

Minnesota Public Radio News and Humphrey Institute Poll

Ranked Choice Voting Supported But Falls Short of Expectations

Report prepared by the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance
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Majorities of Minneapolis voters are generally supportive and satisfied with the use of Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) in city elections on November 3, 2009. But there are partisan divisions over RCV, with Republicans more opposed than Democrats and independents. In addition, there is little evidence to support the promises of RCV advocates that the new voting procedure would stimulate engagement and voter turnout or prompt voters to exercise more choice and to sense that their vote counted more rather than as being “wasted.”

Support for Ranked Choice Voting

Majorities of Minneapolis voters favor RCV over the previous system that included a primary election and want to see it used in next year’s Governor’s race.

Support for Ranked Choice Voting

Prefer RCV system	56%
Prefer former system with primary election	39%
No difference in RCV or former system	5%
RCV should be used in Gubernatorial Election	68%
RCV should not be used in Gubernatorial Election	32%

Indeed, voters report a 13 percentage point increase in support for RCV after Election Day as compared to before.

More Support for Ranked Choice Voting after Election Day

	Before Election	After Election
Support RCV	46%	59%
Neither support nor oppose RCV	32%	21%
Oppose RCV	22%	20%

The support for RCV may stem, in part, from the extraordinary preparation of voters for the new system. Ninety percent of voters reported that they knew they would be asked to rank their choices. Another indication of the familiarity and preparation for RCV is that very few voters volunteered “don’t know” or “no opinion” responses to survey questions about RCV. .

Partisan Polarization over Ranked Choice Voting

Despite the overall support for RCV, **Republicans are less supportive of RCV than Democrats and independents.** Sixty-seven percent of Republicans who voted in the November 3rd election favor the previous system that relied on primary elections instead of RCV compared to half as many Democrats and independents. Three-quarters of Republicans oppose the use of RCV in next year’s gubernatorial elections while similarly lopsided proportions of Democrats and independents favor its use.

Partisan Divide on Ranked Choice Voting

	Prefer:		In Gubernatorial Election:	
	Former system with primary election	RCV System	RCV should be used	RCV should not be used
Republicans	67%	31%	24%	76%
Independents	30%	63%	86%	14%
Democrats	33%	61%	76%	24%

Republican opposition to RCV appears to stem from fear that their influence may be diluted. Forty-two percent of Republicans report that their vote will count for less; only 5 percent of Democrats and 4 percent of independents share this concern. Perhaps with an eye to Governor Pawlenty’s ability to win in 2002 and 2006 without a majority, 53 percent of Republicans indicated that they would be less supportive of RCV because the winner would need a majority rather than a plurality. These results, though, should not be over-interpreted due to the low number of Republican voters in Minneapolis.

Dissatisfaction with the Democratic and Republican Parties and support for a third party is driving support for RCV. Among the 60 percent of Minneapolis voters who believe that a third party is needed, half believe that RCV will make their vote count for more; this contrasts with the 38 percent among supporters of the Democratic and Republican parties.

Dissatisfaction with Democratic and Republican Party Fuels Support for RCV

	Compared to the previous system that lacked choice, RCV:		
	Will help vote to count for more	Will help vote to count for less	Doesn't make a difference
Democratic and Republican Parties do adequate job (40%)	38%	15%	47%
Third Party is needed (60%)	51%	9%	40%

Ranked Choice Voting Falls Short of Expectations

The advocates of RCV argued that this new voting procedure would, according to Fair Vote Minnesota, “solve the ‘spoiler’ problem and give voters more choice,” “eliminate the ‘wasted’ vote” so each vote counted more, and “increase voter participation.” Although additional research will be necessary to evaluate these expectations, the MPR/HHH survey suggests that the Minneapolis elections fell short of the transformations promised by RCV advocates for extensive choice exercise by voters, widespread confidence that the vote counted more, and increased voter turnout.

