

EQUAL.VOTE

My name is Sara Wolk and I'm testifying to urge you to vote no on Ranked Choice Voting. We can do better.

Ranked Choice looks compelling on the surface, and claims it can ensure majority winners, address vote-splitting, and prevent lesser-evil voting are all persuasive, but unfortunately they are not true, as we've seen play out in real world elections. I find it deeply concerning that, reading through the pro and con testimony already submitted, the vast majority of advocates think RCV does much much more than it actually does. Worse, on some points, RCV does the opposite.

RCV is the subject of a massive lobby, steered by FairVote, which spends many millions of dollars a year (23M in Nevada alone last year) on propaganda and lobbying to tell people what they want to hear. If you're a fan of democracy and listen to its many well intentioned advocates you should know that you are also being told what you want to hear. It's not a partisan issue. It's a bad design.

RCV does mitigate some of the issues we see in our current partisan election system, offering outcomes statistically almost identical to Top-Two in most cases. It also shortens the election process and does set up campaigns to be more positive. These pros are great, though not unique to RCV. The real advantages of RCV are also offered by any other alternative voting methods like STAR, but on some metrics, like preventing wasted votes, RCV does much, much worse than the current system or any other proposal – It increases spoiled ballots, leads to exhausted ballots, and causes some votes to backfire and have the opposite of the intended impact. Look that up, it's a phenomenon called non-monotonicity. It's a huge red flag.

Moving forward with a proposal that looks compelling on the surface but is deeply flawed upon closer inspection is dangerous. It runs the risk of inciting serious backlash and setting us back on voting reform. RCV is a proposal that is unlikely to perform as advertised and that is unable to withstand and address the valid concerns of the electorate, not to mention concerns of the county clerks. We can do better.

The field of electoral science has come a very, very long way in the last 150 years since RCV was first invented. I invite the legislature to convene a commission to study this issue in depth and thoroughly fact check every claim made (especially those repeated over and over,) rather than simply taking it from the

well-intentioned advocates you'll hear from today. RCV has a ton of counterintuitive impacts and outcomes that go directly contrary to what one would assume. You owe it to advocates of voting reform to make sure they are not being misled.

I'm the executive director of an Oregon based national nonprofit dedicated to educating and informing the public on alternative voting methods. We strongly support voting reform, and there are many proposals that would be a step in the right direction. STAR, Condorcet (Ranked Robin, Minimax, etc.) and even humble Approval Voting.

We want fair, equitable elections that empower voters to vote their conscience, that help elect representatives win a strong mandate to lead, that combat polarization, that level the playing field, and that ensure secure elections the people can (and should) trust. RCV doesn't deliver on those goals.

This month, an article I co-authored has been peer reviewed and will be published in the peer reviewed journal Constitutional Political Economy on STAR Voting, Ranked Choice Voting, and equality of voice in voting reform. (I'll include the preprint below.)

I'll include a number of citations and statistics about RCV below:

- In elections where more than one round is needed, "an average of 10.92% of ballots are not able to be included in the final round of tabulation, including ballots that could have made a difference. [\(1\)](#), [\(2\)](#). The number of exhausted ballots is often greater than the win margin.
- In RCV in competitive races the incentive is often to vote "lesser-evil" rather than supporting one's honest favorite. Voting honestly in IRV can actually backfire, resulting in a worse outcome than if the voter had not voted at all. This was true for a large portion of voters in both Alaska, 2021, and Burlington, VT, 2009. [\(3\)](#) This runs directly contrary to the common false claims that in RCV it's safe to vote your conscience, that it eliminates vote-splitting, and that it prevents wasted votes. [\(4\)](#)
- "Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) suffers from a defect known as nonmonotonicity, wherein increasing support for a candidate among a subset of voters may adversely affect that candidate's election outcome "monotonicity failures in three-candidate IRV elections may be much more prevalent than widely presumed (results suggest a lower bound estimate of 15% for competitive elections)" [\(1\)](#)
- "Latinos, voters with less education, and those whose first language is not English are more likely to be disenfranchised with a ranked-choice voting

system." This statistic has been reconfirmed by numerous studies which found higher spoiled ballot rates in lower income precincts and wards. ([1](#))

I was a longtime advocate about RCV specifically because the talking points and goals resonated with me and promised to solve fundamental problems with our democracy. Those talking points still resonate, but I now know that RCV does not behave as advertised, is more complicated than it appears, that the tabulation is unnecessarily complex and doesn't scale well. Ranked Choice can and does waste votes and disenfranchise voters specifically in the elections

Voting is a sacred act and we can't afford to adopt a system that appears to be fair and representative, but that can then fail to produce majority outcomes, can fail to elect the candidate preferred over all others, perpetuates vote-splitting, and unnecessarily disenfranchises voters.

While we do support a number of good methods, Ranked Choice Voting is not among them and we believe that passing this outdated and flawed reform would be a mistake.

Peer Review: Constitutional Political Economy

["STAR Voting, Equality of Voice, and Voter Satisfaction: Design considerations for a novel voting method"](#)