---

<sup>17</sup> Burnett and Kogan 2015

<sup>18</sup> Neely and Cook 2008

<sup>19</sup> Neely and McDaniel 2015

<sup>20</sup> Kimball and Anthony 2016

<sup>21</sup> Jacobs and Miller 2014

<sup>22</sup> Schaffner and Streb 2002

campaign spending and receive more media attention.<sup>23</sup> This makes the problem of ballot exhaustion less problematic in congressional races where FFV is being proposed than in the largely local settings where RCV is mostly heavily in use. Research shows that partisan labels on ballots lead to greater ballot completion, and even more so for Black voters than white voters.<sup>24</sup> “Bullet voting” may also be less common in a general election under FFV because a field of five is likely to include more than one minority candidate or multiple candidates with particular appeal to communities of color. In addition, RCV incentivizes all candidates to make appeals to minority voters, an aspect of FFV that we discuss more below.

## **Voter Turnout**

A key question is whether FFV would boost the voter turnout of racial and ethnic minority groups, or at least reduce the common disparity in turnout relative to whites. It is helpful to think about this separately for the two elements of FFV: the nonpartisan primary and the RCV general election.

The nonpartisan top-five primary differs from the usual common distinction between “closed” primaries in which only registered partisans may participate and “open” primaries in which any voter may participate. Both of these more frequent forms are distinct from FFV in that a voter may only participate in one party-facilitated primary election – wherein voters choose among candidates who are seeking to represent the party in the general election.<sup>25</sup> Primaries under FFV allow voters to weigh in all candidates from any party, or none at all, on a single ballot, thus mimicking the typical top-two primary.

The benefits of FFV for voter turnout must be considered relative to the status quo. Voter participation in congressional primaries is often quite low. In the last two midterm cycles in 2014 and 2018, the number of people voting in primaries was less than one third of that in the general election.<sup>26</sup> A key reason is that many primaries are uncompetitive, if they are contested at all. But research based on surveys shows that turnout is depressed by the absence of social norms that encourage electoral participation, deference to people who are perceived to be more knowledgeable, and (outside of top-two or other catch-all primaries) lack of diversity in the partisan affiliations of candidates.<sup>27</sup> Minority voter participation makes up nearly half of participants in Democratic primaries but only 14% in Republican primaries.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Oliver, Ha, and Callen 2012; Jacobson 2015

<sup>24</sup> Garlick 2015

<sup>25</sup> This is also generally true for intermediate variants often known as “semi-open” and “semi-closed.”

<sup>26</sup> Kamarck and Podkul 2018

<sup>27</sup> Gerber et al. 2017

<sup>28</sup> Kamarck and Podkul 2018

Because of the restrictions placed on who participates, research indicates that closed primaries result in lower overall turnout than do open primaries, and that open primaries produce lower turnout than do top-two primaries.<sup>29</sup> The depressive effects of more narrowly defined primaries are felt particularly among voters who are not registered with political parties. More importantly, open primaries foster higher turnout in both the primary and in the general election, more so for people of color than for whites. This is because Hispanics and Asian Americans are less likely to be registered with political parties (in states that have such an option), although Blacks and whites are about equally likely to be nonpartisan registrants.<sup>30</sup> More open systems foster greater turnout of all groups, but the literature is not clear on whether higher turnout would result in smaller or greater disparities across racial and ethnic groups.

In a later section of the report we consider whether FFV would encourage more candidates of color to run for Congress. This has implications for turnout among racial and ethnic groups. Much research finds that people of color are more likely to turn out when there are candidates of color (especially co-ethnics) on the ballot.<sup>31</sup> However, other studies indicate this effect is spurious, due mainly to the racial composition of the district, which also affects who runs.<sup>32</sup> FFV is likely to remedy some of these deterrents, especially by including candidates with a variety of party affiliations.

Voters of color are more likely to turn out when candidates of color are on the ballot, and FFV should foster that. One study finds lower turnout of both whites and Blacks under RCV, but it is limited to five elections in San Francisco and it cannot rule out that turnout is due to the changing mix of races and ethnicities of candidates on the ballot.<sup>33</sup> Another study finds a boost in turnout in low income areas of Minneapolis where minority voters are presumably more prevalent.<sup>34</sup> All told, research on the turnout effects of a nonpartisan primary and especially RCV is quite limited, and the racial implications of such turnout effects are even hazier. At this point, studies suggest that FFV will not clearly contribute to disparities in voter participation by race or ethnicity. Those disparities are driven more by the demographic makeup of the district and the nature of candidates who run than the election system itself. There is evidence that voters who live in “top-two” states are more likely to skip races where both candidates are from the same party.<sup>35</sup> Because it is highly unlikely that all five general election candidates would represent the same party, FFV obviates this problem. Most voters under FFV should be incentivized to turn out because there will be at least one candidate on the ballot from a preferred political party. Assuming that a full set of five

---

<sup>29</sup> Centeno et al. 2021

<sup>30</sup> Hajnal and Lee 2011

<sup>31</sup> Barreto 2007; Sadhwani 2020; Keele et al. 2017

<sup>32</sup> Fraga 2016; Keele and White 2019

<sup>33</sup> McDaniel 2016

<sup>34</sup> McGinn 2020

<sup>35</sup> Patterson 2020



candidate emerges from the primary, there should be at least one appealing candidate for almost any sort of voter.

## Racial Polarization in Voting

An undeniable aspect of contemporary U.S. elections is the enduring division in vote preferences between white voters and many minority voting groups.<sup>36</sup> Some of these differences are the result of co-ethnic voting for candidates from voters' own racial and ethnic groups, more so in low information elections where party labels are absent.<sup>37</sup> This "racial polarization" in voting is so central to the representation of minority interests that it has become a prong of legal tests to decide whether redistricting and other election practices violate the Voting Rights Act. Nevertheless, existing research has identified some negative implications of the phenomenon. In the large number of districts where white voters comprise the majority, strict voting along racial lines would prevent election of minority candidates.<sup>38</sup> In addition, differences in voter preferences presumably fuel racially inflammatory or exclusionary campaign discourse, a concern we address below.

The FFV election system is likely to mitigate some of the negative implications of racial polarization. Because it gives voters the ability to rank multiple candidates, FFV might dampen racial divisions in voting by encouraging voters to consider a wider range of candidates they find acceptable. Because candidates running in a RCV election will want to pick up second and lower place rankings from other candidates' main supporters, they are less likely to use campaign rhetoric that would inflame animosity across racial groups.

To learn about these possible effects, we again draw on experiences under the adjacent practices of top-two primary and RCV. The shift to top-two primaries in California appears to have had no effect on racial polarization in voting in that state.<sup>39</sup> Implementation of RCV in Bay Area cities similarly appears to have had no impact on racial polarization in those communities.<sup>40</sup> The only evidence of a change along these lines is a rise in polarization of choices between white and Asian voters in two Bay Area cities, an effect that seems to be driven by co-ethnic voting in the nonpartisan elections held there.<sup>41</sup> Yet other studies show suggestive evidence of less "competition" among racial groups and more voting across race lines under RCV, although other

---

<sup>36</sup> For example, the 2020 national exit polls show 58% of white voting for Republican Donald Trump but 87% of Blacks, 65% of Hispanics, and 61% of Asians voting for Democrat Joseph Biden.

<sup>37</sup> Hajnal and Trounstein 2014

<sup>38</sup> Research suggests that minority voters might need to comprise more than 50% of the district to make election of a minority candidate likely — see Lublin 1997.