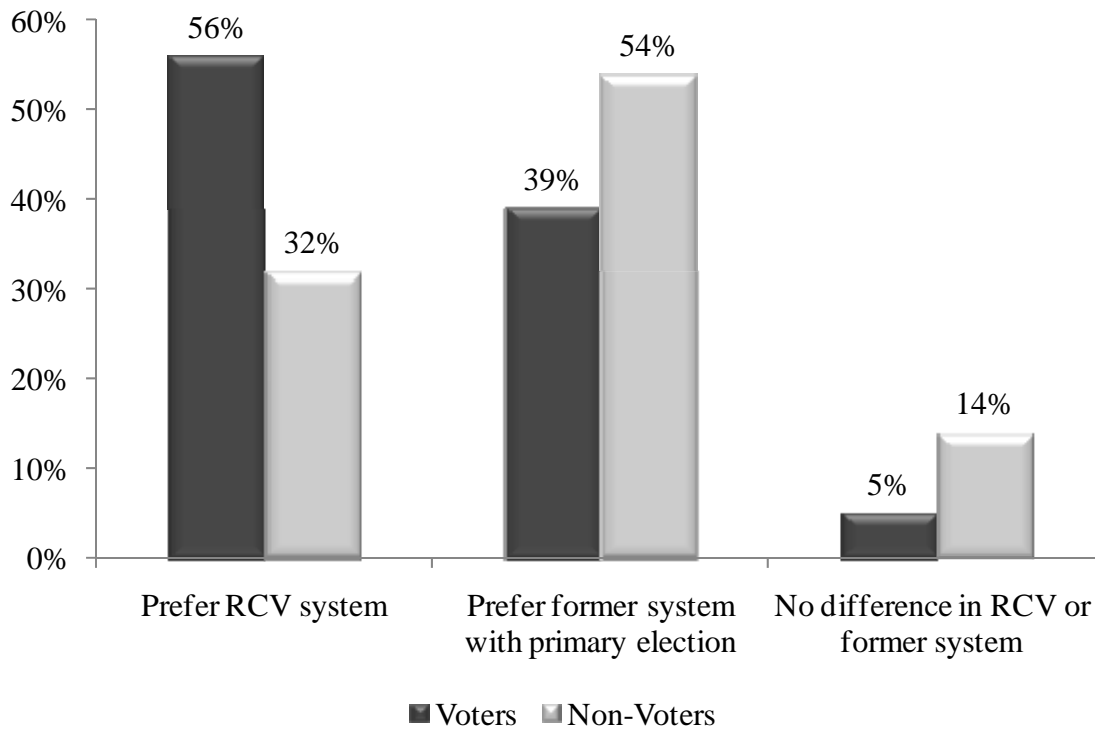
Only 10 percent of voters and 18 percent of non-voters report that the use of RCV in next year’s gubernatorial election would make them more likely to cast a ballot. This already limited impact is weaker because of a partial backlash against RCV among individuals who report that they are **less likely to vote** because of the new system. Even tepid indications of higher future participation should be put in the context of historically low turnout in this year’s Minneapolis elections and the likelihood of much higher turnout next year; indeed, three-quarters or more report that RCV won’t make a difference to them.

RCV Produces Only Muted Increase in Voter Turnout for Gubernatorial Election

	Voters	Non-Voters
If RCV is used in Gubernatorial Election:		
More likely to vote	10%	18%
Less likely to vote	2%	5%
No difference in likelihood of voting	88%	77%

Minneapolis residents who did not cast a ballot are notably less supportive of RCV than voters. Compared to the previous system, support for the RCV is 24 percentage points lower among non-voters than among voters. This is an indication of the muted impact of RCV on the turnout of those who sat out the Minneapolis elections and may be a warning of RCV’s drag on voter participation.

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Nearly half of Minneapolis residents who reported casting a ballot in Mayoral and City Council races failed to exercise the choice that RCV advocates believed voters craved.

When asked to explain why they only ranked one candidate, about half of voters indicated that no other candidates were acceptable and nearly another third reported that they did not know enough about the other candidates.

Many Voters Failed to Exercise Choice

	Election for Mayor	City Council Elections
Select first choice on ballot only	47%	47%
Selected other choices on ballot	52%	50%
Did not vote in the race	1%	3%

Many voters did not report a surge in efficacy and the sense that their ballot would count more. Forty-one percent indicated RCV would not make a difference compared to the previous system that did not allow voters to rank their choices. An additional twelve percent feared that RCV would make their ballot count for **less**.

