

# PS: Political Science & Politics

## Why Donald Trump Should be a Fervent Advocate of Using Rank-Choice Voting in 2024

--Manuscript Draft--

Manuscript Number:	PS-D-21-00081R1
Full Title:	Why Donald Trump Should be a Fervent Advocate of Using Rank-Choice Voting in 2024
Short Title:	Why Donald Trump Should be a Fervent Advocate of Using Rank-Choice Voting in 2024
Article Type:	Article
Keywords:	Rank Choice Voting; Third Parties; elections; Social Choice
Corresponding Author:	Jonathan Cervas Carnegie Mellon University Irvine, CA UNITED STATES
Corresponding Author Secondary Information:	
Corresponding Author's Institution:	Carnegie Mellon University
Corresponding Author's Secondary Institution:	
First Author:	Jonathan Cervas
First Author Secondary Information:	
Order of Authors:	Jonathan Cervas Bernard Grofman
Order of Authors Secondary Information:	
Abstract:	<p>This article builds off work by Devine and Kopko (2021) and Lacy and Burden (1999) who estimate a probit model of candidate choice from the CCES to determine the second choice of third-party voters. Using this model on 2020 election data, we show that the Libertarian candidate Jo Jorgenson probably cost Donald Trump victory in at least two state – AZ and GA. Additionally, the popular vote margin enjoyed by Joe Biden could have been between 260,000 and 525,000 votes less, using conservative estimates. The motivation of this paper is to give contrary evidence for two main misconceptions. First, that third-party candidates are “spoiling” elections for the Democrats. Our evidence clearly shows that third-parties have the potential to hurt either of the two main parties, but in 2020, it was Donald Trump who was hurt most; though not consequentially. Second, some reformers believe that Rank Choice Voting benefits the Democrats; again, we show that, all else being equal, it is the Republicans that would have benefited by the change in rules, since the majority of third-party votes are going to the Libertarian candidate, and whose voters prefer Republicans over Democrats 60% to 32%.</p>
Suggested Reviewers:	Kyle Kopko kkopko@gmail.com  Christopher Devine UD: University of Dayton cdevine1@udayton.edu
Opposed Reviewers:	
Response to Reviewers:	Reviewer #1: Overall, I think this is a solid contribution to the literature on ranked-choice voting. This short paper highlights that the effects of this mechanism for voting does not necessarily benefit one party versus another. The answer to this, like much in life, is it depends. The methodology is very simple, but that is all it needs to be to address the question the authors have. The authors are also astute enough to highlight

where some their assumptions might begin error. They then discuss how changes in them would influence their interpretation. The only suggestion I would make is that the authors make this already short manuscript a bit shorter.

-We are very pleased that Reviewer #1 supported publication of our essay virtually as is. Our current word count is now slightly longer at 3,614. The minor change in length come from responding in full to the suggestions of the other reviewers. We believe that these change unquestionably add value and justify the minor addition in length.

---

Reviewer #2: This is a nice piece that makes a single solid point really well. It's an important point--that rank choice voting would tend to help Republican presidential candidates, and particularly Donald Trump if he ran again, in the current environment. ...Given the instability the country has experienced, this is very good to know, because as the author points out many of the strongest advocates of rank choice voting tend to be on the other side of the political fence.

-We are indebted to this reviewer for calling our attention to lack of clarity in statement of our central thesis. We believe the statement above is correct, but we did not want to leave the readers with the impression that Republicans always benefit, or that RCV is biased. We have clarified that it is only when, in net terms, supporters of the minor parties would otherwise have disproportionately given support to one of the major parties that benefits from RCV can have partisan consequences, and the nature of that impact depends upon the sizes of the various voting blocs and may change with who are the major party candidates. Because we view this point as critical to an understanding of our thesis, we now make this point early in the essay, and again in the conclusion.

The article is good as is with a few technical changes (which I will specify below), but if the author is asked to make substantive changes, the one thing I'd as is as follows. I wish that there was a bit more about how we don't know how rank choice voting procedures would change candidates' and parties' behavior down the road (or maybe we do, and there's some literature out there on how it has in countries where it exists now).

-We are very pleased that Reviewer #2 also supported publication of our essay with only minor changes. To address the issue of changes in the structure of contests that might accompany a change in electoral rule we have added the following text under the subsection "Rank Choice Voting".  
Of course, the counterfactual evaluation of any rule-change effect requires a note of caution. It would not just be changes in turnout levels affected by a shift to RCV; the consequences of a change in electoral rules include different incentives for candidate entry, strategic voting in the mass electorate, and different campaign strategies. For instance, a Donald Trump candidacy might have been less (more) likely in 2016 had RCV been in place for the Republican primary. The set of competitors might have been different, and the outcome very well may have been affected. Under a different voting rule, calculations about whether to enter the race would have changed. Some of Trump's rivals in 2016 might have defeated him in head on head competition at the end of an RCV process, or there might have been more incentives for candidates to seek support from their rivals that would have changed who got eliminated when.

I imagined that one thing that might happen is that parties in the US start thinking more about coalitions over time, even though that's not the explicit intent. Of course parliamentary systems do this and it is intentional, but rank choice systems, while different in how they play out, might also encourage people to think about how to best incorporate elements of smaller parties' platforms into their own or even try to make implicit deals with other parties to have their candidates stand down (or not stand down). I know this article can't be mostly about that, but perhaps just a note or a couple of sentences would be helpful, about how the assumptions of the article are based on the very limited frame of reference, based on past data, in the US context, and that the context would be different if this were widely adopted and it might very well change behavior of both parties and voters over time in unpredictable ways. They do

acknowledge this just a bit in the second to the last paragraph. I'm just suggesting a bit more and maybe re-locating towards the front so people's minds don't spin on that one throughout the article like mine did.

-We have added a new footnote 13 specifically to address this point. It provides the example of candidates endorsing each other in the NYC mayoral race held last week – though we also note that some commentators were surprised that more of these endorsements didn't happen. We also note that the effect of such endorsement on the final outcome (is, as of this writing, still unknown ).

Biggest suggestion for subtle re-working: The bit on p. 6 that starts "Rank Choice voting has been supported by liberal reformers..." could be put up front. What I mean is that something like this right away would help readers immediately know why people have supported RCV and that is important for the readers to know.

-We found that comment extremely helpful, and fully agree that starting off with this point greatly improves the organization and flow of the paper. We have moved this point to the beginning of the paper, and we reiterate it in the conclusion.

#### MINOR POINTS:

In the abstract, there is a space after equal and before the comma in the fourth line from the bottom.

On p. 1, second para. "In this article, after reviewing..." rather than "Here, after..."

P. 2, in the third para. "But it is unrealistic to assume that..." rather than "But assuming that all minor.... (and take out unrealistic later in the sentence)

Footnote 3: economic issues rather than "economic issue"

P. 6, first full para. This paragraph needs to be re-written. It's a bit convoluted--make sure it's clear and strong.

-All of these stylistic suggestions have been addressed and we very much thank the reviewer for helping to find grammatical errors and identifying poorly written sentences.