<sup>39</sup> Alvarez and Sinclair 2015

<sup>40</sup> Atsusaka and Landsman 2021

<sup>41</sup> McDaniel 2018

factors at work make such conclusions tenuous.<sup>42</sup> When party labels are missing, endorsements can help voters make informed decisions.<sup>43</sup> Partisanship remains the most important factor in legislative elections under RCV when party labels are present, although candidate characteristics carry more weight when partisan labels are absent.<sup>44</sup>

Co-ethnic voting could be heightened if voters participating in the multicandidate primaries or general elections under FFV rely on racial cues to simplify their decision making. To the degree that RCV elections are more mentally taxing decision environments than are plurality elections, voters might look for readily available cues such as candidate traits – often inferred from candidates’ names – in deciding how to vote. In a study of voters in highly “complex” settings such as RCV with high demands on voters and low information about the candidates, white voters appear to fall back on stereotypes, leading to less support for Black candidates.<sup>45</sup> However, this result is based on a simulated election that is nonpartisan. Moreover, the disadvantage for Black candidates evaporates when more information is provided, such as candidates’ occupations or experience in office.<sup>46</sup>

In summary, although some research finds more reliance on racial cues in “demanding” elections in which there are many candidates, party labels do not appear on the ballot, and RCV is being used for the first time, these exacerbating factors are likely to be ameliorated when FFV is used to elect members of Congress. FFV keeps the demands on voters manageable by limiting the (general election) field to no more than five candidates, each of whom is likely to get at least some level of public attention. Whereas a fourth or fifth place candidate in a plurality system might be excluded from debates and dismissed by competitors, such candidates warrant attention under FFV because their supporters may help select the ultimate winner through lower rankings and because they may share party labels with some of the leading candidates. These features help to make FFV a more information-rich environment than many nonpartisan municipal elections under RCV, likely resulting in less reliance on racial cues and less ballot exhaustion.

## **2. How Does FFV Affect Candidates?**

In assessing how FFV may affect candidates, we delve into three key areas. The first is what role the two main political parties will have in the candidate recruitment process and how FFV will affect the barriers to entry for candidates of color. While FFV may remove some of the power of the party, the research suggests that the two main political parties may still play a role in the

---

<sup>42</sup> McDaniel 2016

<sup>43</sup> Grossman and Helpman 1999

<sup>44</sup> Alvarez, Hall, and Levin 2018; Boudreau, Elmendorf, and MacKenzie 2019

<sup>45</sup> Crowder-Meyer et al. 2020

<sup>46</sup> Crowder-Meyer, Kushner Gadarian, and Trounstein 2020

process. Given that there may also be other political parties involved in the recruitment and election process, the second area to consider is alternative cues or heuristics that relay information to voters about these candidates. Finally, we consider whether FFV will decrease “vote splitting” among candidates of color that can sometimes inhibit their electoral success.

## Candidate Emergence

Previous research shows that the Democratic and Republican parties play an important role in candidate emergence and in the intentional processes of candidate identification and recruitment. When we consider the recruitment of women as an analogous scenario, studies show that female candidates are recruited to run in places where the party chair is a woman and where they have a good network.<sup>47</sup> Yet other studies show no discrimination by party donors against women or candidates of color who run in partisan primaries.<sup>48</sup> Research shows that both Republican and Democratic party county chairs view women as viable candidates, but when it comes to Black and Hispanic candidates, this is not the case.<sup>49</sup> Democratic chairs consider the minority population in the district when deciding on viability of such candidates, while Republicans do not.<sup>50</sup>

Under the current electoral rules, the composition of the district drives the emergence of Black and Hispanic candidates.<sup>51</sup> One concern here might be that only “majority-minority” districts will produce candidates of color. A study of congressional elections – both primary and general – finds that minority turnout is not higher in districts with minority candidates, even when accounting for the size of the ethnic group in the district.<sup>52</sup> Instead, the study indicates that Blacks and Hispanics are more likely to vote in both primary and general elections when their populations are larger, regardless of candidate race. This suggests that even if FFV produces a more racially diverse pool of candidates, the racial composition of the pool itself is unlikely to raise voter turnout rates in communities of color relative to whites.

But FFV might have more impact on who actually wins. The demographic makeup of a district is strongly related to the race and ethnicity of the legislator who represents it. Under the current electoral rules, in majority white congressional districts the legislators are white in 87% of the

---

<sup>47</sup> Crowder-Meyer 2013

<sup>48</sup> Hassell and Visalvanich 2019

<sup>49</sup> Doherty, Dowling, and Miller 2019

<sup>50</sup> Survey experiments also show that voters generally and Democratic voters in particular may “strategically discriminate” against female candidates and candidates of color running in primaries for fear that they will be disadvantaged in the general elections (Bateson 2020). This self-fulfilling logic may be alleviated under FFV if primary voters come to believe that the RCV system is more favorable to underrepresented groups.

<sup>51</sup> Branton 2009

<sup>52</sup> Fraga 2016

districts, Black in 6% of the districts, and Hispanic in 2% of the districts.<sup>53</sup> In contrast, in majority-minority districts, the legislators are white in 23% of the districts, Black in 35% of the districts, and Hispanic in 31% of the districts.<sup>54</sup> FFV offers the possibility of loosening the connection by creating more incentives for voting – especially ranking – across traditional partisan and demographic lines. Unlike the current system, where voters are asked to select their preferred candidate from among a list of two candidates, FFV allows voters to express their preferences with more nuance through their candidate rankings. There will still be a tendency for voters to rank candidates of the same races and ethnicities first, but the lower rankings will almost certainly go to candidates from outside voters’ racial groups. Especially if voters are educated about the RCV system and take advantage of the opportunity to rank multiple candidates, it is possible that the race and ethnicity of an office holder will be less consistently related to the demographics of the constituency. This means that although FFV has the potential to produce a more diverse candidate pool, who runs will still largely be a function of the district characteristics.

In a traditional partisan primary, party affiliation does not differentiate candidates who are running under the same banner, thus making co-ethnic voting more prevalent. In congressional primary elections, both party leaders and voters strategically select candidates that they deem as viable, which tends to disadvantage candidates of color.<sup>55</sup> FFV is likely to mitigate or at least complicate these strategies because multiple candidates, potentially from the same party or demographic group, are selected in the primary.

While there has not been an election under FFV to date, Washington state provides useful information about the role of partisanship in elections. When Washington switched from an open primary to a top-two primary, it resulted in more variety in the partisanship of candidates.<sup>56</sup> Under the Washington system, party affiliation is not listed next to the candidates’ names on the ballot, but instead, the candidates indicate which political party they prefer. Washington does this to avoid the appearance of party endorsement of candidates. While the lack of party labels on the ballots did not necessarily lead to different electoral outcomes, the variety of party preferences listed by the candidates did increase. Nebraska uses a nonpartisan system for their state legislature, but after term limits were implemented, the legislature grew more polarized.<sup>57</sup> Using interviews and a social network analysis, one analysis shows that imposing term limits actually created opportunities for the party to engage in candidate recruitment, which in turn created incentives for the newly elected legislators to behave in more partisan ways. The party also helped connect the candidates to donors, which further cemented the candidates’ commitment to the party. Finally, there is some

---

<sup>53</sup> Daily Kos Elections Data Archive

<sup>54</sup> Daily Kos Elections Data Archive

<sup>55</sup> Bateson 2020; Doherty, Dowling, and Miller 2019

<sup>56</sup> Donovan 2012

<sup>57</sup> Masket and Shor 2015

evidence to suggest that even in a nonpartisan primary, endorsements from the party can influence some voters.<sup>58</sup>