Many Do Not Believe RCV Makes Their Vote Count for More

Compared to the previous system that lacked choice, RCV:	
Will help vote to count for more	47%
Will help vote to count for less	12%
Doesn't make a difference	41%

About the Survey

This survey is a collaboration between Minnesota Public Radio and the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs. The survey was analyzed by the Center. The research team was Lawrence R. Jacobs (Center Director) and Joanne M. Miller (Associate Professor, Department of Political Science). Melanie Burns was the team's research and data analyst.

The survey was fielded by the Information Specialists Group (ISG) and is based on a landline random digit dial survey in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota conducted by ISG. ISG called a sample of telephone exchanges that was randomly selected by a computer from a list of active residential exchanges within Minneapolis. Within each exchange, random digits were added to form a complete telephone number, thus permitting access to both listed and unlisted numbers. Within each household, one adult was selected to be the respondent for the survey.

As is common with public opinion surveys, the data were weighted. In the first stage, the data were weighted according to gender, age, race, and Hispanic ethnicity to approximate the demographic characteristics of the population according to the Census. In addition, cell phone usage was also incorporated. A second stage of weighting was geared to the first-vote outcome of the mayoral elections to reflect the November 3rd voter population. After the weightings, Mayor Rybak received 74 percent of the vote in both the unofficial Secretary of State results and the findings of this survey.

The distribution of party identification among Minneapolis residents in the full sample is as follows:

	Minneapolis
Republican	19%
Independent	16%
Democrat	65%

300 voters in Minneapolis were interviewed by telephone between November 4, 2009 and November 9, 2009; the margin of error is +/-5.7 percentage points. In theory, in 19 cases out of 20 the results among Minneapolis voters will differ by no more than +/-5.7 percentage points in either direction from what would have been obtained by interviewing all voters in the election. In addition, 204 non-voters were interviewed; the margin of error is +/-6.9 percentage points. For smaller subgroups the margin of sampling error is larger. The response rate is 46 percent (based AAPOR response rate calculation 4).

In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting any survey of public opinion may introduce sources of error into the poll. Variations in the wording and order of questions, for example, may lead to somewhat different results.

Wording of Substantive Questions in Survey

Before voting this time, did you know you would be asked to rank your choices for the candidates for each office by selecting your first, second, and third choices?

Before the election, how much did you support or oppose Ranked-Choice Voting? Strongly support, somewhat support, neither support nor oppose, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose?

How much did you support or oppose Ranked-Choice Voting now that the election is over? Strongly support, somewhat support, neither support nor oppose, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose?

When you filled out your ballot for the race for Mayor of MINNEAPOLIS, did you select your first, second, and third choices, or did you select just your first and second choices, or did you select just your first choice?

I'm going to read you a list of reasons why you might have only selected one choice for Mayor. Please tell me which was the MAIN reason you selected only one choice. (All choices were read and their order was randomized)

1. I didn't know I could rank three
2. I didn't understand that part of the ballot
3. I didn't know enough about the other candidates
4. No other candidates were acceptable to me
5. My favorite candidate suggested that strategy
6. I'll probably always just pick one
7. Other [VOL] [SPECIFY]
8. Don't know [VOL]
9. Refused

When you filled out your ballot for the race for City Council, did you select your first, second, and third choices, or did you select just your first and second choices, or did you select just your first choice?

I'm going to read you a list of reasons why you might have only selected one choice for City Council. Please tell me which was the MAIN reason you selected only one choice. (All choices were read and their order was randomized)

Sometimes voters feel like their vote doesn't count for much in an election. What about you? Compared to the system in which you couldn't rank your choices, do you think that Ranked-Choice voting will help your vote to count for more, for less, or doesn't it make a difference?

With the Ranked-Choice Voting system, there wasn't a primary election this year. Which do you prefer – this system with no primary or the former system with a primary?

Do you think that Ranked-Choice Voting should be used in next year's election for Governor?

If the Ranked-Choice Voting system were used in next year's election for Governor, do you think you would be more or less likely to vote in the election, or won't it make a difference?

In your view, do the Republican and Democratic parties do an adequate job of representing the American people, or do they do such a poor job that a third major party is needed?