---

Reviewer #3: This is a fascinating manuscript, in two respects. First, it makes the counterintuitive claim that minor party candidates—despite winning smaller shares of the vote—probably were more electorally consequential in 2020 than in 2016. Second, it makes another counterintuitive claim, that Republicans, rather than Democrats, probably would have stood to gain if ranked-choice voting (RCV) had been used in the 2020 election (and, if I understand correctly, in 2016, as well). This is surprising since, as the authors note, Democrats/liberals usually are associated with promoting RCV.

(On the last point, the authors' explanation for this association is not quite satisfying. They indicate on pages 2 and 5 that this is because of a reformist streak among progressives, who wish for voters to be able to express their true preferences. I take the point, but many Libertarians and other right-leaning minor party supporters are just as supportive of such reforms. Perhaps the point to make here is simply that the politicians and interest groups supporting the adoption of RCV in Maine, New York City, etc., have been associated with the Democratic Party or other left-leaning causes. In other words, the evidence for the claim is not an assertion about ideology, but an empirical observation about patterns of support.)

-This was a very helpful comment because we inadvertently misstated the facts. The new framing of the paper helps to clarify this point. We now explain that liberals have advocated for this change, but so have supporters of third parties more generally. We

further describe in more detail why Democrats support changes, namely the perception that third party “spoilers” cost Democrat’s elections in 2000 and 2016 (evidenced by inversions where the Democrat wins the popular vote but loses the EC). And we now point out an example of Republicans specifically opposing the introduction of RCV.

The authors support these claims by citing election results in several key swing states from 2020 and Devine and Kopko’s (2021) estimates of Libertarian and Green Party voters’ counterfactual abstention rates and voting preferences in 2016. (Note: It does not seem accurate to say—see top of p. 4—based on D&K’s results, that 60% of Libertarian voters ranked Trump second, and 32-33% of Green voters ranked Clinton second. Factoring in the preceding sentence, these percentages speak only to voting preferences among those who still would have voted. It is probably better to say that 60% of Johnson voters who would have chosen not to abstain then would have voted for Trump, and the same logic for Stein voters.)

-We re-wrote this to clarify, as suggested. It now reads:  
They also estimate that, among non-abstainers, in 2016 about 60% of the voters who ranked the Libertarian candidate, Gary Johnson, first would have ranked Trump second, and about 32-33% would have ranked Clinton second.

It is clear from the data presented that Jorgensen, the Libertarian nominee in 2020, garnered more than enough votes to spell the difference in critical states, and potentially swing the election. Hawkins, the Green nominee, did not come close to this. And, combined with Libertarians’ apparent inclination toward Republican candidates, it is reasonable to argue that Trump would have benefited greatly if the Libertarians had not run a candidate, and perhaps if they had done so but under an RCV system. It is a significant limitation of this article that the authors must rest on previous estimates of minor party preferences—rather than replicating previous analyses using 2020 survey data, for instance—and assumptions about their applicability to 2020. But, with appropriately cautious language—which I mostly see here, but would prefer to see a bit more of—I can, and I think most readers can, accept this argument.

-We completely agree that care must be taken to state the assumptions of our results clearly, and we are pleased the reviewer recognized that we had sought to be careful in doing just that. While the language about this point in the revised text is little changed, we did rewrite one sentence slightly to be even more explicit about this point.

I am pleased to recommend this article for publication in PS, given the plausibility and counterintuitive nature of the authors’ argument. Additionally, with RCV being adopted in more states and municipalities recently, it is worth engaging in such a thought experiment—which this really is, because there is almost no chance that RCV will become the dominant electoral system by 2024, as the authors ought to acknowledge more clearly. In fact, this manuscript would make a constructive contribution not only to the literature on minor party voting—which I very much believe it does—but also to public debate about RCV. There seems to be a widespread perception on the political right (see, for example, Bruce Poliquin’s loss in Maine in 2018, and Trump’s reaction to it) that RCV is bad for Republicans.

-We added a footnote about Poliquin’s reaction to his loss, but could not locate a source on Trump’s reaction. “...his failure to secure the seat infuriated Poliquin, who called the outcome the “biggest voter rip-off in Maine history.””

Perhaps an argument such as this, supported by relevant data, would cause some Republicans to reconsider the effects of RCV and even support its adoption. That could have real public policy consequences, and I don’t hear anyone else making this argument. So this truly makes an important contribution.

-While, based on their reading of our essay, Republicans may reconsider their opposition to what otherwise might be viewed as a fair and beneficial reform, in this as in other recent election contexts, we are not sanguine about evidence affecting beliefs .

There are a couple points that I would urge the authors to consider, and to address if given the opportunity—as I hope will be the case—to revise and resubmit. First, they acknowledge only briefly on page 7 ("Even though the use of RCV...") that if the rules of the game had been different in 2020, this would have affected campaign strategy and the vote distributions that they analyze in this manuscript. Indeed, this is a critical point when engaging in such a counterfactual analysis. It reminds me of Donald Trump's claim that he would have won the popular vote in 2016 if the rules had required him to do so, rather than win the Electoral College. While that is very unlikely, it is worth taking the thrust of this argument seriously. Specifically, I would like to see the authors discuss: how would the campaign, and voters' response to it, likely have been different if the 2020 election had been conducted using RCV? For one thing, I suspect the Libertarian and Green Parties would have run better, more credible, candidates, than two activists with no government experience (as they did in 2012 in 2016). If so, this probably would have increased turnout even more, and even brought out disproportionately more vote (Libertarian) voters who would have ranked Trump second on their ballot.

-This is a very similar to a comment made by R2, and we have taken this comment seriously and have addressed it. See above. We agree strongly that electoral reforms will almost always have consequences for the rational decision-making of parties, candidates and voters.

Second, assuming (as I think is the case) that RCV would apply not only to the presidential race but to congressional and perhaps also state and local races, is there any reason to believe that this would have helped Republicans, as well (or would in 2024)? In other words, on balance, would it have helped Republicans to win the House and/or keep the Senate? Perhaps so, given that Libertarians run more candidates and win more of the vote than other minor parties, generally, and they seem to favor Republicans. If the authors believe that is the case, it may be a useful and relevant way to extend their argument that Republicans should be more open to, if not supportive of, adopting RCV.

-We have not tried to do new analyses of the 2020 election of the type done by Devine and Kopko (2021). That would essentially be a new paper. We have however, added information about the number of congressional districts that were close enough and with minor party vote large enough that their outcome might have been affected by use of RCV. We find that there were only a handful of such in 2020. We also added some facts about RCV effects in Maine. There it has only been of potential importance in the second CD in Maine, and only in 2018.

A few other, less important points...

1. Page 2, 1st sentence: Concerns about spoilers did not begin with Nader's candidacy. There were similar concerns in other races—e.g., Perot, 1992 and 1996; John Anderson, 1980; George Wallace, 1968 (whose objective was to throw the election to the House of Reps); Thurmond and Wallace in 1948. It might be better to say here that Nader made such concerns more salient, illustrating to voters that a spoiler effect really can happen.

-We now directly make reference to these other races and have changed our language to now read "potential spoilers has long been a topic of concern" and that the Nader candidacy made it more salient.