One way that FFV may increase diversity of candidates is that without the requirement of a major party affiliation that is currently necessary to be a credible competitor in the general election, candidates of color may be more willing to run outside of the Democratic party label. While the connection between African American voters and Democratic Party candidates has been well documented, there are Black conservatives and moderates who may engage more if they do not have to do so under the Republican Party label.<sup>59</sup>

Finally, although FFV differs from RCV in fundamental ways, there are important lessons to learn from RCV as it relates to the barriers to entry for candidates. Some research suggests that RCV may facilitate more minority candidates because it avoids “splitting the vote” – a situation where candidates of color may divide the minority vote, thus denying any of them the nomination. Under FFV, because voters may rank multiple candidates instead of only selecting one candidate, we may see voters of color placing more than one candidate of color at the tops of their rankings. In previous elections, voters of color even play spoiler in local non-partisan elections where parties play less of a gatekeeping role. Using data from four cities in the Bay Area, researchers found that cities that implemented RCV had more minority candidates run for office and elected more women and women of color.<sup>60</sup> A similar study considered the impact of single seat RCV on women’s representation in electoral contests from 11 California cities: seven that did not use RCV (Alameda, Anaheim, Richmond, San Jose, Santa Ana, Santa Clara and Stockton) and four that did (Berkeley, Oakland, San Francisco and San Leandro).<sup>61</sup> The researchers found that women ran less often in both systems, but more women were elected in RCV systems. Overall, they find a strong correlation between RCV implementation and outcomes for women and candidates of color. This is a positive signal about the potential for FFV to diversify the range of candidates who run and who win.

The recent Democratic Party primary in New York City is instructive on the issue of candidate recruitment. This municipal election featured a diverse candidate pool with Black men and women, an Afro-Hispanic woman, a Hispanic woman, and two Asian American men. Perhaps more importantly, the top three candidates were a Black man (Eric Adams), a Black woman (Maya Wiley), and a Hispanic woman (Kathryn Garcia). That these three candidates were in the top tier of contenders points to potential benefits of FFV for candidate emergence, or at least shows that RCV did not inhibit diversity in candidates in New York. The new rules allowed for an extremely diverse candidate pool and for voters to support more diverse candidates. That Adams, Wiley, and

---

<sup>58</sup> Kousser et al. 2015

<sup>59</sup> Frymer 1999; Philpot 2005; Philpot 2017; White and Laird 2020

<sup>60</sup> John, Smith, and Zak 2018

<sup>61</sup> Terrell, Lamendola, and Reilly 2021

Garcia were among top contenders represents an important shift in that not only did the candidate pool reflect the diversity of the city, but they were competitive. While previous Democratic mayoral primaries had candidates of color, white men received the party's nomination in 2001, 2005, and 2013.<sup>62</sup> In the end, Eric Adams was nominated, is likely to be the second Black man to serve as mayor of New York City, and will lead the most diverse city council in the city's history.

## Endorsements

While party affiliation is often an important cue for voters, there is some evidence that partisanship does not mean as much to minority and immigrant voters as it does to white voters.<sup>63</sup> In the case of FFV, there could be multiple candidates from the same party, which could lessen the importance of the party label as voters cast their ballots during the primary. In this case, endorsements may serve as a useful cue to voters. Studies of local elections, many of which are nonpartisan, find that endorsements in local contests can help voters make informed voting decisions.<sup>64</sup> At the national level, there is evidence that endorsements matter in primaries. For example, in the 2020 Democratic primary, Representative James Clyburn's endorsement is credited with helping Joe Biden secure the Black vote and ultimately his party's nomination.<sup>65</sup>

Major parties are unlikely to relinquish what control of the nomination process they have, and previous experience with primary reforms demonstrate how flexible networks of influential party activists can be in coordinating around preferred nominees.<sup>66</sup> Even when confronted with the nonpartisan top-two primary and nonpartisan general election for Nebraska's unicameral legislature, party brokers have learned how to recruit and fund candidates to further their policy goals.<sup>67</sup>

Even if multiple candidates have the same party label on the primary ballot under FFV, political parties are likely to endorse specific candidates, which may reproduce the partisan divide we see under the current system. A study of the top-two primary in California found that Democratic party endorsements do matter to voters, but candidate characteristics and the voter's connection to the Democratic party were also important.<sup>68</sup> That is, the endorsement from the party did not move all voters to prefer the endorsed candidates, but for some candidates, the endorsement was useful to certain voters, both co-partisans and independents.

---

<sup>62</sup> See Benjamin 2017. In 2009, Bill Thompson, a Black man, did receive the Democratic Party nomination, but lost to Bloomberg who ran as an Independent for a third term.

<sup>63</sup> Hajnal and Lee 2011

<sup>64</sup> Benjamin 2017; Benjamin and Miller 2019

<sup>65</sup> Benjamin 2020

<sup>66</sup> Cohen et al. 2008; Masket 2009

<sup>67</sup> Masket and Shor 2015

<sup>68</sup> Kousser et al. 2015

While political parties are not the only entities that engage in candidate selection, they are usually the most influential. In some districts where local political action committees (PACs) offer endorsements, there may be opportunities for those PACs to mobilize their members for particular candidates.<sup>69</sup> In one study of party elites and donors, Democratic men were more likely to donate to candidates endorsed by Emily's List.<sup>70</sup> PACs may seek to fill in the role of gatekeeper that results from less partisan structure under the FFV system, but it is likely that the party will still heavily engage with the election. For candidates of color, this may result in more opportunities to receive endorsements from a wider variety of organizations, which could help them receive votes from those that identify with those organizations. Because a variety of groups can engage in the election process, general election candidates may focus on specific policies or group appeals because party affiliation provides less structure in an election among five candidates than in one primarily between two major party nominees. Under FFV, interest groups could potentially be influential by advocating for specific policy outcomes and backing the candidates that support those outcomes.<sup>71</sup> However, partisanship will likely still matter to voters as they cast their ballots and it is unlikely that parties will give up the influence they exert in the electoral process. What is more likely is that parties will adapt to the new rules and find new ways to engage as they have in response to prior election reforms.

## Vote Splitting

A concern under the current primary system is that the presence of multiple minority candidates in a party primary could split the votes of their supporters and ultimately result in a less favored white candidate winning the nomination. To avoid this scenario, voters must coordinate their support for a single candidate, but that is difficult to do without the involvement of trusted party leaders or candidate endorsements from influential individuals and groups.

The theory of racial voting suggests that voters will vote for racial and ethnic in-group candidates in both primaries and general elections unless there is a serious reason to do otherwise.<sup>72</sup> However, in many elections, not all voters have the option to support a co-ethnic candidate. Turning to recent general elections for Congress, 180 races in 2020 featured two white candidates, 176 races featured a white candidate and a non-white candidate, and 79 races featured two non-white candidates.<sup>73</sup> When we consider Black candidates specifically, 55 congressional races in 2020 were between a Black and white candidate and 13 races had two Black candidates.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> Benjamin and Miller 2019

<sup>70</sup> Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman 2018

<sup>71</sup> Heaney 2010

<sup>72</sup> Hero 1992; Bullock and Campbell 1984

<sup>73</sup> Daily Kos Elections Data Archive

<sup>74</sup> Daily Kos Elections Data Archive

In local elections, this is much more common, in part because of the greater use of multimember districts and in part because of greater demographic diversity in some areas. In the Durham, North Carolina city council election in 2015, three Black candidates and three white candidates contended for three nonpartisan at-large seats in the general election, in which voters could select up to three candidates. Black voters tended to support two Black candidates and one white candidate, while white voters supported the third Black candidate and the other two white candidates.<sup>75</sup> In this case, given the number of candidates voters could select (three) and the diversity of candidates (three Black and three white), there was less racial voting than expected—where we might have seen Black voters supporting all three Black candidates and white voters supporting all three white candidates. However, this was not the case. Instead, issue preferences and endorsements predicted vote choice better than the race of the candidate and the race of the voters.

