

A City Club Report on Measure 117: Ranked Choice Voting

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.	1
Ballot Measure Summary.	3
Background.	4
How Ballot Measure 117 changes Oregon elections.	4
Proponent and Opponent Arguments.	6
Major assertions made in favor of the measure.	6
Major assertions made against the measure.	7
Discussion and Analysis.	8
Voters' ability to express themselves and voter participation.	8
Vote splitting.	9
Election Civility.	9
Implementation Costs.	11
Potential Limitations of RCV.	11
Political landscape and perceived electoral integrity.	14
Conclusions.	17
Recommendation.	17
Bibliography.	18
Witnesses.	21

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Executive Summary.

For more than a century United States elections have used “**plurality voting**,” in which the candidate with the most votes wins. Recently, jurisdictions nationwide have introduced varying forms of “**ranked choice voting**” (RCV) in which the voter ranks the candidates in order of the voter’s preference. In Oregon, Benton County introduced a type of RCV in 2022, and shortly after the City of Corvallis adopted it for races with 3 or more candidates. In the current election (November 2024) voters will use different forms of RCV to choose the 12 members of the new Portland city council, the mayor, and auditor. In 2026, RCV will be used to elect Multnomah County commissioners.

Ballot Measure 117 would require RCV for specific statewide elections and primaries: president/vice president, the two senators, the six congressional representatives, governor, secretary of state, state treasurer, attorney general, and commissioner of Labor and Industry. In addition, cities, counties, metropolitan service districts, school districts, and other local governments or local service districts may use RCV for their elections, unless prohibited by their home rule charters. If this ballot measure is approved by voters, RCV for these statewide offices will be used beginning in 2028. If not approved, plurality voting will continue for these offices.

Your Committee’s task was to determine whether Measure 117’s RCV is a better voting system for Oregon than the current one (plurality voting). Your Committee considered whether RCV is accessible and transparent to voters, if RCV presented a significant increase in equity and representation for voters, and if the change of system would allow voters to fully express their preferences.

Through expert witness interviews, a study of academic papers and a review of available articles and data, your Committee identified seven key areas to consider:

1. Voters’ ability to fully express their preferences and voter participation
2. Vote splitting (the “spoiler effect”)
3. Primaries’ impact on the effect of RCV

4. Election civility
5. Implementation cost
6. Potential limitations
7. Political landscape and perceived electoral integrity

Your Committee concluded that RCV provides an improvement over the existing plurality system in Oregon. Your Committee found that while all voting systems have inherent flaws, RCV could significantly enhance voter representation for Oregonians now and will allow the opportunity to fine tune RCV once Measure 117 is in practice. By allowing voters to more fully express their preferences, RCV is a positive, impactful change that increases the likelihood that the winning candidate is more reflective of the majority of voters' sentiments.

Ballot Measure Summary.

Measure 117 will appear on the ballot as follows:

Oregon Ranked-Choice Voting for Federal and State Elections Measure (2024)

Gives voters option to rank candidates in order of preference; candidate receiving the majority of votes wins.

Result of “Yes” Vote: A "yes" vote supports implementing ranked-choice voting primary and general elections for federal and state executive offices beginning in 2028.

Result of “No” Vote: A "no" vote opposes implementing ranked-choice voting for federal and state executive offices.

Summary: Ballot Measure 117 changes Oregon law to give voters the option to rank candidates in order of preference using “ranked-choice voting” for specified federal and statewide offices starting January 1, 2028. Under current law, voters select only one candidate for most offices, and the candidate with the most votes wins, even if the candidate does not receive a majority of all the votes cast. With ranked-choice voting, voters may rank candidates for office in order of preference. Voters may choose to rank multiple candidates or only one candidate for each office, as well as write-in candidate(s). Votes are counted in rounds. In the first round, if a candidate receives a majority of highest ranked votes, the candidate wins. If no candidate receives a majority of highest-ranked votes in the first round, votes are automatically counted in additional rounds. The candidate receiving the fewest votes in each round is defeated and the defeated candidate’s votes are assigned to the voter’s next highest-ranked candidates. This process continues until a candidate receives a majority of votes.