2. Page 2, line 5: Here and at a later point the authors definitively say that claims about spoilers in 2016 are incorrect. I think that's a bit strong, given that the authors only cite one empirical source for it, the Devine and Kopko article, which—whatever its merits—presents counterfactual estimates that, while indicative, cannot be truly conclusive.

-We have deleted the text that makes this definitive statement, though we now say it is incorrect to say RCV is invariably biased against Republicans, since that statement is

clearly supported by the evidence we present.

3. Page 4, second paragraph: It is worth clarifying that Hawkins' vote totals were lower in part because he failed to get on the ballot in numerous states, especially in comparison to Stein. Also in this paragraph, while Libertarians won about the same number of votes, Jorgensen won a much smaller percentage of the popular vote than Johnson. It would be helpful to clarify in this paragraph just how big of a difference that was.

-This is now clarified and we added commentary on the number of states given candidates were on the ballot, and on the total number of votes cast and how differences in turnout between 2016 and 2020 also should be taken into account.

4. Page 5, Footnote 4, 3rd sentence: This is such an important point, and one that the authors ought to make more forcefully in the article. Even if Jorgensen's candidacy, or RCV not being used, didn't make the difference in the 2020 election, the fact that it would have narrowed Trump's loss surely would have exacerbated the very tense, and even violent, situation that followed the election. In fact, if RCV does benefit Republicans generally, then one could argue its adoption would further distort institutions in favor of the election of Republican presidents (in combination with the Electoral College's rural/small state bias).

-We are delighted with the suggestion to take this out of a footnote and make the argument more forcibly, especially since one of us happens to live in an affected state. We now say:

It is also worth noting the potential importance of minor party votes in Pennsylvania. If every Jorgensen voter in that state had switched to Trump, the state outcome would have been very close, with a gap of only 1,175 votes. During the certification of votes, Pennsylvania was one of the states asserted by Republicans to have irregularities, and its outcome continues to be challenged by former President Trump (June 2021). In the light of the events of January 6, 2021, one can only imagine the furor had the outcome of the election in Pennsylvania been this close.

Let me close by reiterating that this is a very interesting and consequential piece. In my opinion, it is worthy of publication, and PS would be the ideal outlet for it. I am certain that this manuscript will appeal to a wide audience of political scientists, and—perhaps most importantly—beyond the academy, with the potential to actually change some partisans' negative assumptions about a leading method of electoral reform.

-We are very pleased that Reviewer #3 also strongly endorsement the publication of this essay.





**Institute for Politics and Strategy**

Carnegie Mellon University  
Posner Hall 387D  
5000 Forbes Avenue  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213-3890

Phone: 702-234-6075

Dear Dr. Ardoin,

We very much appreciate the opportunity to revise our short manuscript “Why Donald Trump Should be a Fervent Advocate of Using Rank-Choice Voting in 2024” (Ms. No. PS-D-21-00081) for PS. We were delighted that all three reviewers recommended publication and that they generally endorsed the paper in rather strong terms. Their very well taken suggestions for changes were either stylistic or otherwise relatively minor – and the key suggested change was on how to improve the flow of the paper, namely by starting off with RCV, is one that we were delighted to embrace. And, we have clarified that the substance of our argument is that, while rank choice voting might help Trump in 2024, RCV is not *a priori* biased for or against any particular political party. We do not wish our essay to be used in support of the claim of RCV bias in either direction, politically or ideologically. As we point out in the paper, RCV effects depend upon the structure of candidacy and the way in which voters rank candidates. We also appreciate that we needed to clarify which groups were supporting the use of RCV. Now we explain that liberals have advocated for this change, but so have supporters of third parties more generally.

Thanks again for the opportunity to revise and for the many helpful suggestions from reviewers. Given the generally positive nature of the reviewer comments, we have only made very limited changes to the manuscript, but we believe strongly that the changes we have, which directly respond to all the reviewer comments, make this a much better paper.

We welcome any additional comments from you or Dr. Gronke, and we will be happy to make any further revisions needed before publication. In particular, since the NYC mayoral elections results under RCV were not available as of the time of writing, we hope that you will allow us to add a sentence to the present footnote dealing with this contest when those results become known

In the discussion below we identify in detail how we incorporated each of the points raised by each of the three reviewers

Sincerely,

Jonathan Cervas

---

Ref.: Ms. No. PS-D-21-00081

Why Donald Trump Should be a Fervent Advocate of Using Rank-Choice Voting in 2024

PS: Political Science & Politics

Dear Mr. Cervas,

Reviewers have now commented on your paper. You will see that they are advising minor revisions to your manuscript. If you are prepared to undertake the work required, we look forward to reviewing a revised manuscript.

For your guidance, reviewers' comments are appended below.

If you decide to revise the work, please submit a list of changes or a response to each point which is being raised when you submit the revised manuscript.

Your revision is due by Jul 18, 2021. I ask that you pay particular attention to the comments of R3. Also, please do address the comment noted by R2 with regard to the impact of RCV on party strategies.

To submit a revision, go to <https://www.editorialmanager.com/ps/> and log in as an Author. You will see a menu item call Submission Needing Revision. You will find your submission record there.

Yours sincerely,

Phillip J. Ardoin  
Editor  
PS: Political Science & Politics

Reviewers' comments:

Reviewer #1: Overall, I think this is a solid contribution to the literature on ranked-choice voting. This short paper highlights that the effects of this mechanism for voting does not necessarily benefit one party versus another. The answer to this, like much in life, is it depends. The methodology is very simple, but that is all it needs to be to address the question the authors have. The authors are also astute enough to highlight where some their assumptions might begin error. They then discuss how changes in them would influence their interpretation. The only suggestion I would make is that the authors make this already short manuscript a bit shorter.

**We are very pleased that Reviewer #1 supported publication of our essay virtually as is. Our current word count is now slightly *longer* at 3,614. The minor change in length come from responding in full to the suggestions of the other reviewers. We believe that these change unquestionably add value and justify the minor addition in length.**

Reviewer #2: This is a nice piece that makes a single solid point really well. It's an important point--that rank choice voting would tend to help Republican presidential candidates, and particularly Donald Trump if he ran again, in the current environment. ...Given the instability the country has experienced, this is very good to know, because as the author points out many of the strongest advocates of rank choice voting tend to be on the other side of the political fence.

**We are indebted to this reviewer for calling our attention to lack of clarity in statement of our central thesis. We believe the statement above is correct, but we did not want to leave the readers with the impression that Republicans *always* benefit, or that RCV is biased. We have clarified that it is only when, in net terms, supporters of the minor parties would otherwise have disproportionately given support to one of the major parties that benefits from RCV can have partisan consequences, and the nature of that impact depends upon the sizes of the various voting blocs and may change with who are the major party candidates. Because we view this point as critical to an understanding of our thesis, we now make this point early in the essay, and again in the conclusion.**

The article is good as is with a few technical changes (which I will specify below), but if the author is asked to make substantive changes, the one thing I'd as is as follows. I wish that there was a bit more about how we don't know how rank choice voting procedures would change candidates' and parties' behavior down the road (or maybe we do, and there's some literature out there on how it has in countries where it exists now).