Taken together, the research suggests that candidates of color will not do worse under the FFV system than the single-member district plurality voting used in congressional elections today. In the primary stage, it seems quite likely that the top-five system makes it easier for candidates of color to win the 20% of the vote necessary (and often much less in practice) to appear on the general election ballot. In general elections, minority candidates may in fact do better than they do now in moderately diverse districts where white voters, who might not be inclined to vote for minority candidates in a plurality system, would be willing to rank them second or third in the general election.

### **3. How Does FFV Affect Campaigns?**

Our third area of inquiry is how FFV is likely to affect the nature of campaigning and attention to issues of particular interest to minority populations. Are campaigns waged under FFV marked by more focus on topics that disproportionately concern communities of color? Does the system influence the tone or prevalence of racial and ethnic appeals? Although these important questions cannot be answered in a definitive way, we again draw inferences from studies of the related practices of top-two primaries and RCV, and then extrapolate beyond them to imagine how FFV would affect the ways that campaigns address non-white constituencies. The types of campaigns waged of course depends in part on the ways that voters behave and who actually runs for office, the two prior topics of this report. Our conclusions also have implications for the subsequent section on the report on how FFV shapes the substantive outputs of government that benefit communities of color.

---

<sup>75</sup> Benjamin and Miller 2019



Because the RCV aspect of FFV provides incentives for candidates to make themselves palatable to a wide variety of voters rather than simply maximizing turnout among their parties' core supporters, racial "polarization" in voting — that is, the tendency of voters from different ethnic and racial groups to choose candidates different from other groups — ought to be less pronounced than under traditional election systems. Analyses of elections in other countries have considered whether RCV leads to broader, more inclusive racial appeals than are seen under single member districts. Researchers have yet to reach agreement about how ethnic tension and in-group favoritism for ethnically extreme parties are affected by use of RCV in countries such as Fiji.<sup>76</sup> The U.S. system and issue environment are sufficiently different from Fiji that the findings from that country have little to say about how FFV would operate here. The STV system — RCV in multi-member districts — used in Northern Ireland appears to have facilitated somewhat more cross-ethnic voting, but the uniqueness of the politics there and distinctions between FFV where a single winner is selected and multi-member STV also limit generalizations to the U.S.<sup>77</sup> We are again required to learn what we can from the top-two primary and RCV.

There is no evidence that introduction of the top-two primary in California reduced voter participation in minority communities, a sign that the campaigns under that system addressed concerns particular to communities of color at least as well as they had when using partisan plurality primaries.<sup>78</sup> The same study finds that co-ethnic voting for candidates of the same race or ethnicity in the primary also appears to have ebbed under the top-two system, thus reducing racial polarization.

Likewise, usage of RCV appears to have made little difference in the degree of voting along racial and ethnic lines.<sup>79</sup> At least in the nonpartisan mayoral races in diverse, multiracial Bay Area communities that were studied, racial bloc voting looked the same before and after RCV compared to a set of parallel communities. For minority voters' concerns to be taken seriously, it is important that they make use of full rankings rather than "bullet voting" for individual candidates they prefer.<sup>80</sup> As the Australian experience indicates, a mandatory minimum number of rankings could be helpful in fostering cross-group alliances.<sup>81</sup> Requiring voters to rank as few as three candidates on each ballot would essentially require voters to choose some candidates from outside their racial groups and further motivate candidates to campaign for support from a variety of demographic groups.

---

<sup>76</sup> Coakley and Fraenkel 2017; Fraenkel and Grofman 2004, 2007; Horowitz 2004

<sup>77</sup> Mitchell 2014

<sup>78</sup> Alvarez and Sinclair 2015

<sup>79</sup> Atsusaka and Landsman 2021

<sup>80</sup> Benade et al. 2021

<sup>81</sup> Reilly 2021

Research on campaign discourse under practices adjacent to FFV suggests that it would result in more civil and productive campaigns than those conducted under plurality rules. A study of candidate debates in the Twin Cities found greater civility after RCV was implemented.<sup>82</sup> Surveys conducted in a matched set of RCV and plurality rule cities showed that residents of the RCV communities perceived less negativity in local campaigns.<sup>83</sup> Although one study found that campaign tweets were more negative in tone in the RCV cities, news coverage was more positive where RCV was used.<sup>84</sup> The greater negativity in tweets may be the result of greater cross-campaign engagement under RCV and is limited to the subset of candidates who happen to use Twitter as campaign tools in those low profile elections. As noted above, there is some evidence that campaigns conducted under RCV are less racially hostile than those conducted under plurality rules.

In states that implemented top-two primaries, same-party matchups lead to campaign rhetoric that was more centrist and bipartisan.<sup>85</sup> This may be consistent with the softening of racially divisive messaging. The top-two primary in Washington state resulted in more “flavors” of partisanship in candidates, even within the same party (e.g, libertarian versus organizational Republicans).<sup>86</sup> This might play out differently for the two major parties, as Democrats tend to be a coalition of benefits-oriented groups rather than broad principles whereas Republicans tend to coalesce under ideological themes rather than programmatic details.<sup>87</sup> Other studies similarly suggest RCV will produce more variety within parties rather than a larger number of competitive parties,<sup>88</sup> but this argument assumes that traditional party primaries remain in place rather than the catch-all, nonpartisan primary that characterizes FFV. Because the two major political parties are so clearly defined by their positions on “racial” issues,<sup>89</sup> are closely tied to racial identities,<sup>90</sup> and differ so sharply in the racial and ethnic composition of their supporters,<sup>91</sup> findings on intra-party heterogeneity in top-two contests lead us to conclude that FFV does indeed have the potential to shake up existing partisan and group orientations and facilitate more cross-racial appeals by candidates.

In summary, the small number of studies that exist around related election rules do not point to any ill effects of FFV on minority communities in terms of the tone or content of campaign

---

<sup>82</sup> McGinn 2020

<sup>83</sup> Donovan, Tolbert, and Gracey 2019

<sup>84</sup> Kropf 2021

<sup>85</sup> Sparks 2019

<sup>86</sup> Donovan 2012

<sup>87</sup> Grossman and Hopkins 2016

<sup>88</sup> Santucci 2021

<sup>89</sup> Carmines and Stimson 1989; Karol 2009

<sup>90</sup> Mason 2018

<sup>91</sup> Zingher 2019

discourse. If anything, theory and limited evidence from top-two primaries and RCV elections hint at the potential for less racial hostility in campaign rhetoric and decreased polarization of voting along racial and ethnic lines. Introducing more competition, both within and between the major parties, in the top-five primary should encourage a variety of positions on issues of concern to minority communities (with the caveat that this may include some positions that are extreme or hostile). Moreover, the RCV general election should incentivize broader cross-ethnic appeals than under plurality voting and voters should also consider more than the racial aspects of their choices, particularly if they rank multiple candidates.