Ballot Measure 117 requires the Secretary of State to establish a program to educate voters about how ranked-choice voting elections will be conducted. The program must be made available in English and the other five most commonly spoken languages in this state. Ballot Measure 117 applies to the nomination by major political parties for candidates for President, United States Senator, Representative in Congress, Governor, Secretary of State, State Treasurer and Attorney General. The measure applies to the election of President and Vice-President, United States Senator, Representative in Congress, Governor, Secretary of State, State Treasurer, Attorney General and the Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor and Industries. The measure eliminates the primary for the Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor and Industries. Ballot Measure 117 allows local governments to adopt ranked-choice voting for elections for local offices and for primaries for partisan local offices.

The measure requires the Secretary of State, in consultation with county clerks and elections officers, to enact rules and provide general guidance to local governments regarding the implementation of ranked-choice voting. The measure allows home rule jurisdictions that already adopted ranked-choice voting prior to 2025 to continue to use their current method, or to revise it. Ballot Measure 117 requires the Secretary of State and county clerks to analyze state election laws to determine whether those laws are inconsistent with implementing ranked-choice voting, and to provide publicly available reports discussing that analysis and the anticipated expenditures necessary to implement the measure.

Background.

How Ballot Measure 117 changes Oregon Elections.

Ballot Measure 117 changes Oregon law by giving voters the option to rank candidates in order of preference using a ranked ballot for specific nominations and elections. If approved by voters, RCV for these offices would begin in 2028.

If passed, Ballot Measure 117 would implement a specific type of RCV known as Instant Runoff Voting. Under the current plurality system, voters select only one candidate for most offices, and the candidate with the most votes wins. With RCV, voters may rank candidates for office in order of preference, choosing to rank multiple candidates or only one candidate for each office. A candidate who receives a majority of voters' first choices wins the election. However, if there is no majority after tallying first choices, an Instant Runoff, or series of Instant Runoffs, determines the winner. After each round of tabulation the Instant Runoff is conducted by eliminating the candidate with the fewest votes. Voters who ranked the defeated candidate as their top choice have their vote applied to their next-highest-ranked candidate. This continues until a tabulation round where one candidate receives a majority of the votes. The ballot measure does not specify what happens if two candidates end up with the exact same number of votes during the Instant Runoff Voting process.

The method of RCV proposed in Measure 117 is known as “**Instant Runoff Voting**”, where a voter’s ballot only applies to their single highest ranked candidate still in the race. This is different from “**Single Transferable Vote**” with multi-member districts method being implemented in Portland this fall for the new City Council.

For federal races, Measure 117 applies to the major political party primary elections to choose candidates for President, United States Senator, and Representative in Congress, and to the general elections for each of these offices.

At the statewide level Measure 117 applies to the primary elections of Governor, Secretary of State, State Treasurer, and Attorney General. It also applies to the general election for each of these offices, as well as the nonpartisan election for Oregon’s Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor and Industries, however it eliminates the primary for this position. The measure does not change nominations or elections not specifically listed here, most notably state legislative races.

Ballot Measure 117 allows local governments to adopt RCV for elections for local offices and for primaries for partisan local offices. It also requires the Secretary of State to establish a program to educate voters about how RCV elections will be conducted

Ballot Measure 117 will be on the ballot this fall after being referred to voters by the Oregon State Legislature. It was introduced into the Oregon State Legislature as House Bill 2004 (HB 2004) in 2023. On May 23, 2023, the House voted 35-24 to approve HB 2004. On June 25,

2023 the Senate voted 17-8 to approve an amended version of the legislation, and on the same day the House voted 34-17 to approve the final version of the bill, sending the ballot measure to voters this fall.

Over 50 American jurisdictions use some form of RCV, and six states use RCV ballots for overseas voters in runoff elections. Additionally, over 100 colleges, universities, and professional associations use RCV. Internationally, Australia has used RCV for more than 100 years. Additionally, Ireland and New Zealand use single-winner RCV, and Malta, Northern Ireland, Scotland, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka use multi-winner RCV.