**We are very pleased that Reviewer #2 also supported publication of our essay with only minor changes. To address the issue of changes in the structure of contests that might accompany a change in electoral rule we have added the following text under the subsection "Rank Choice Voting"**

**Of course, the counterfactual evaluation of any rule-change effect requires a note of caution. It would not just be changes in turnout levels affected by a shift to RCV; the consequences of a change in electoral rules include different incentives for candidate entry, strategic voting in the mass electorate, and different campaign strategies. For instance, a Donald Trump candidacy might have been less (more) likely in 2016 had RCV been in place for the Republican primary. The set of competitors might have been different, and the outcome very well may have been affected. Under a different voting rule, calculations about whether to enter the race would have changed. Some of Trump's rivals in 2016 might have defeated him in head on head competition at the end of an RCV process, or there might have been more incentives for candidates to seek support from their rivals that would have changed who got eliminated when.**

I imagined that one thing that might happen is that parties in the US start thinking more about coalitions over time, even though that's not the explicit intent. Of course parliamentary systems do this and it is intentional, but rank choice systems, while different in how they play out, might also encourage people to think about how to best incorporate elements of smaller parties' platforms into their own or even try to make implicit deals with other parties to have their candidates stand down (or not stand down). I know this article can't be mostly about that, but perhaps just a note or a couple of sentences would be helpful, about how the assumptions of the article are based on the very limited frame of reference, based on past data, in the US context, and that the context would be different if this were widely adopted and it might very well change behavior of both parties and voters over time in unpredictable ways. They do acknowledge this just a bit in the second to the last paragraph. I'm just suggesting a bit more and maybe re-locating towards the front so people's minds don't spin on that one throughout the article like mine did.

**We have added a new footnote 13 specifically to address this point. It provides the example of candidates endorsing each other in the NYC mayoral race held last week – though we also note that some commentators were surprised that more of these endorsements didn't happen. We also note that the effect of such endorsement on the final outcome (is, as of this writing, still unknown).**

Biggest suggestion for subtle re-working: The bit on p. 6 that starts "Rank Choice voting has been supported by liberal reformers..." could be put up front. What I mean is that something like this right away would help readers immediately know why people have supported RCV and that is important for the readers to know.

**We found that comment extremely helpful, and fully agree that starting off with this point greatly improves the organization and flow of the paper. We have moved this point to the beginning of the paper, and we reiterate it in the conclusion.**

#### MINOR POINTS:

In the abstract, there is a space after equal and before the comma in the fourth line from the bottom.

On p. 1, second para. "In this article, after reviewing..." rather than "Here, after..."

P. 2, in the third para. "But it is unrealistic to assume that..." rather than "But assuming that all minor.... (and take out unrealistic later in the sentence)

Footnote 3: economic issues rather than "economic issue"

P. 6, first full para. This paragraph needs to be re-written. It's a bit convoluted--make sure it's clear and strong.

**All of these stylistic suggestions have been addressed and we very much thank the reviewer for helping to find grammatical errors and identifying poorly written sentences.**

---

Reviewer #3: This is a fascinating manuscript, in two respects. First, it makes the counterintuitive claim that minor party candidates—despite winning smaller shares of the vote—probably were more electorally consequential in 2020 than in 2016. Second, it makes another counterintuitive claim, that Republicans, rather than Democrats, probably would have stood to gain if ranked-choice voting (RCV) had been used in the 2020 election (and, if I understand correctly, in 2016, as well). This is surprising

since, as the authors note, Democrats/liberals usually are associated with promoting RCV.

(On the last point, the authors' explanation for this association is not quite satisfying. They indicate on pages 2 and 5 that this is because of a reformist streak among progressives, who wish for voters to be able to express their true preferences. I take the point, but many Libertarians and other right-leaning minor party supporters are just as supportive of such reforms. Perhaps the point to make here is simply that the politicians and interest groups supporting the adoption of RCV in Maine, New York City, etc., have been associated with the Democratic Party or other left-leaning causes. In other words, the evidence for the claim is not an assertion about ideology, but an empirical observation about patterns of support.)

**This was a very helpful comment because we inadvertently misstated the facts. The new framing of the paper helps to clarify this point. We now explain that liberals have advocated for this change, but so have supporters of third parties more generally. We further describe in more detail why Democrats support changes, namely the perception that third party "spoilers" cost Democrat's elections in 2000 and 2016 (evidenced by inversions where the Democrat wins the popular vote but loses the EC). And we now point out an example of Republicans specifically opposing the introduction of RCV.**

The authors support these claims by citing election results in several key swing states from 2020 and Devine and Kopko's (2021) estimates of Libertarian and Green Party voters' counterfactual abstention rates and voting preferences in 2016. (Note: It does not seem accurate to say—see top of p. 4—based on D&K's results, that 60% of Libertarian voters ranked Trump second, and 32-33% of Green voters ranked Clinton second. Factoring in the preceding sentence, these percentages speak only to voting preferences among those who still would have voted. It is probably better to say that 60% of Johnson voters who would have chosen not to abstain then would have voted for Trump, and the same logic for Stein voters.)

**We re-wrote this to clarify, as suggested. It now reads:**

**They also estimate that, among non-abstainers, in 2016 about 60% of the voters who ranked the Libertarian candidate, Gary Johnson, first would have ranked Trump second, and about 32-33% would have ranked Clinton second.**

It is clear from the data presented that Jorgensen, the Libertarian nominee in 2020, garnered more than enough votes to spell the difference in critical states, and potentially swing the election. Hawkins, the Green nominee, did not come close to this. And, combined with Libertarians' apparent inclination toward Republican candidates, it is reasonable to argue that Trump would have benefited greatly if the Libertarians had not run a candidate, and perhaps if they had done so but under an RCV system. It is a significant limitation of this article that the authors must rest on previous estimates of minor party preferences—rather than replicating previous analyses using 2020 survey data, for instance—and assumptions about their applicability to 2020. But, with appropriately cautious language—which I mostly see here, but would prefer to see a bit more of—I can, and I think most readers can, accept this argument.

**We completely agree that care must be taken to state the assumptions of our results clearly, and we are pleased the reviewer recognized that we had sought be careful in doing just that. While the language about this point in the revised text is little changed, we did rewrite one sentence slightly to be even more explicit about this point.**

I am pleased to recommend this article for publication in PS, given the plausibility and counterintuitive nature of the authors' argument. Additionally, with RCV being adopted in more states and municipalities recently, it is worth engaging in such a thought experiment—which this really is, because there is almost no chance that RCV will become the dominant electoral system by 2024, as the authors ought to acknowledge more clearly. In fact, this manuscript would make a constructive contribution not only to the literature on minor party voting—which I very much believe it does—but also to public debate about RCV. There seems to be a widespread perception on the political right (see, for example, Bruce Poliquin's loss in Maine in 2018, and Trump's reaction to it) that RCV is bad for Republicans.