#### **4. How Does FFV Affect Policy Making?**

Research on representation shows that not all groups are represented equally by their members of Congress. For example, the preferences of those who are more financially well off, those with more education, those with better health, and those that identify as male are better represented by their members of Congress than their counterparts: those who make less money, those that are less educated, those with worse health, and those that identify as female, respectively.<sup>92</sup> These studies also show that voters' preferences are better represented by their senators than non-voters, so much so that the ideological positions of non-voters are unrelated to how their senators vote.<sup>93</sup> Voters communicate their preferences on policy issues better than non-voters and they are better represented when senators are up for re-election. For communities of color, this is a troubling finding, given that minority voter turnout is often lower than white voter turnout.<sup>94</sup>

Additional research finds that under the current plurality election system, Black and Hispanic constituents are not represented well by their members of Congress, even when the Black and Hispanic shares of the population in those districts are considered. According to one study, Black constituents need to comprise 40% of the district for them to be represented well. Part of the reason for this is that Black and Hispanic individuals have less “voting power” because of lower turnout, smaller populations, and a stronger tendency to vote for one party compared to whites.<sup>95</sup> To the degree that it can boost turnout in communities of color and incentivize more voting across party and racial lines, the RCV aspect of FFV at least offers a path to alleviate these disparities in representation.<sup>96</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> Bartels 2008; Gilens 2012; Griffin and Newman 2008; Pacheco and Ojeda 2020

<sup>93</sup> Griffin and Newman 2005

<sup>94</sup> Burns, Lehman Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Fraga 2018; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993

<sup>95</sup> Griffin and Newman 2013

<sup>96</sup> One study of RCV in seven municipalities finds it has no effect on behavior of office holders or fiscal policies, but these outcomes do not consider the demographic composition of communities (Vishwanath 2020).

The top-five primary component of FFV may also result in improved representation over the status quo. Early studies compared open and closed primary elections to determine the relationship between the electoral rules and policy outcomes. One study found that members of Congress from states with closed primaries took policy positions furthest from the estimated median voter's ideal positions within their districts, while representatives from states with semi-closed primaries were the most ideologically moderate.<sup>97</sup> Yet multiple opposing studies have taken issue with this finding and claim that the type of primary has no meaningful influence on the extremity of legislators' positions.<sup>98</sup>

These divergent findings thus leave open the question of how different types of primaries currently in use affect whether legislators tend to cater to the political center or the extremes. They have even less to say about the effects of the top-five primary. Because it has yet to be put into use, it is difficult to reach firm conclusions about whether a top-five primary would facilitate more responsiveness to constituents and particularly the communities of color that have been traditionally less well represented in the policy-making process.

Examination of the top-two primary system provides some insights. Using data from California, one study finds that there is more ideological moderation in congressional voting under the new top-two primary system.<sup>99</sup> The effect is bigger among newly elected members of Congress when compared to incumbents. The effect is also bigger in comparison to closed primaries than in open primaries, indicating that broadening of the eligible electorate under top-two facilitated more moderate positions by legislators. This seems to occur in part because when two candidates of the same party advance to the general election, the more moderate of them is most likely to win.<sup>100</sup>

One contrary study found no consistent evidence that the top-two primary led to ideological moderation.<sup>101</sup> However, the authors note that it is difficult to identify the causal effects of the primary because California also drew new districts and imposed legislative term limits at the same time the primary was implemented, making it impossible to isolate the three effects. Another study on California suffers from the same inferential challenges, but reaches a more positive conclusion. This study compares the California Assembly and Senate before and after electoral reforms and finds that after the electoral reforms, both chambers were less ideologically polarized and more willing to build consensus with other lawmakers across the aisle.<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> Gerber and Morton 1998

<sup>98</sup> McGhee et al. 2014; Nielson and Visalvanich 2017

<sup>99</sup> Grose 2020

<sup>100</sup> Munger 2019

<sup>101</sup> McGhee and Shor 2017

<sup>102</sup> Grose 2014

More comprehensive studies that rely less on the California experience are more optimistic that new electoral rules can help representatives govern better. A larger study considers all U.S. House members from 2003 to 2018 to determine how ideological extremity is affected by winning via the top-two primary versus a more traditional party primary.<sup>103</sup> The study shows that districts using the top-two primary elect more ideologically moderate U.S. House members than districts using partisan primary systems, and the effect was larger compared to closed primaries and open primaries. The moderating effect of the top-two nomination system holds for both new office holders and ongoing incumbents, but the degree is larger for new candidates.

Of the four main questions addressed in this report, our conclusions about how FFV will shape the provision of policies desired by constituents of color is the most difficult to address. The top-five primary differs more from all of the existing primary types (open, closed, top-two, etc.) than they are from each other. Studies show that legislators often forgo legislative compromise because they fear primary challenges,<sup>104</sup> even if the likelihood of being “primaried” is much lower than they assume.<sup>105</sup> Under FFV, in contrast, there is an incentive for politicians to appeal to a wider variety of interests because a legislator may face competition from a candidate with broader appeal, whether that opponent emerges from within their own party and from other parties. Indeed, a legislator from a particular party could be replaced by another party member who attracts a larger coalition of supporters who rank the candidate highly.

Research on RCV and other types of primaries provided mixed and tangential evidence, although the best studies of the top-two primary and RCV offer some hints at the benefits of RCV. We have identified ways in which the current plurality election system fails to serve minority constituents as well as their white counterparts and find no signs from scholarly research that FFV would exacerbate existing disparities in representation, the enduring disparities between racial groups will not be easily or fully remedied as a result of FFV on its own.

## Conclusions

To make inferences about how FFV would affect communities of color, we have drawn on scholarly studies of two adjacent practices: RCV and the top-two primary. Neither has all the features of FFV and nowhere are the two practices combined in the way that FFV proposes: a combination of a top-five catch-all primary with a ranked choice general election. In addition, the geographic focus of existing studies does not easily generalize to the rest of the country, further complicating predictions of FFV in congressional elections. Studies of the top-two primary mostly depend on data from California and Washington. Almost all studies of RCV are at the local level

---

<sup>103</sup> Grose 2020

<sup>104</sup> Anderson, Butler, and Harbridge-Yong 2020

<sup>105</sup> Boatright 2013

and in urban environments where diversity may be greater and parties matter much less. The same communities have been studied repeatedly (e.g., the Bay Area and the Twin Cities), so multiple studies do not necessarily provide independent or conclusive evidence. Many of those communities are local counties and cities where nonpartisan offices are on the ballot and voters have limited information about candidates. In addition, many cities with RCV are multiracial and multiethnic, in contrast to most legislative districts.

Statewide implementation in congressional and senatorial elections will play out differently than these heavily studied examples. Voter turnout is likely to be driven by the most visible contest at the top of the ticket – usually a presidential or gubernatorial race – so FFV’s influence on turnout in the general election will vary based on larger forces tied to election cycles. Senate elections are a key arena where FFV could at times be potent. This is most likely in a midterm election year when the senatorial race in a state is the marquee event driving voter interest. FFV’s impact on turnout should be consistently pronounced only in the primary stage, but that too will depend somewhat on whether high level races have competitive contests and appear on the same ballot. Compared to where RCV is currently used (outside of Maine), congressional elections will generally provide more information to voters and have a wider variety of individuals participating than is the case in most of the studied local settings.

The various consequences of FFV for communities of color are likely to vary depending on the political preferences and racial demographics of a district. In majority-minority districts where one minority group is dominant, outcomes may not be much different under FFV than under the current plurality system, in which competition is focused more between moderate and more extreme candidates from the majority demographic group. But in districts with a more balanced mix of racial and ethnic groups, minority interests might be better represented due to less racial animosity and inclusive cross-candidate coalitions that emerge to accommodate minority voters’ preferences.

There are some variable factors that are difficult to predict in terms of how they will operate when FFV is implemented. As we have noted, the role of “gatekeepers” such as local party leaders, influential insiders, and large donors is likely to be smaller under FFV than the current partisan primary system, but party networks are sure to reconfigure their activities to avoid losing too much control over selection of nominees, as they have done in the past. This might happen by coordinating around a single favored candidate in the primary, as well as fostering relationships with interest groups and further developing informal methods of coordination that determine the outcome of the primary before voters get a chance to weigh in. Nevertheless, it will be difficult to prevent other candidates of the same party from entering the primary knowing that getting into the top-five provides a viable path to election because of the rankings that will be used in the general election.