RCV is designed to more extensively express a voter's preference. If a voter's first choice doesn't advance to the final round of the RCV count, the voter's ballot still counts for whichever remaining candidate they ranked the highest. For this reason, many believe this is a more meaningful way to cast votes, providing preference for candidates who more closely align with the voters' interests without strategic consideration. RCV reduces the threat of "**vote splitting**," also known as the "**spoiler effect**," in which voting for a candidate politically similar to another will divide support between them, awarding the election to an opposing candidate. It also can result in more positive campaigning and increased outreach, as candidates should strategically seek the second or third votes expected to align with an opponent.

Proponent and Opponent Arguments

Your Committee interviewed expert witnesses, reviewed legislative testimony, and read wide-ranging media coverage to collect a diverse list of arguments for and against RCV in general and Measure 117 specifically. While your Committee chose to exclude claims that had no apparent basis in fact, we otherwise included all assertions, both pro and con, regardless of how persuasive or impactful we believed them to be. As such, it is important to note that your Committee does not view the below claims as equivalently valid or equally important in our decision to endorse supporting Measure 117.

Major assertions made in favor of the measure.

Encourages voters to vote more sincerely. If a voter's top choice is a less popular candidate, their vote will still count towards their next preferred candidate if their first choice is eliminated.

Decreases the amount of wasted votes (votes that don't go to the winning candidate). Using the next preferred candidate when one is eliminated means that fewer votes are wasted on losing candidates.

Increases candidate engagement with voters. Candidates are encouraged to appeal to a broader audience in primaries and general elections to gain second and third-choice votes, encouraging them to engage more with the entire voter base rather than just their core supporters.

Reduces the spoiler effect and vote splitting. Since voters can rank candidates, they don't have to worry as much about unintentionally assisting a candidate they don't like by voting for their favorite less popular candidate.

Incentivizes a more diverse candidate pool. By removing the fear of vote splitting, candidates can run with less worry about stealing away votes and becoming a spoiler.

Increases voters' ability to express their preferences. RCV ballots convey more detailed information about voter preferences than plurality ballots.

Increases campaigning civility. RCV promotes positive campaigning that focuses on candidates' platforms and qualifications.

Signals to lawmakers that Oregon favors voting reform. Passing the measure would demonstrate a commitment to improving the electoral process and addressing voter concerns about fairness and representation.

Major assertions made against the measure.

Voting requires more effort. The new ballot format could cause confusion and increase the chance of a vote being invalid or exhausted.

Tallying is more complex. Instant Runoff RCV involves multiple rounds of counting and redistribution of votes. This complexity makes the system less intuitive and harder for voters to understand.

Increases costs. Implementing Instant Runoff RCV will incur costs including updating voting systems, training election officials, and educating voters.

Ballots can be exhausted. If not all candidates are ranked on a ballot, and all ranked candidates are eliminated in early rounds, the ballot will not be counted toward any candidate.

Results can be unintuitive. There are potential scenarios in an Instant Runoff RCV election where the winner wouldn't have the most first-choice votes. An election outcome could also change by adding or removing a losing candidate.

Leads to less connection to an individual vote. Voters often won't know the final recipient of their vote, as it may be transferred multiple times during the tabulation process.

Outcomes are more sensitive to recounts. A flip in who is eliminated in the first round of counting could cascade into a much different outcome.

Many different voting systems could be available on one ballot. Voters may face multiple voting systems (plurality and RCV) and multiple ways of counting (Instant Runoff and Single Transferable Vote) on a single ballot, leading to potential confusion and frustration.

May diminish trust in election outcomes at a time when trust is already low.

Inconsistency in which elected positions are included in the measure. Oregon legislators passed the measure and referred it to voters, but chose not to include their own positions (among others) under Instant Runoff RCV.

Discussion and Analysis.

Your Committee conducted its research on Measure 117's impact on Oregon's elections, focusing on the following areas:

1. Voters' ability to express their preferences and voter participation
2. Vote splitting (the "spoiler effect")
3. Election civility
4. Implementation cost
5. Potential limitations of RCV
6. Political landscape and perceived electoral integrity

Voters' ability to express their preferences and voter participation.