**We added a footnote about Poliquin's reaction to his loss, but could not locate a source on Trump's reaction. "...his failure to secure the seat infuriated Poliquin, who called the outcome the "biggest voter rip-off in Maine history.""**

Perhaps an argument such as this, supported by relevant data, would cause some Republicans to reconsider the effects of RCV and even support its adoption. That could have real public policy consequences, and I don't hear anyone else making this argument. So this truly makes an important contribution.

**While, based on their reading of our essay, Republicans may reconsider their opposition to what otherwise might be viewed as a fair and beneficial reform, in this as in other recent election contexts, we are not sanguine about evidence affecting beliefs .**

There are a couple points that I would urge the authors to consider, and to address if given the opportunity—as I hope will be the case—to revise and resubmit. First, they acknowledge only briefly on page 7 ("Even though the use of RCV...") that if the rules of the game had been different in 2020, this would have affected campaign strategy and the vote distributions that they analyze in this manuscript. Indeed, this is a critical point when engaging in such a counterfactual analysis. It reminds me of Donald Trump's claim that he would have won the popular vote in 2016 if the rules had required him to do so, rather than win the Electoral College. While that is very unlikely, it is worth taking the thrust of this argument seriously. Specifically, I would like to see the authors discuss: how would the campaign, and voters' response to it, likely have been different if the 2020 election had been conducted using RCV? For one thing, I suspect the Libertarian and Green Parties would have run better, more credible, candidates, than two activists with no government experience (as they did in 2012 in 2016). If so, this probably would have increased turnout even more, and even brought out disproportionately more vote (Libertarian) voters who would have ranked Trump second on their ballot.

**This is a very similar to a comment made by R2, and we have taken this comment seriously and have addressed it. See above. We agree strongly that electoral reforms will almost always have consequences for the rational decision-making of parties, candidates and voters.**

Second, assuming (as I think is the case) that RCV would apply not only to the presidential race but to congressional and perhaps also state and local races, is there any reason to believe that this would have helped Republicans, as well (or would in 2024)? In other words, on balance, would it have helped Republicans to win the House and/or keep the Senate? Perhaps so, given that Libertarians run more candidates and win more of the vote than other minor parties, generally, and they seem to favor Republicans. If the authors believe that is the case, it may be a useful and relevant way to extend their argument that Republicans should be more open to, if not supportive of, adopting RCV.

**We have not tried to do new analyses of the 2020 election of the type done by Devine and Kopko (2021). That would essentially be a new paper. We have however, added information about the number of congressional districts that were close enough and with minor party vote large enough that their outcome might have been affected by use of RCV. We find that there were only a handful of such in 2020. We also added some facts about RCV effects in Maine. There it has only been of potential importance in the second CD in Maine, and only in 2018.**

A few other, less important points...

1. Page 2, 1<sup>st</sup> sentence: Concerns about spoilers did not begin with Nader's candidacy. There were similar concerns in other races—e.g., Perot, 1992 and 1996; John Anderson, 1980; George Wallace, 1968 (whose objective was to throw the election to the House of Reps); Thurmond and Wallace in 1948. It might be better to say here that Nader made such concerns more salient, illustrating to voters that a spoiler effect really can happen.

**We now directly make reference to these other races and have changed our language to now read “potential spoilers has long been a topic of concern” and that the Nader candidacy made it more salient.**

2. Page 2, line 5: Here and at a later point the authors definitively say that claims about spoilers in 2016 are incorrect. I think that's a bit strong, given that the authors only cite one empirical source for it, the Devine and Kopko article, which—whatever its merits—presents counterfactual estimates that, while indicative, cannot be truly conclusive.

**We have deleted the text that makes this definitive statement, though we now say it is incorrect to say RCV is invariably biased against Republicans, since that statement is clearly supported by the evidence we present.**

3. Page 4, second paragraph: It is worth clarifying that Hawkins' vote totals were lower in part because he failed to get on the ballot in numerous states, especially in comparison to Stein. Also in this paragraph, while Libertarians won about the same number of votes, Jorgensen won a much smaller percentage of the popular vote than Johnson. It would be helpful to clarify in this paragraph just how big of a difference that was.

**This is now clarified and we added commentary on the number of states given candidates were on the ballot, and on the total number of votes cast and how differences in turnout between 2016 and 2020 also should be taken into account.**

4. Page 5, Footnote 4, 3rd sentence: This is such an important point, and one that the authors ought to make more forcefully in the article. Even if Jorgensen's candidacy, or RCV not being used, didn't make the difference in the 2020 election, the fact that it would

have narrowed Trump's loss surely would have exacerbated the very tense, and even violent, situation that followed the election. In fact, if RCV does benefit Republicans generally, then one could argue its adoption would further distort institutions in favor of the election of Republican presidents (in combination with the Electoral College's rural/small state bias).

**We are delighted with the suggestion to take this out of a footnote and make the argument more forcibly, especially since one of us happens to live in an affected state. We now say:**

**It is also worth noting the potential importance of minor party votes in Pennsylvania. If every Jorgensen voter in that state had switched to Trump, the state outcome would have been very close, with a gap of only 1,175 votes. During the certification of votes, Pennsylvania was one of the states asserted by Republicans to have irregularities, and its outcome continues to be challenged by former President Trump (June 2021). In the light of the events of January 6, 2021, one can only imagine the furor had the outcome of the election in Pennsylvania been this close.**

Let me close by reiterating that this is a very interesting and consequential piece. In my opinion, it is worthy of publication, and PS would be the ideal outlet for it. I am certain that this manuscript will appeal to a wide audience of political scientists, and—perhaps most importantly—beyond the academy, with the potential to actually change some partisans' negative assumptions about a leading method of electoral reform.

**We are very pleased that Reviewer #3 also strongly endorsement the publication of this essay.**

## **Why Donald Trump Should be a Fervent Advocate of Using Rank-Choice Voting in 2024**

Keywords: Rank Choice Voting; Third Parties; Elections; Social Choice

Reforms to address perceived deficiencies in American elections have included changes to primary rules (**McGhee 2014; Grose 2020**), redistricting reform (**Grofman and Cervas 2018; Saxon 2020; Nagle 2019**), and revisions to election registration and balloting rules (**Burden et al. 2014**), among others (**Wang et al. 2021**). One particular voting reform that has generated a large amount of recent interest is the *instant run-off election*, commonly referred to as *rank choice voting* (RCV).<sup>1</sup> This electoral reform was recently implemented in Maine, and adopted in Alaska for federal elections beginning in 2022. It is also being used in various cities, including city council elections in San Francisco and the New York City mayoral race. RCV is purported to have a number of positive characteristics, including reduction in negative campaigning, and a greater likelihood of electing moderate candidates. It almost certainly leads to the encouragement of more candidates, including women and racial minorities (**John, Smith, and Zack 2018**), and one indisputable advantage of RCV is the ability it gives a voter to support a candidate with a lesser chance of winning while still providing support for a candidate with a higher probability of victory by including both in the voter's ranking.

In the U.S., RCV's most ardent supporters tend to be liberal reformers, who call to mind examples of situations in which RCV would have benefited Democrats. Because this reform is being pushed by the political left, it is seen -- incorrectly -- as being biased against Republicans. And RCV's opponents tend to be Republicans. For example, an unsuccessful lawsuit in Maine brought by members of the Republican party asked the court to find RCV unconstitutional (*Baber v. Dunlap*, 376 F. Supp. 3d 125, 143 (D. Me. 2018)).