Also as we have noted, as with almost any election reform, sufficient public education is essential to ensure that FFV does not reduce the influence of minority voters. Because some studies find that minority voters are less likely to take full advantage of ranking opportunities that will ensure their votes are counted in later rounds, the benefits of complete rankings over “bullet” voting should be made evident. On the other hand, the limit of five candidates in the general election ensures that the RCV process will never last more than four rounds, thus constraining the degree to which minority voters’ ballots might be exhausted.

Although we can say little conclusively about how it will play out, it is worth considering how FFV will affect the redistricting process. Especially in states where congressional districts are gerrymandered through a partisan process, mapmakers might be less focused on the racial and ethnic composition of districts when five candidates compete under RCV than they have been under plurality rules and two major candidates in most districts. While some change in strategy will happen, the consequences of FFV for redistricting may not be sizable as long as the Voting Rights Act and legal jurisprudence prioritize creating districts that do not dilute the power of minority voters to elect candidates of their choosing.

Communities of color have little to fear from FFV. We see no systematic evidence that adjacent reforms such as the top-two primary or RCV elections advantage white constituents or candidates in terms of participation, representation, or policy provision. Although it is difficult to reach firm conclusions about a reform that has yet to be implemented, the potential upsides of FFV for communities of color appear to be larger than potential downsides.

## Sources Cited

- Abrajano, Marisa. 2015. "Reexamining the 'Racial Gap' in Political Knowledge." *Journal of Politics* 77(1): 44-54. doi:10.1086/678767.
- Alvarez, R. Michael, and J. Andrew Sinclair. 2015. *Nonpartisan Primary Election Reform: Mitigating Mischief*. Cambridge University Press.
- Alvarez, R. Michael, Thad E. Hall, and Ines Levin. 2018. "Low-Information Voting: Evidence From Instant-Runoff Elections." *American Politics Research* 46(6): 1012–38. doi:10.1177/1532673X18759643.
- Anderson, Sarah E., Daniel M. Butler, and Laurel Harbridge-Yong. 2020. *Rejecting Compromise: Legislators' Fear of Primary Voters*. Cambridge University Press.
- Atsushaka, Yuki, and Theodore Landsman. 2021. "Does Ranked-Choice Voting Reduce Racial Polarization? A Clustering Approach to Ranked Ballot Data." SSRN Scholarly Paper ID 3800237. Social Science Research Network. doi:10.2139/ssrn.3800237.
- Barreto, Matt A. 2007. "¡Sí Se Puede! Latino Candidates and the Mobilization of Latino Voters." *American Political Science Review* 101(3): 425–41. doi:10.1017/S0003055407070293.
- Bartels, Larry M. 2008. *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Bateson, Regina. 2020. "Strategic Discrimination." *Perspectives on Politics* 18(4): 1068-87. doi:10.1017/S153759272000242X.
- Benade, Gerdus, Ruth Buck, Moon Duchin, Dara Gold, and Thomas Weighill. 2021. "Ranked Choice Voting and Minority Representation." SSRN Scholarly Paper ID 3778021. Social Science Research Network. doi:10.2139/ssrn.3778021.
- Benjamin, Andrea. 2017. *Racial Coalition Building in Local Elections: Elite Cues and Cross-Ethnic Voting*. Cambridge University Press.
- Benjamin, Andrea. 2020. "Several Black Mayors Have Endorsed Bloomberg. Will That Influence Black Voters?" *Washington Post: The Monkey Cage*, February 25. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/02/25/several-black-mayors-have-endorsed-bloomberg-will-that-influence-black-voters/>.
- Benjamin, Andrea, and Alexis Miller. 2019. "Picking Winners: How Political Organizations Influence Local Elections." *Urban Affairs Review* 55(3): 643–74. doi:10.1177/1078087417732647.
- Boatright, Robert G. 2013. *Getting Primaried: The Changing Politics of Congressional Primary Challenges*. University of Michigan Press.
- Boudreau, Cheryl, Christopher S. Elmendorf, and Scott A. MacKenzie. 2019. "Racial or Spatial Voting? The Effects of Candidate Ethnicity and Ethnic Group Endorsements in Local Elections."



*American Journal of Political Science* **63**(1): 5–20. doi:10.1111/ajps.12401.

Boudreau, Cheryl, Jonathan Colner, and Scott A. MacKenzie. 2020. “Ranked-Choice Voting and Political Expression: How Voting Aids Narrow the Gap between Informed and Uninformed Citizens.” SSRN Scholarly Paper ID 3786972. Social Science Research Network. doi:10.2139/ssrn.3786972.

Branton, Regina P. 2009. “The Importance of Race and Ethnicity in Congressional Primary Elections.” *Political Research Quarterly* **62**(3): 459–73. doi:10.1177/1065912908319606.

Bullock, Charles S., and Bruce A. Campbell. 1984. “Racist or Racial Voting in the 1981 Atlanta Municipal Elections.” *Urban Affairs Quarterly* **20**(2): 149–64. doi:10.1177/004208168402000202.

Bullock, Charles S., III, M. V. Hood III, and Richard Clark. 2005. “Punch Cards, Jim Crow, and Al Gore: Explaining Voter Trust in the Electoral System in Georgia, 2000.” *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* **5**(3):283-294.

Burnett, Craig M., and Vladimir Kogan. 2015. “Ballot (and Voter) ‘Exhaustion’ under Instant Runoff Voting: An Examination of Four Ranked-choice Elections.” *Electoral Studies* **37**(March): 41–49. doi:10.1016/j.electstud.2014.11.006.

Burns, Nancy, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Sidney Verba. 2001. *The Private Roots of Public Action: Gender, Equality, and Political Participation*. Harvard University Press.

Carmines, Edward G., and James A. Stimson. 1989. *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics*. Princeton University Press.

Centeno, Raquel, Christian R. Grose, Nancy Hernandez, and Kayla Wolf. 2021. “The Demobilizing Effect of Primary Electoral Institutions on Voters of Color.” Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago. SSRN Scholarly Paper ID 3831739. Social Science Research Network. doi:10.2139/ssrn.3831739.

Coakley, John, and Jon Fraenkel. 2017. “The Ethnic Implications of Preferential Voting.” *Government and Opposition* **52**(4): 671–97. doi:10.1017/gov.2017.4.

Cohen, Marty, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller. 2008. *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform*. University of Chicago Press.

Coll, Joseph A. 2021. “Demographic Disparities Using Ranked-Choice Voting? Ranking Difficulty, Under-Voting, and the 2020 Democratic Primary.” *Politics and Governance* **9**(2): 293–305. doi:10.17645/pag.v9i2.3913.

Common Cause NY. 2021. Preliminary results of Edison Research exit polls entitled “New York City Voters Embrace Ranked Choice Voting (RCV).” Common Cause NY and Rank the Vote NYC, June 28. <https://perma.cc/Z3X6-UD8A>.

Crowder-Meyer, Melody. 2013. “Gendered Recruitment without Trying: How Local Party Recruiters Affect Women's Representation.” *Politics & Gender* **9**(4): 390–413. doi:10.1017/S1743923X13000391.