Studies assessing RCV's impact on voter turnout have been mixed due to a lack of sample data across areas where RCV is and isn't used. One study found that RCV did not have a strong impact on voter turnout and ballot completion.¹ However, another recent study of voter turnout records found substantially higher probabilities of turnout in jurisdictions using RCV. This same study found that campaigns in places with RCV have greater incidences of direct voter contact than in similar places without RCV.² Though more academic inquiry is required, early data indicate that RCV is an improvement over the status quo.

Voter representation is a particularly important consideration in Oregon, where approximately 1.3 million of Oregon's 3 million registered voters are non-affiliated or third party voters. RCV provides unaffiliated and third-party voters the ability to vote in the general election for their preferred third-party candidate and then still record their preferences between the major-party candidates by ranking them on their ballot. While unaffiliated voters can already vote for non-major party candidates under the current system, the previously highlighted concerns about vote splitting and strategic voting often prevent this from happening in practice.

Even if a non-major party candidate fails to get elected, a strong showing in the ranked voting can demonstrate the breadth of support for that candidate's positions potentially influencing the policy choices made by the race's winner. There is evidence that independent and third-party candidates fare better under RCV elections.³

Your Committee found that RCV significantly improves voter equity and representation compared to a plurality system through increased turnout, expanded representation for unaffiliated and third party voters, and increased ability of voters aligned within major parties to express political goals outside the scope of a single party platform.

¹ (Kimball and Anthony 2016)

² (Dowling et al. 2024)

³ ("Research and Data on RCV in Practice," n.d.)

Vote splitting.

A significant assertion in favor of RCV is the reduction of “**vote splitting**,” also known as the “**spoiler effect**,” in which the presence of multiple politically similar candidates divides the support of voters with similar preferences. Vote splitting is suggested to have occurred in the the 2000 presidential election in which Democratic candidate Al Gore lost the key state of Florida to Republican candidate George W. Bush by 537 votes, while liberally-aligned Green Party candidate Ralph Nader received over 97,000 votes in the state. Exit polling research found that while a significant number of Nader’s supporters were likely to have stayed home had Nader not run, the majority of his voters would have participated and were more likely to have voted for Gore than Bush.⁴

Plurality voting systems are particularly susceptible to vote-splitting because voters can only indicate a single preference when voting. This encourages “**strategic voting**” in which a voter chooses a candidate they consider to have a better chance of winning even if that candidate is not the most representative of their interests. RCV methods are designed to mitigate vote splitting by allowing voters to rank candidates in order of preference, ensuring their votes still count towards their political interests even if their top choice is not a frontrunner. In many instances, RCV produces winners with broader support, preventing scenarios where a candidate wins with only a weak plurality.⁵

Though advocates highlight that RCV voters can rely on backup choices when their first choice is eliminated, opponents counter that the order in which candidates are defeated matters significantly. In elections where your favorite is competitive but isn't likely to win on first choice votes alone, ranking them in first place can backfire. If your second choice is eliminated before your vote is able to transfer, your vote can actually help your last choice win, and you would have been better off marking a front-runner as your first choice.⁶ However, this type of strategic voting can also backfire if a voter misjudges the relative strength of candidates. While RCV cannot fully eradicate vote splitting and strategic voting, your Committee found that RCV significantly shifts the burden of electoral strategy from the voter to parties and candidates. It also expands voter representation by allowing voters to more freely express interests in candidates without splitting the vote for a candidate on whom they would have compromised.

Election Civility.

RCV is structured to encourage candidates to seek second and third choice voters. This can increase outreach to voters who aren't typically a target for a candidate's political alignment as well as reduce negative “attack campaigns” that could alienate potential votes through ranking⁷. Studies show that both voters and candidates perceive RCV elections as more civil and positive

⁴ (Southwell 2004)

⁵ (“WHY ADOPT RCV?,” n.d.)

⁶ (“Comparing Leading Voting Methods,” n.d.)