Here, we provide evidence of why, in contemporary presidential politics, RCV should be attractive to Republicans. But our bottom line is very simple: *a priori*, there is no reason to think that RCV has any partisan or ideological bias even if it might be shown to favor (relative to simple plurality) one party or the other in particular circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Referring to this method as 'ranked choice' voting is actually a misnomer, since there are many methods, e.g., the *Borda Rule* and other scoring rules, that also require voters to rank ballots (**Grofman and Feld 2004; Grofman, Feld and Fraenkel 2017**). RCV is known as the *alternative vote* when used in places such as Australia and Fiji (**Fraenkel and Grofman 2006; 2007**), and previously labeled as an "instant runoff" by U.S. reformers because it allows for an elimination process that otherwise would require multiple elections,

<sup>2</sup> Similarly, while there are circumstances in which RCV will foster more moderate candidates than plurality voting would, it is not guaranteed (**Grofman and Feld 2004**), with expectations affected by the nature of the party system, the number of candidates and their ideological distribution and, especially, whether or not RCV is being used in a primary or general. For example, even though there is evidence that Democratic voters would give a slight edge to moderate candidates in a pairwise contest between a Democrat and President Trump (**Broockman and Kalla 2021**), there remains the issue of whether moderate candidates with lots of later round support might still be eliminated in earlier phases of RCV balloting.



The role of minor party candidates as potential spoilers has long been a topic of concern. That concern became more salient after Ralph Nader's role in denying Al Gore the victory in Florida, and thus denying him the presidency. As a consequence of Nader's taking votes from the Democratic candidate, much of the subsequent hullabaloo has been about Green candidates costing Democrats votes. In 2016 there were assertions that Jill Stein, the 2016 Green Party candidate, was a "spoiler" for Hillary Clinton (see e.g., **Herron and Lewis 2007**; **Magee 2003**, and discussion below).<sup>3</sup> But, even if minor party candidates did not change the presidential election outcome in 2016 (**Devine and Kopko 2021**), can we say the same for 2020? Unlike the election in 2016, the 2020 election did not exhibit an Electoral College inversion of the popular vote (**Cervas and Grofman 2019**). Nonetheless, despite Joe Biden having won the national popular vote by more than seven million votes, the outcome was very close in many states, as in 2016, including the pivotal states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Indeed, with only a few thousand changes in votes, Trump would have been re-elected in 2020. Moreover, as we show below, there was an even greater scope for minor party candidates to have affected the election outcome in 2020 than was the case for 2016.

Here, after reviewing work on the effects of minor party candidates in 2016, and then examining the probable effects of minority party candidacies in 2020 under the present election rules, we consider what might have happened in 2020 had presidential voting taken place under *rank-choice voting* (RCV). While, on the one hand, this reform is generally touted in terms of its impact in promoting minor parties by allowing voters to cast votes for the candidates of minor parties without harming the chances of major party candidates who would be the voter's second choice; on the other hand, rank choice voting can also be thought of as an "anti-spoiler" reform that reduces the likely impact of minor party candidates on election outcomes. Thus, we have a pro-RCV coalition in which minor party supporters tend to favor this reform since it presents a way to make a dent in the two-party cartel that has dominated American politics for the past 150+ years, together with major party supporters who believe that RCV will, in general, help moderates -- especially Democrats worrying about "spoiler votes" from the left.<sup>4</sup>

Democrat support for RCV was reinforced when the Democratic candidate, Jared Golden, defeated Republican incumbent Bruce Poliquin, after multiple rounds when all candidates failed to reach 50% of the vote in the first round for the 2018 Maine second congressional district. Poliquin received more first place votes than Golden, and his failure to secure the seat infuriated Poliquin, who called the

<sup>3</sup> See e.g., Tina Nguyen. 2016. "Gary Johnson and Jill Stein Handed the Presidency to Donald Trump". *Vanity Fair*, November 10. <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2016/11/gary-johnson-jill-stein-election-2016>.

<sup>4</sup> In an op-ed for the *USA Today*, in 2020, former Libertarian vice presidential candidate Bill Weld and 2021 candidate for Mayor of New York City Andrew Yang advocate a switch to RCV in presidential primaries (which for the first time will use RCV in 2021). Yang, Andrew, and Bill Weld. 2020. "Why Ranked Choice Voting Will Improve America's Elections." *USA Today*, October 2. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2020/10/02/why-ranked-choice-voting-improve-american-elections-yang-weld-column/5877731002/>

outcome the “biggest voter rip-off in Maine history.”<sup>5</sup> Polquin then unsuccessfully sued the secretary of state claiming he won the “constitutional ‘one-person, one-vote’ first choice election”.<sup>6</sup> But, while we agree with Ray Wolfinger’s famous observation (quoted in **Wuffle 1986**) that “data is the plural of anecdote,” it is also important to remember another aphorism, namely, “not all swans are white.” Concluding that RCV necessarily (or even usually) can be expected to benefit Democrats is simply wrong. Here, building on Devine and Kopko (**2021**), we show that at the presidential level, based on the two most recent presidential elections, RCV is actually likely to benefit the Republican nominee.

### The presidential election of 2016

In 2016 there were two minor party candidates who received at least a million votes: Gary Johnson, running as a Libertarian, won 4.5 million votes and Jill Stein running as the Green candidate, won 1.5 million votes.<sup>7</sup> It is common to think of Libertarians as being ideologically closer to Republicans (in part because some high profile Libertarians are former Republicans, e.g. Gary Johnson was the Republican governor of New Mexico before being the Libertarian presidential candidate in 2012 and 2016), while Greens are seen as being ideologically closer to Democrats since Green candidates tend to have platforms that are uniformly to the political left of the Democrats.<sup>8</sup>

Had Johnson’s voters all instead chosen Trump and Stein’s all chosen Clinton, Trump would have now lost the popular vote by only 220,461 votes, rather than the 2,868,686 million by which he actually lost the popular vote. Moreover, under this strong assumption, the outcomes would have changed in four states. Trump would have won additional electors in Maine, and won Minnesota, Nevada, and New Hampshire for an additional 22 EC votes. In contrast, under the above assumptions there are no additional Clinton victories. Thus, under the assumptions most favorable to minority party impact, the absence of minority party candidates would have significantly benefited Trump in terms of both popular vote and Electoral College seat share, but still would not have changed the outcome. On the other hand,

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Maine Examiner, “Poliquin calls ranked-choice voting a “rip off” in testimony to the Massachusetts Legislature.” November 12, 2019. Maine Examiner, <https://maineexaminer.com/poliquin-calls-ranked-choice-voting-a-rip-off-in-testimony-to-massachusetts-legislature/>

<sup>6</sup> Simone Pathé, “Maine’s Bruce Poliquin Loses in Ranked-Choice Voting”. November 15, 2018. Roll Call, <https://www.rollcall.com/2018/11/15/maines-bruce-poliquin-loses-in-ranked-choice-voting/>.