- Crowder-Meyer, Melody, and Rosalyn Cooperman. 2018. "Can't Buy Them Love: How Party Culture among Donors Contributes to the Party Gap in Women's Representation." *Journal of Politics* **80**(4): 1211-1224. doi:10.1086/698848.
- Crowder-Meyer, Melody, Shana Kushner Gadarian, and Jessica Trounstine. 2020. "Voting Can Be Hard, Information Helps." *Urban Affairs Review* **56**(1): 124-53. doi:10.1177/1078087419831074.
- Crowder-Meyer, Melody, Shana Kushner Gadarian, Jessica Trounstine, and Kau Vue. 2020. "A Different Kind of Disadvantage: Candidate Race, Cognitive Complexity, and Voter Choice." *Political Behavior* **42**: 509-30. doi:10.1007/s11109-018-9505-1.
- Daily Kos Elections Data Archive. "117th Congress members and District Demographics Comprehensive Guide" and "2020 Congressional Candidate Guide." *Daily Kos*. <https://perma.cc/369Y-2LY8>.
- Davis, Darren W., and Brian D. Silver. 2003. "Stereotype Threat and Race of Interviewer Effects in a Survey on Political Knowledge." *American Journal of Political Science* **47**(1): 33-45. doi:10.1111/1540-5907.00003.
- Delli Carpini, Michael X., and Scott Keeter. 1997. *What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters*. Yale University Press.
- Doherty, David, Conor M. Dowling, and Michael G. Miller. 2019. "Do Local Party Chairs Think Women and Minority Candidates Can Win? Evidence from a Conjoint Experiment." *The Journal of Politics* **81**(4): 1282-97. doi:10.1086/704698.
- Donovan, Todd. 2012. "The Top Two Primary: What Can California Learn from Washington?" *California Journal of Politics and Policy* **4**(1): 1-22. doi:10.5070/P2959Z.
- Donovan, Todd, Caroline Tolbert, and Kellen Gracey. 2019. "Self-Reported Understanding of Ranked-Choice Voting." *Social Science Quarterly* **100**(5): 1768-76. doi:10.1111/ssqu.12651.
- Fraenkel, Jon, and Bernard Grofman. 2004. "A Neo-Downsian Model of the Alternative Vote as a Mechanism for Mitigating Ethnic Conflict in Plural Societies." *Public Choice* **121**(3-4): 487-506. doi:10.1007/s11127-004-5794-5.
- Fraenkel, Jon, and Bernard Grofman. 2007. "The Merits of Neo-Downsian Modeling of the Alternative Vote: A Reply to Horowitz." *Public Choice* **133**(1): 1-11. doi:10.1007/s11127-007-9156-y.
- Fraga, Bernard L. 2016. "Candidates or Districts? Reevaluating the Role of Race in Voter Turnout." *American Journal of Political Science* **60**(1): 97-122. doi:10.1111/ajps.12172.
- Fraga, Bernard L. 2018. *The Turnout Gap: Race, Ethnicity, and Political Inequality in a Diversifying America*. Cambridge University Press.
- Frymer, Paul. 1999. *Uneasy Alliances: Race and Party Competition in America*. Princeton University Press.

- Garlick, Alex. 2015. "'The Letter after Your Name': Party Labels on Virginia Ballots." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* **15**(2): 147-170. doi:10.1177/1532440015573015.
- Gerber, Alan S., Gregory A. Huber, Daniel R. Biggers, and David J. Hendry. 2017. "Why Don't People Vote in US Primary Elections? Assessing Theoretical Explanations for Reduced Participation." *Electoral Studies* **45**: 119-129. doi:10.1016/j.electstud.2016.11.003.
- Gerber, Elisabeth R., and Rebecca B. Morton. 1998. "Primary Election Systems and Representation." *Journal of Law, Economics, & Organization* **14**(2): 304-24. doi:10.1093/jleo/14.2.304.
- Gilens, Martin. 2012. *Affluence and Influence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America*. Princeton University Press.
- Griffin, John D., and Brian Newman. 2005. "Are Voters Better Represented?" *Journal of Politics* **67**(4): 1206-27. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2508.2005.00357.x.
- Griffin, John D., and Brian Newman. 2008. *Minority Report: Evaluating Political Equality in America*. University of Chicago Press.
- Griffin, John D., and Brian Newman. 2013. "Voting Power, Policy Representation, and Disparities in Voting's Reward." *Journal of Politics* **75**(1): 52-64.
- Grose, Christian R. 2014. "The Adoption of Electoral Reforms and Ideological Change in the California State Legislature." Schwarzenegger Institute Report, University of California Price School of Public Policy. <http://schwarzeneggerinstitute.com/electoral-reforms-report>.
- Grose, Christian R. 2020. "Reducing Legislative Polarization: Top-Two and Open Primaries Are Associated with More Moderate Legislators." *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy* **1**(2): 267-87. doi:10.1561/113.00000012.
- Grossman, Gene M., and Elhanan Helpman. 1999. "Competing for Endorsements." *American Economic Review* **89**(3): 501-524. doi:10.1257/aer.89.3.501.
- Grossman, Matt, and David A. Hopkins. 2016. *Asymmetric Politics: Ideological Republicans and Group Interest Democrats*. Oxford University Press.
- Hajnal, Zoltan L., and Taeku Lee. 2011. *Why Americans Don't Join the Party: Race, Immigration, and the Failure (of Political Parties) to Engage the Electorate*. Princeton University Press.
- Hajnal, Zoltan, and Jessica Trounstine. 2005. "Where Turnout Matters: The Consequences of Uneven Turnout in City Politics." *Journal of Politics* **67**(2):515- 35. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2508.2005.00327.x.
- Hajnal, Zoltan, and Jessica Trounstine. 2014. "What Underlies Urban Politics? Race, Class, Ideology, Partisanship, and the Urban Vote." *Urban Affairs Review* **50**(1): 63- 99. doi:10.1177/1078087413485216.
- Hassell, Hans J.G., and Neil Visalvanich. 2019. "The Party's Primary Preferences: Race, Gender,

and Party Support of Congressional Primary Candidates.” *American Journal of Political Science* **63**(4): 905-919. doi:10.1111/ajps.12461.

Heaney, Michael T. 2010. “Linking Political Parties and Interest Groups.” In *The Oxford Handbook of American Political Parties and Interest Groups*, Jeffrey M. Berry and Sandy Maisel, eds., pp. 568-587. Oxford University Press.

Hero, Rodney. 1992. *Latinos and the U.S. Political System: Two-Tiered Pluralism*. Temple University Press.

Horowitz, Donald L. 2004. "The Alternative Vote and Interethnic Moderation: A Reply to Fraenkel and Grofman." *Public Choice* **121**(3): 507-16. doi:10.1007/s1127-004-2488-y.

Jacobs, Lawrence, and Joanne Miller. 2014. “Rank Choice Voting and the 2013 Minneapolis Elections.” University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, February 13. Center for the Study of Politics and Governance, Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota. <https://hdl.handle.net/11299/195063>.

Jacobson, Gary. 2015. “How Do Campaigns Matter?” *Annual Review of Political Science*. Vol. 18:31-47. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-072012-113556>

John, Sarah, Haley Smith, and Elizabeth Zak. 2018. “The alternative vote: Do changes in single-member voting systems affect descriptive representation of women and minorities?” *Electoral Studies* **54**: 90–102. doi: 10.1016/j.electstud.2018.05.009.

Kamarck, Elaine, and Alexander R. Podkul. 2018. “The 2018 Primaries Project: The Demographics of Primary Voters.” October 23. The Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-2018-primaries-project-the-demographics-of-primary-voters/>.

Karol, David. 2009. *Party Position Change in American Politics: Coalition Management*. Cambridge University Press.

Keele, Luke J., Paru R. Shah, Ismail White, and Kristine Kay. 2017. “Black Candidates and Black Turnout: A Study of Viability in Louisiana Mayoral Elections.” *Journal of Politics* **79**(3): 780-791. doi:10.1086/690302.