⁷ (Dowling et al. 2024)

compared to traditional plurality elections⁸. Research also indicates that candidates in RCV elections are more likely to engage in positive campaigning and appeal to a broader range of voters⁹, and that media coverage in RCV cities features more positive language.¹⁰ For example, the 2013 Minneapolis mayoral election saw candidates frequently engaging with a diverse array of community groups and avoiding negative attacks on opponents.¹¹ Similarly, in Oakland, California, RCV aided in the election of the city's first female and Asian-American mayor, Jean Quan, who actively sought second and third-choice votes by running a positive and coalition-building campaign.¹²

By eliminating some of the risk around vote splitting and by increasing the value of traditionally under-represented voters, RCV can incentivize parties to prioritize diverse candidates that have been historically viewed as less electable. Under the current system some candidates are sometimes told to “wait their turn,” a dismissive phrase used in politics to suggest that certain candidates must work longer to prove their electability than other candidates whose electability is assumed with less effort.¹³ However, California cities that adopted RCV saw an increase in the percentage of candidates of color running for office, indicating that these candidates had been more competitive than anticipated.

A study of four cities in the Bay Area that adopted RCV found that more women and people of color were elected to office following its adoption. Specifically, across the elections held using RCV a person of color was elected 59.8% of the time; in the corresponding elections prior to the adoption of RCV this number was 41.4%. In comparison, similarly sized Bay Area cities that did not adopt RCV only saw a 2.9% increase in people of color elected to office over the same period¹⁴.

While the increase in women elected to office is less substantial, it also shows a correlation to RCV. In the same four Bay Area cities over the same period, the percentage of women holding seats elected via RCV increased 2.2% while the percentage of women elected in the comparable non-RCV cities decreased 4.5%.

While not crucial to your Committee's criteria for evaluating RCV, the increase in political accessibility for diverse candidates was weighed as a strong benefit for transitioning to this system. Political alignment aside, increased diversity in political representation increases community knowledge about legislation and can increase policy attention toward issues that are relevant to specific groups. While further study is needed, your Committee was moved by evidence that RCV expanded representation and equity in comparison to plurality voting.

⁸(Donovan, Tolbert, and Gracey 2016)

⁹ (Donovan and Tolbert 2023)

¹⁰ (Kropf 2021)

¹¹ (“RCV BY THE NUMBERS: 2013 Key Minneapolis Election Findings” 2013)

¹² (Richie and Hill, n.d.)

¹³ (Fox and Lawless 2004)

¹⁴ (John, Sarah, Smith, and Zac 2018)

Implementation Costs.

The Oregon Department of Administrative Services has produced estimates for costs at the county and state level for implementation of RCV as outlined in HB 2004.

At the state level, costs include salaries for additional full-time positions required to manage and support RCV implementation, consulting support, publicity and outreach efforts to educate voters, IT professional services, and additional staffing. The total state costs for implementing RCV in Oregon from now to 2027 are estimated to be \$6.5 million. This includes \$865,000 for the 2023-25 biennium and \$5.6 million for the 2025-27 biennium. This annualizes to \$2.2 million, assuming one year in the 2023-2025 biennium. However, the other listed costs like voter education and consulting will likely drop over time.

At the county level, where most election administration takes place, the initial one-time expenses include software and hardware upgrades, staff training, and additional staffing for system testing. Ongoing costs for counties include additional expenses for printing and logistics during each statewide election as well as annual costs for software and maintenance contracts. However, the report states that given the novelty of these new systems and the vast difference individual counties need for upgrades, these estimates are much less certain. The initial one-time implementation cost is estimated at \$2.3 million for counties statewide, and ongoing annual expenses for all counties would total \$1.6 million.

In a typical year, the cost of administering an election in Oregon can range from \$2.2 million to \$4.5 million a year, climbing to \$5-6 million in presidential election years.¹⁵ With this in mind, your Committee considers a \$1.6 million variance each year and initial increases of \$2.3 million in 2026 (a typical election year) to be an acceptable cost in exchange for the benefits provided.

Potential Limitations of RCV

The question before this Committee and Oregonians is whether or not to approve RCV as outlined in Ballot Measure 117, but in the course of research and witness interviews your Committee met many pro-RCV witnesses who expressed concern with issues that occur exclusively in Instant Runoff Voting. Your Committee considered the following perceived failures and determined they were not material negative factors:

“One person, One Vote”

“One Person One Vote” is a legally established criterion of fair democratic elections, which holds that each individual’s vote must hold weight equal to any other voter. Some forms of RCV, including Instant Runoff Voting, produce exhausted ballots in which every candidate for whom the voter had expressed a preference could be eliminated prior to the final runoff. Some argue the exclusion of these ballots from the end process violates the one person, one vote principle.