<sup>7</sup> Evan McMullin won an additional 731,991 votes, 243,690 of which were cast in Utah. He was considered the alternative to Donald Trump in that state, and while his votes were a very significant 22% of all Utah votes, Trump was able to win Utah by over 200,000 votes anyway. Election results can be found at <https://www.fec.gov/resources/cms-content/documents/federalelections2016.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> While there is good reason to think that a Libertarian candidate would be the obvious second choice of Republican voters, or vis versa, as Devine and Kopko (**2021**) and Lacy and Burden (**1999**) before them show, non-trivial percentages of Libertarian voters would vote for the Democrat over the Republican. This is likely determined by whether the voter places more salience on economic issues or social issues. Libertarians do not fall neatly on a one-dimensional line of ideology.

if only Jill Stein did not run, but Johnson remained, Clinton would have likely picked up electors in at least one state, Michigan (**Devine and Kopko 2021**).

But it is unrealistic to assume that all minor party supporters would have shifted their support to a major party candidate if their preferred choice were not in the contest. Supporters of minor parties can exhibit negative affect toward both major parties (cf. **Abramowitz and Webster 2018**), leading to abstention. Building upon Lacy and Burden's (**1999**) analysis of the 1992 presidential election, Devine and Kopko (**2021**) estimate, using a multinomial probit model, that about half of the minority party supporters would not have voted had their own candidate not been in the race. They also estimate that, among non-abstainers, in 2016 about 60% of the voters who ranked the Libertarian candidate, Gary Johnson, first would have ranked Trump second, and about 32-33% would have ranked Clinton second. Similarly in 2016, they estimate that about 75-80% of the voters who ranked the Green candidate Jill Stein first would have ranked Clinton second, and about 20% would have ranked Trump second. Doing the arithmetic, we find that, on balance, at least vis-à-vis the popular vote, minor party candidates in 2016 hurt Trump more than they hurt Clinton.

### The presidential election of 2020

In 2020 there was again a Green Party candidate for president, Howie Hawkins, and again a Libertarian candidate, Jo Jorgensen. However, in 2020, Green supporters were more anxious to defeat Trump. They now recognized Trump's victory in 2020 as a real possibility and thus were more likely to choose to vote strategically. Hawkins also failed to make the ballot in 22 states, while Stein was on the ballot in all but three states in 2016. Thus, the votes for the Green Party candidate were significantly fewer in 2020 than in 2016 (352,974 versus 1,457,218). In contrast, Jorgensen did almost as well as Johnson in terms of raw votes, with 4,125,170 votes in 2020, compared to 4.5 million votes for Johnson in 2016; thus, the gap between Libertarian Support and Green Party support was much larger in 2020 than it was in 2016.<sup>9</sup> This difference between 2016 and 2020 meant that the Libertarian presence on the ballot had a greater chance in the latter year to affect election outcomes by denying votes to Trump.

The 2020 data for four key states are shown in the table below.

State	Electors	Biden (D)	Trump (R)	Biden minus Trump	Jorgensen (L)	Hawkins (G)
<i>Arizona</i>	11	1,672,143	1,661,686	10,457	51,465	1,557
<i>Georgia</i>	16	2,473,633	2,461,854	11,779	62,229	1,013

<sup>9</sup> We would note, though, that overall turnout in 2020 was significantly higher than 2016, so Jorgensen's vote total represents a smaller share of the overall vote.

<i>Pennsylvania</i>	20	3,458,229	3,377,674	80,555	79,380	-
<i>Wisconsin</i>	10	1,630,866	1,610,184	20,682	38,491	1,089
<i>NATIONAL EC</i>	538	306	232	7,060,519	0	0

We see from this table that Jorgensen's votes could, in principle, have affected the outcome in three states (Arizona, Georgia, and Wisconsin), with a combined total of 37 electors. In these states, the margin of Biden's victory was not only less than the Jorgensen vote share, but less than the Jorgensen vote share minus the vote share of Howie Hawkins -- sometimes markedly so. These are the only three states won by Biden where the Jorgensen vote relative to Biden's vote margin is large enough to plausibly affect the outcome.<sup>10</sup> The 37 Electoral College votes in these three states would have been enough to change the EC outcome to a tie had all three states gone for Trump. If there had been a tie in the Electoral College, voting would have gone to Congress and there, with each state's delegation in the House voting as a bloc, with votes in tied state delegations not counted, Trump would have won, since Republicans control more *delegations* in more states. Note that, because of this state-based bloc voting rule, the party that holds the majority in the House could still fail to elect its preferred presidential candidate (**Foley 2020**). It is also worth noting the potential importance of minor party votes in Pennsylvania. If every Jorgensen voter in that state had switched to Trump, the state outcome would have been very close, with a gap of only 1,175 votes. During the certification of votes, Pennsylvania was one of the states asserted by Republicans to have irregularities, and its outcome continues to be challenged by former President Trump (*June 2021*). In the light of the events of January 6, 2021, one can only imagine the furor had the outcome of the election in Pennsylvania been this close.

Of course, positing that all the Hawkins vote would go to Biden and that all of Jorgensen's vote would go to Trump is highly unrealistic. Still, while only voters know for sure how they would vote had certain candidates not been on the ballot, plausible inferences are possible. What is likely to have happened if Jorgensen (or perhaps both Jorgensen and Hawkins) had not been on the ballot in 2020 and there was no other Libertarian candidate to replace Jorgensen?

Let us imagine that Hawkins remains in the race in 2020 but there is no Libertarian candidate. If we posit the same second preference rankings found by Devine and Kopko (**2021**) for 2016 apply to Libertarian voters in 2020, and posit that half the Libertarian voters would have abstained if their candidate had not been in the race in 2020, we would now find that no states shift in 2020.<sup>11</sup> On the other

<sup>10</sup> In only four congressional elections in 2020 was the Libertarian vote larger than the margin of victory: Iowa 3, New York 2, Texas 24, and Utah 4. The Green candidate never exceeded the margin of victory in any 2020 House contest.

<sup>11</sup> Devine and Kopko (**2021**) specifically advise against extrapolating their results to other elections, but we argue that 2020 offers similar circumstances that make such a comparison plausible. For instance, Donald Trump was the Republican nominee in both elections, so concerns about an anti-Trump vote driving the Libertarian ballots applies in both cases. Additionally, at the

hand, if we posit a zero rate of abstention for former Jorgensen voters, then there are two states that shift to Trump: Arizona and Georgia. And these two states would still shift to Trump even if all of the Hawkins voters in them shifted to Biden. But these two states would still not be enough to change the EC outcome.<sup>12</sup>

We might think that these results tell us that minority party candidates did not have any real impact in 2020. But that is far too strong a conclusion. Assuming a 50% abstention rate if there were no Libertarian option on the ballot, Trump would have gained nearly 260,000 net votes. Moreover, had there been no Libertarian candidates on the ballot, but all the actual Libertarian voters still participated, with Trump receiving 60% of their votes, Arizona and Georgia would have flipped in 2020. Trump's popular vote loss also would have shrunk by 522,403 votes.

