

EQUAL.VOTE

My name is Sara Wolk, executive director at the Equal Vote Coalition.

I'd like to focus my time on two facts and three recent events that should give us pause.

- Most people would assume otherwise, but most of the rankings given under RCV are never counted. As a result, it requires centralized tabulation and election officials can't know which ballot data is relevant until the order of elimination has been determined. This makes it much harder for election officials to check their work as they go and can allow errors to go undiscovered, as happened in two recent major RCV elections:
 - In the 2021 New York City mayor's race, the Board of Elections added 135,000 "test" ballots to the official count and failed to catch the error.
 - In the 2022 general, Alameda County, California (which includes Oakland,) tallied every single RCV election wrong, conducting the steps, and eliminating candidates in the wrong order. They *also* failed to catch this error and went on to certify the wrong winner in one race. The error was only uncovered 50 days later, by a 3rd party doing data analysis.
 - Both of these errors could have been avoided if STAR Voting was used instead. STAR Voting is counted using simple addition and allows for all of the same security protocols and audits as the current system.

Now, let's focus on outcomes:

- RCV ignores most voters' rankings, so it can eliminate a candidate who was actually preferred overall. This happened in the 2022 Alaska Special Election, where despite claims that the problem had been solved, the election was spoiled by Sarah

Palin, flipping the seat blue rather than electing the moderate Republican who was preferred over all others according to the ballots cast.

- For Palin voters, ranking her 1st choice actually backfired and ironically helped elect their last choice instead. In Oregon a similar spoiler effect scenario could easily flip a seat from Blue to Red.

For years the electoral science community has warned about a number of serious pathologies with RCV specifically that have the potential to cause huge problems, especially when it's used at larger scales and in competitive elections like we have here in Oregon.

Unfortunately, recent events have proven us right, and we are now facing unprecedented backlash towards voting reform in general. Our fear is that this reform is a Trojan horse with the potential and means to set the reform movement back a generation.

Again, Please vote no on HB 2004 and 3509.

The New York Times

New York Mayor's Race in Chaos After Elections Board Counts 135,000 Test Ballots

The extraordinary sequence of events threw the closely watched Democratic primary contest into a new period of uncertainty and seeded further confusion about the outcome.



A new vote tally released by the Board of Elections suggested that Eric Adams's lead in the mayoral primary had wobbled; the results were later taken down. James Estrin/The New York Times



By Katie Glueck

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The New York City mayor's race plunged into chaos on Tuesday night when the city Board of Elections released a new tally of votes in the Democratic mayoral primary, and then removed the tabulations from its website after citing a "discrepancy."

Then, around 10:30 p.m., the board finally released a statement, explaining that it had failed to remove sample ballot images used to test its ranked-choice voting software. When the board ran the program, it counted "both test and election night results, producing approximately 135,000 additional records," the statement said. The ranked-choice numbers, it said, would be tabulated again.

The extraordinary sequence of events seeded further confusion about the outcome, and threw the closely watched contest into a new period of uncertainty at a consequential moment for the city.

... The results released earlier in the day had suggested that the race between Eric Adams and his two closest rivals had tightened significantly.

But just a few hours after releasing the preliminary results, the elections board issued a cryptic tweet revealing a "discrepancy" in the report, saying that it was working with its "technical staff to identify where the discrepancy occurred."

By Tuesday evening, the tabulations had been taken down, replaced by a new advisory that the ranked-choice results would be available "starting on June 30."

... A comparison between first-place vote totals released on primary night and those released on Tuesday offered some insight into how the 135,000 erroneous votes were distributed. The bottom four candidates received a total of 42,000 new votes, roughly four times their actual vote total; the number of write-in ballots also skyrocketed to 17,516 from 1,336. Mr. Adams and Mr. Yang received the highest number of new votes.

It was not known, however, how the test votes were reallocated during the ranked-choice tabulations, making it impossible to determine how they affected the preliminary results that were released and then retracted. ...

San Francisco Chronicle

BAY AREA

Alameda County admits tallying error in ranked-choice voting, flips one result and raises big questions

Jill Tucker, Jordan Parker, J.D. Morris, Nami Sumida
Dec. 28, 2022 | Updated: Jan. 3, 2023 11:38 a.m.



More than 50 days after the November election and days before winners take office, Alameda County election officials announced that a programming error led to a miscount across all ranked-choice contests, including a race in which an Oakland school board candidate was wrongly declared the winner.

The revelation came well after the county certified the results and raised questions not only about what happens next, but whether the mistake could further erode faith in fair elections.

...

San Francisco political consultant Jim Ross said he had never seen anything like the vote-count reversal in his three decades of political work in numerous states.

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... "As somebody who does politics for a living, I'm kind of shocked, outraged and just dismayed about it all," he said. "You count on the registrar of voters to conduct the election in a way that's fair and competent.... It really feeds into the distrust that so many people have in our electoral system when this sort of thing happens."

... FairVote, an election reform group, alerted Alameda County to the problem with November's vote, and officials subsequently confirmed the miscount.

...

The Alameda County registrar explained that if a voter didn't select a candidate as first choice, then the second choice should have been counted as the first choice in the first round. The same would occur in subsequent rounds moving lower choices up into the empty slot. Instead, the erroneous algorithm didn't count any vote in a round if a space was blank.

...

More than 200 ballots were considered suspended and not counted correctly in the Oakland District Four school director race. A majority of these suspended votes, 115, were for Hutchinson.

Without the suspended votes in the first-round results, the ranked-choice voting algorithm incorrectly determined that Hutchinson had the fewest votes and eliminated him in the first round. But with the suspended votes, Hutchinson's vote tally grows to 8,227, making him the second-highest vote-getter in the first round after Resnick. Hutchinson then won by a few hundred votes in the second round.