¹⁵ (Woon and Myers, n.d.)

By design, Instant Runoff Voting produces exhausted ballots frequently, but these are overwhelmingly cases of “**voluntary abstention**” in which voters are not interested in the final contenders. While 21% of ballots in Alaska’s 2022 Special Election were exhausted before the final round, 75% of voters who listed only one candidate on their ballot did so because that candidate was the only one they liked. RCV gives voters the option to fully express preferences beyond single candidates without repercussion, but it is a voter’s prerogative to list as few or as unpopular candidates as they want.

Alaska's Special Election

In 2022, Alaska held a special election to fill its U.S. House seat for the remaining five months of the term following the death of Representative Don Young. This marked the first use of RCV in an Alaskan statewide election following a 2020 ballot measure.

Candidates and Vote Shares:

- **Nick Begich (R):** 28.5% (first round, eliminated)
- **Sarah Palin (R):** 31.3% (first round) → 48.5% (final round)
- **Mary Peltola (D):** 40.2% (first round) → 51.5% (final round, winner)

This election highlighted the impact of RCV, with Peltola ultimately winning after the redistribution of Begich's votes. Voters in Alaska will decide this November whether to keep RCV in future elections.

“Majority Winners”

While RCV advocates will sometimes say the outcome “guarantees a **majority win**” or over 50% of votes, this is not necessarily the case. It should be noted that while Ballot Measure 117 states that the rounds of elimination happen “until a candidate receives a majority of votes,” no democratic electoral system can *guarantee* a majority win. Population preferences are complex, and it takes very few voters to shift from a majority to a minority win even in plurality systems. The goal of voting reform is to move elections closer to the majority when there isn’t consensus.

Some opponents of Instant Runoff Voting argue that alternative voting methods can produce outcomes closer to a majority. Proponents of Ranked Robin, a method in which a winner is determined by a series of head to head matchups based on voter’s rankings, argue that the winner should be one who voters en masse prefer to any other candidate. Had Alaska’s race been evaluated by Ranked Robin, Nick Begich would have won as both Peltola and Palin voters preferred him to the alternative candidate in their second choice votes. Ranked Robin voting can select a compromise among diverse opinions, but only guarantees the candidate to whom voters collectively least object to. A secondary vote for a candidate does not always mean the candidate is representative of one’s interest; it can be a failsafe to prevent a significantly different candidate from being elected, or at the least a candidate less interested in or capable of making significant policy changes. Ranked Robins ask voters to compromise between party lines to reach a majority, while Instant Runoffs provide voters a series of descending safety nets to provide compromise within their alignment.

Multiple types of voting on one ballot

With the passage of this measure, voters could encounter up to two different voting methods and three distinct counting systems on a single ballot. The voting methods might include plurality and RCV, while the counting systems could encompass Single Transferable Vote, Instant Runoff, and plurality voting.

However, your Committee was unable to find evidence that this additional complexity potentially affects voter participation and “**ballot spoilage**,” when a ballot is marked incorrectly and cannot be counted by election officials. While voter education initiatives could also mitigate the impact of increased ballot complexity, predicting their effectiveness remains challenging. In addition, this situation is not entirely new in Oregon; Benton County residents have been using two voting methods since 2020, and Portland will implement this approach starting in 2024.

Primaries’ impact on the effect of RCV

Potential positive outcomes, such as incentivizing a more diverse candidate pool, and increasing candidate engagement with voters, are potentially reduced by Oregon’s closed primary elections even if those elections are conducted via Instant Runoff RCV.

Closed primary systems, in which only party members can vote, allow subsets of voters to narrow down the candidate pool before the general election. This means that candidates who have broad appeal across parties and would likely perform well in a ranked choice Instant Runoff general election, but do not have the most appeal within a single party, can be eliminated before the general election. This effect is potentially more substantial when voter turnout in primaries is much less than that of the general election, as even smaller portions of the electorate are choosing which candidates to eliminate before the general election. In 2022, 38% of registered voters participated in primaries compared to 67% in the general election¹⁶.