Keele, Luke J., and Ismail K. White. 2019. “African American Turnout and African American Candidates.” *Political Science Research and Methods* **7**(3): 431–49. doi:10.1017/psrm.2017.45.

Kimball, David C., and Joseph Anthony. 2016. “Voter Participation with Ranked Choice Voting in the United States.” Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia. <http://www.umsl.edu/~kimball/KimballRCV.pdf>.

Kousser, Thad, Scott Lucas, Seth Masket, and Eric McGhee. 2015. "Kingmakers or Cheerleaders? Party Power and the Causal Effects of Endorsements." *Political Research Quarterly* **68**(3): 443-56. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24637786>.

Kropf, Martha. 2021. “Using Campaign Communications to Analyze Civility in Ranked Choice Voting Elections.” *Politics and Governance* **9**(2): 280–92. doi:10.17645/pag.v9i2.4293.

- Lublin, David. 1997. *The Paradox of Representation: Racial Gerrymandering and Minority Interests in Congress*. Princeton University Press.
- Maloy, J.S., and Matthew Ward. 2021. "The Impact of Input Rules and Ballot Options on Voting Error: An Experimental Analysis." *Politics and Governance* 9(2): 306–18. doi:10.17645/pag.v9i2.3938.
- Masket, Seth. 2009. *No Middle Ground: How Informal Party Organizations Control Nominations and Polarize Legislatures*. University of Michigan Press.
- Masket, Seth, and Boris Shor. 2015. "Polarization without Parties: Term Limits and Legislative Partisanship in Nebraska's Unicameral Legislature." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 15(1): 67-90. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24643822>.
- Mason, Lilliana. 2018. *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*. University of Chicago Press.
- McCarthy, Devin, and Jack Santucci. 2021. "Ranked Choice Voting as a Generational Issue in Modern American Politics." *Politics & Policy* 49(1): 33-60. doi:10.1111/polp.12390.
- McDaniel, Jason A. 2016. "Writing the Rules to Rank the Candidates: Examining the Impact of Instant-Runoff Voting on Racial Group Turnout in San Francisco Mayoral Elections." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 38(3): 387–408. doi:10.1111/juaf.12209.
- McDaniel, Jason A. 2018. "Does More Choice Lead to Reduced Racially Polarized Voting? Assessing the Impact of Ranked-Choice Voting in Mayoral Elections." *California Journal of Politics and Policy* 10(2): 1–24. doi:10.5070/P2cjpp10241252.
- McGhee, Eric, and Boris Shor. 2017. "Has the Top Two Primary Elected More Moderates?" *Perspectives on Politics* 15(4): 1053–66. doi: 10.1017/S1537592717002158.
- McGhee, Eric, Seth Masket, Boris Shor, Steven Rogers, and Nolan McCarty. 2014. "A Primary Cause of Partisanship? Nomination Systems and Legislator Ideology." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(2): 337-351. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24363489>.
- McGinn, Eamon. 2020. "Rating Rankings: Effect of Instant Run-off Voting on participation and civility." *Working Paper*, University of Technology - Sydney. [http://eamonmcginn.com/papers/IRV\\_in\\_Minneapolis.pdf](http://eamonmcginn.com/papers/IRV_in_Minneapolis.pdf).
- Mitchell, Paul. 2014. "The Single Transferable Vote and Ethnic Conflict: The Evidence from Northern Ireland." *Electoral Studies* 33(1): 246-257. doi:10.1016/j.electstud.2013.07.022.
- Munger Jr., Charles T. 2019. "California's Top-two Primary: A Successful Reform." Schwarzenegger Institute Report, February 22. University of California Price School of Public Policy. <http://schwarzenegger.usc.edu/institute-in-action/article/californias-top-two-primary-a-successful-reform>.
- Neely, Francis, and Corey Cook. 2008. "Whose Votes Count?: Undervotes, Overvotes, and Ranking in San Francisco's Instant-Runoff Elections." *American Politics Research* 36(4): 530–54. doi:10.1177/1532673X08318110.

- Neely, Francis, and Jason A. McDaniel. 2015. "Overvoting and the Equality of Voice under Instant-Runoff Voting in San Francisco." *California Journal of Politics and Policy* 7(4):1–27. doi:10.5070/P2cjpp7428929.
- Nielson, Lindsay, and Neil Visalvanich. 2017. "Primaries and Candidates: Examining the Influence of Primary Electorates on Candidate Ideology." *Political Science Research and Methods* 5(2): 397-408. doi:10.1017/psrm.2015.60.
- Oliver, J. Eric, Shang E. Ha, and Zachary Callen. 2012. *Local Elections and the Politics of Small-Scale Democracy*. Princeton University Press.
- Pacheco, Julianna, and Christopher Ojeda. 2020. "A Healthy Democracy? Evidence of Unequal Representation Across Health Status." *Political Behavior* 42: 1245-1267. doi:10.1007/s11109-019-09541-0.
- Patterson Jr., Shawn. 2020. "Estimating the Unintended Participation Penalty under Top-Two Primaries with a Discontinuity Design." *Electoral Studies* 68:102231. doi:10.1016/j.electstud.2020.102231.
- Philpot, Tasha S. 2005. *Race, Republicans, and the Return of the Party of Lincoln*. University of Michigan Press.
- Philpot, Tasha S. 2017. *Conservative but Not Republican: The Paradox of Party Identification and Ideology among African Americans*. Cambridge University Press.
- Reilly, Benjamin. 2021. "Ranked Choice Voting in Australia and America: Do Voters Follow Party Cues?" *Politics and Governance* 9(2): 271–9. doi:10.17645/pag.v9i2.3889.
- Rosenstone, Steven J., and John Mark Hansen. 1993. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Sadhwani, Sara. 2020. "Asian American Mobilization: The Effect of Candidates and Districts on Asian American Voting Behavior." *Political Behavior*. doi:10.1007/s11109-020-09612-7.
- Santucci, Jack. 2021. "Variants of Ranked-Choice Voting from a Strategic Perspective." *Politics and Governance* 9(2): 344–53. doi:10.17645/pag.v9i2.3955.
- Schaffner, Brian F., and Matthew J. Streb. 2002. "The Partisan Heuristic in Low-Information Elections." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 66:559–81. <https://doi.org/10.1086/343755>
- Sparks, Steven. 2019. "Polarization and the Top-Two Primary: Moderating Candidate Rhetoric in One-Party Contests." *Political Communication* 36(4): 565–85. doi:10.1080/10584609.2019.1579772.
- Terrell, Cynthia R., Courtney Lamendola, and Maura Reilly. 2021. "Election Reform and Women's Representation: Ranked Choice Voting in the U.S." *Politics and Governance* 9(2): 332–43. doi: 10.17645/pag.v9i2.3924.
- Vishwanath, Arjun, 2021. "Electoral Institutions and Substantive Representation in Local Politics: The Effects of Ranked Choice Voting." SSRN Scholarly Paper ID 3802566. Social

Science Research Network. doi:10.2139/ssrn.3802566.

Weaver, Vesla, Gwen Prowse, and Spencer Piston. 2019. "Too Much Knowledge, Too Little Power: An Assessment of Political Knowledge in Highly-Policed Communities." *Journal of Politics* **81**(3): 1153-1166. doi:10.1086/703538.

White, Ismail K., and Chryl N. Laird. 2020. *Steadfast Democrats: How Social Forces Shape Black Political Behavior*. Princeton University Press.

Zingher, Joshua N. 2019. "An analysis of the changing social bases of America's political parties: Group support in the 2012 and 2016 presidential elections." *Electoral Studies* **60**: 102042. doi:10.1016/j.electstud.2019.04.006.