While candidates could run as independents if they hadn’t run in a primary election (Oregon has sore loser laws and doesn’t allow candidates to re-run as independent if they lose in the primary election¹⁷), the lack of party support for fundraising, voter mobilization, and other resources, coupled with the need to gather a significant number of signatures to appear on the ballot, present substantial hurdles to a successful campaign.

In summary, because of the structure of Oregon’s existing primary system, we may not see significant changes in election outcomes in the short term.

Theoretical Failures

¹⁶(Oregon Secretary of State 2023)

¹⁷ (“Ballot Access Requirements for Presidential Candidates in Oregon - Ballotpedia,” n.d.)

Like all voting systems, RCV can hypothetically create paradoxical anomalies. The “Lesser-Evil Failure,” in which a voter would choose a candidate they believe is more electable to avoid vote splitting, is theoretically still possible under RCV. For this strategy to be necessary, voters have to correctly predict that votes for their first choice candidate will be redistributed in an unfavorable way or exhaust ballots. Your Committee found this outcome to be rare since RCV discourages the extreme polarity that creates these conditions and reduces ballot exhaustion by rewarding candidates actively collecting second and third choice votes.

“Monotonicity” is the principle that increasing a candidate’s ranking should not worsen the candidate’s odds of winning. It is theoretically possible in RCV to violate this principle if a certain number of voters strategically elevate an unpopular candidate to change the order of elimination. For monotonicity failure to occur, a risky, coordinated effort to alter elimination order would have to take place, and would require highly accurate estimates of election outcomes. Your Committee found there has never been a confirmed case of Monotonicity Failure.

Political Landscape and Perceived Electoral Integrity.

Some organizations and think tanks oppose RCV based on concerns about its impact on election integrity and the potential for complicating the voting process. Notably, the Republican National Committee adopted a resolution to officially oppose RCV across the U.S. As stated in the resolution, “grassroots activists of the Republican Party have made it abundantly clear that they do not trust new election procedures, outcomes, and further complications of modern systems that sow additional distrust in elections and we need to keep voting simple and secure.”¹⁸ Similarly, the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, contends that RCV is “a scheme to disconnect elections from issues and allow candidates with marginal support from voters to win.” They suggest that RCV disenfranchises voters “because ballots that do not include the two ultimate finalists are cast aside to manufacture a faux majority for the winner.”¹⁹ The Foundation generally prefers simpler voting systems, such as traditional plurality or runoff elections, which they argue are easier for voters to understand and for election officials to administer without introducing additional complexities and costs.

That said, despite the stated opposition of some conservative organizations on the national level, a group of prominent Oregon Republicans used RCV in 2022 to evaluate support for gubernatorial candidates. RCV is also frequently used in Republican “straw polls,” including at the Dorchester Conference- the oldest and largest annual gathering of political conservatives in Oregon each year.²⁰

Referring to RCV as “a scheme” rather than a viable voting method was echoed in many witness testimonies in opposition to Measure 117, alleging that RCV is a liberal tactic to elect more left-leaning candidates. Alaska’s 2022 special election is a common flashpoint supporting this argument, as Peltola’s vote share increased from 40.2% in the first round to 51.5% after

¹⁸ (RTP Staff 2023)

¹⁹ (Spakovsky, n.d.)

²⁰ (Oregonian/OregonLive 2022)

Begich's elimination.²¹ This led to Republican resentment because a majority of voters would have favored Begich to Peltola or Palin in a Ranked Robin style head-to-head match up.²² To avoid such results, some experts advocate for selecting the “Ranked Robin winner,” where the candidate who wins by the highest margin in every head-to-head election against each of the other candidates is declared the winner even if they have the lowest number of first choice votes.²³ While outside the scope of this measure, Ranked Robin tabulation could be performed on a ranked ballot in place of Instant Runoff Voting if desired.

Despite those concerns, RCV appears to have done a good job of representing Alaska voters’ desires; after the special election, voters went back to the polls 5 months later with the same 3 candidates and re-elected Peltola. Two years after her election, Peltola is the most popular statewide elected official and has the highest favorability rating of any member of Congress from Alaska.²⁴ Supporters across the aisle in Alaska, including Republican Senate Majority Leader Cathy Giessel, have been vocal about their support for using RCV in future elections.²⁵ Bryce Edgmon, Independent Speaker of the House in Alaska, is also a proponent of RCV, stating during the ballot measure campaign that: “As a political independent and the leader of a bipartisan coalition, there’s no question that legislators are at their best when they’re able to put party politics aside. The reforms in Ballot Measure 2 [Alaska RCV] will make it easier for everyone to work together to protect and improve all Alaskans’ way of life.”²⁶

RCV produces significantly more data about voter preferences than plurality voting, which can be used to determine whether an alternative method would have resulted in a different outcome. Groups dissatisfied with a result determined by Instant Runoff Voting will often argue that it did not produce the “right” outcome. Ranked Robin, for example, would have resulted in Nick Begich being elected. Ultimately, no single voting method can satisfy all reasonable criteria in every election, but instances in which RCV fails to elect a winner identified by other methods are rare. After hundreds of RCV elections, the Alaska House race is one of only two races identified in the United States where RCV didn’t elect the candidate that would have won via Ranked Robin voting. Harvard Law professor Nick Stephanopoulos found this to be true internationally as well.²⁷

Nonetheless, polarization around RCV exists. Some states, including Tennessee, Florida, Idaho, Montana, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and South Dakota—all Republican controlled states—have now banned RCV.²⁸ The Missouri legislature has passed a proposed constitutional amendment that would bar RCV in most of the state if approved by

²¹ (“Alaska Election Results, 2022,” n.d.)

²²(Foley and Maskin 2022)

²³ (Close, n.d.)

²⁴ (“Rep. Peltola Is the Most Popular Politician in Alaska. She Still Faces a Tight Race” 2024)

²⁵ (Ruskin 2023)

²⁶ (“Alaska Ballot Measure 2, Top-Four Ranked-Choice Voting and Campaign Finance Laws Initiative (2020),” n.d.)

²⁷ (Stephanopoulos 2024)

²⁸ (Rosenbaum 2024)

voters.²⁹ Additionally, as Oregonians vote on implementing RCV in November, Alaskans will vote on whether to overturn it.

While your Committee found that polarization around RCV is significant, it found no evidence this voting system mechanically benefits candidates from one political party over another. Your Committee believes RCV is a positive step towards voting reform.

²⁹ (Kellogg 2024)

Conclusions.

Your Committee concludes that:

- RCV has been shown in early studies to increase voter turnout and direct voter contact.
- Third party and independent candidates are more competitive in RCV elections, and Oregon has a high share of voters interested in these candidates.
- RCV greatly diminishes strategic voting and plurality outcomes like the spoiler effect.
- Elections are more civil with RCV with the reduction of attack campaigns. Increases in positive media coverage are also observable.
- Candidates are more likely to widen their engagement with voters in RCV to secure a ranking somewhere on the voter's ballot.
- More diverse candidates campaign and win in RCV elections, creating more diverse leadership.
- The cost of implementing RCV, though difficult to predict, is reasonable to produce other significant benefits of moving away from plurality voting.
- Exhausted ballots are not a significant detractor of RCV and a significant improvement over plurality exhaustion after a single and often strategic vote.
- While RCV cannot guarantee a "majority win" more than any other electoral system, RCV produces winners that a majority of voters prefer to the runner-up, and gives voters more ability to voice preference for the final two.
- There is no evidence of ballot spoilage, voter fraud or significant voter confusion around RCV.
- Theoretical failures of RCV like monotonicity and lesser-evil are not material in practice.
- Significant political pressures have not deterred bi-partisan lawmakers from supporting the use of RCV even after unusual election outcomes.

In your Committee's review, ranked choice voting is a decided improvement over the present system.

Recommendation.

Your Committee recommends a "yes" vote on Measure 117.

Respectfully submitted.

William Creger
Robin Denburg
Walker Griffith
Katie Lorish
Peter Miller
Michaela Parker
Jon Williams

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Witnesses.

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