### Rank Choice Voting

Let us ask a different but related question about the 2020 presidential election. What might have happened in 2020 had Rank Choice Voting (RCV) been used instead of plurality? RCV asks voters to rank the candidates. Under the Maine rules for RCV for federal elections (**Akula, Cervas, and Goren 2020**), if no candidate receives a majority of first choice votes, then the candidate with fewest first choice votes have the votes on the ballots which ranked that candidate first reallocated to the voter's second choice on the ballot. And the process continues in this way until one candidate has a majority of the then valid first place votes. If it has not already been decided by one candidate receiving a majority of the votes at an earlier stage, this process must eventually lead to a two-candidate contest and thus a clear winner. RCV makes it easier for voters to express their true preferences without worrying whether their vote will be wasted on a candidate who has no real chance of winning, so we might think that RCV would encourage turnout by minority party voters. Of course, the counterfactual evaluation of any rule-change effect requires a note of caution. It would not just be changes in turnout levels affected by a shift to RCV; the consequences of a change in electoral rules include different incentives for candidate entry, strategic voting in the mass electorate, and different campaign strategies. For instance, a Donald Trump candidacy might have been less (more) likely in 2016 had RCV been in place for the Republican primary. The set of competitors might have been different, and the outcome very well may have been affected. Under a different voting rule, calculations about whether to enter the race would have changed. Some of Trump's rivals in 2016 might have defeated him in head-to-head competition at the end of an RCV process, or there might have been more incentives for candidates to seek support from their rivals that would have

---

presidential level, there appear to be fewer split-ticket voters and fewer swing voters (**Gelman et al 2016**). Moreover, estimates of the level of abstention based on 2016 are probably conservatively biased, since turnout in 2020 was much higher than in 2016. Indeed, we expect continuing high levels of turnout in 2024, especially if former President Trump is on the ballot.

<sup>12</sup> Under this hypothetical, Trump would now win 259 electors, while Biden wins 279.

changed who got eliminated when.<sup>13</sup> In 2020, since the two major parties received the vast majority of the votes cast, it would be the voters who had selected a minor party as their first choice that would have their second (or third) choice counted in the final round. Is it plausible to assume that the Jorgensen vote would have gone disproportionately to Trump under RCV? Well, the answer to that is yes -- at least again using the 2016 estimates of Libertarian voting behavior from Devine and Kopko (2021) as our guide.

Let us assume that the same set of voters vote in our hypothetical 2020 RCV election, i.e., there are no abstentions, since their preferred candidates are on the ballot. Let us further assume that minor party supporters vote in the fashion posited by Devine and Kopko (2021), with those who do vote providing a ranking to at least their top two candidates. Of course, these are strong assumptions, but two states would flip to Trump under RCV even if as many as 50% of the minor party candidate voters “undervote”.<sup>14</sup> Even though the use of RCV rather than plurality could be expected to have changed the nature of the campaigning and thus the ultimate vote distribution, it is still is not unreasonable to believe that had the election in 2020 been held under RCV, Trump would have captured two states that he in fact lost, and come within eleven votes of an Electoral College victory. So, based on this analysis, in looking forward to a potential 2024 third Trump presidential campaign, Trump should worry a lot about a Libertarian spoiler. Given this distinct possibility, he should be a strong supporter of Rank Choice Voting being used in 2024, since that will mitigate the spoiler effect. And the same is potentially true for any Republican presidential candidate in 2024.

Opposition to rank choice voting from the political right is rooted in the idea that liberals would benefit from such a reform, especially in general elections. But whether any given minor party candidate will take votes from major party candidates in a way that benefits the Democrats as opposed to the Republicans depends upon the nature of the candidate and the particular circumstances of the time. The attractiveness of RCV should not depend upon expectation of partisan gain since, in the long run, RCV is neutral.<sup>15</sup> As noted earlier, RCV largely eliminates the problem of spoilers, while still encouraging participation by minority party voters.

---

<sup>13</sup> In June 2021, “Kathryn Garcia and Andrew Yang—running second and fourth in the 13-candidate field, according to a [then] recent Marist Poll—campaigned together in Flushing, Queens, a heavily Asian-American stronghold for Mr. Yang, and the Lower East Side of Manhattan, favourable territory for Ms. Garcia”. (“Democrats in New York choose a mayoral candidate in a tight race: Besides the candidates, ranked-choice voting is on trial”. *The Economist*, June 21, 2021.)

<sup>14</sup> *Undervoting* occurs when some later ranks are left blank (Kilgour, Grégoire, and Foley 2020).

<sup>15</sup> We also need to be careful about claimed past effects of third-party candidacies at the presidential level. We previously expressed skepticism about the perception that Jill Stein cost Hillary Clinton the 2016 election. In 1992, Ross Perot’s Reform Party candidacy is widely viewed to have taken votes that otherwise would have gone to George H.W. Bush. But as Lacy and Burden (1999) show, Perot increased overall turnout and reduced Clinton’s vote, contrary to popular perception. Similarly, there is debate about which party benefited most from the Wallace candidacy. \citep{Wayman1983} show that, even in the



But it is useful to remember that no reform comes without unintended consequences. We have shown in this short essay that it was Donald Trump who was more likely to have been harmed by third party candidates in 2016, and especially in 2020, than his Democratic opponent. It would be ironic, indeed, if a reform supported by liberals and adopted in cities such as San Francisco and New York for local elections, ended up in a Trump restoration if it were used to elect a president in 2024.

## References

- Abramowitz, Alan I., and Steven W. Webster. 2018. "Negative Partisanship: Why Americans Dislike Parties But Behave Like Rabid Partisans." *Political Psychology* 39(S1): 119–35. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12479>.
- Akula, Anjali, Jonathan Cervas, and Elsie Goren. 2020. "Great Lobster and a More Equitable Voting System Exists in Maine." *3Streams*. <https://medium.com/3streams/a-more-equitable-voting-system-in-maine-ranked-choice-voting-864cb3367468>.
- Broockman, David, and Joshua Kalla. 2020. "Candidate Ideology and Vote Choice in the 2020 US Presidential Election."
- Burden, Barry C., David T. Canon, Kenneth R. Mayer, and Donald P. Moynihan. 2014. "Election Laws, Mobilization, and Turnout: The Unanticipated Consequences of Election Reform." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(1): 95–109. <http://doi.wiley.com/10.1111/ajps.12063>.
- Cervas, Jonathan R., and Bernard Grofman. 2019. "Are Presidential Inversions Inevitable? Comparing Eight Counterfactual Rules for Electing the U.S. President." *Social Science Quarterly* 100(4): 1322–42. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/ssqu.12634>.
- Devine, Christopher J., and Kyle C. Kopko. 2021. "Did Gary Johnson and Jill Stein Cost Hillary Clinton the Presidency." *The Forum*.
- Foley, Edward B. 2020. *Presidential Elections and Majority Rule: The Rise, Demise, and Potential Restoration of the Jeffersonian Electoral College*. Oxford University Press.
- Fraenkel, Jon, and Bernard Grofman. 2006. "Does the Alternative Vote Foster Moderation in Ethnically Divided Societies?: The Case of Fiji." *Comparative Political Studies* 39(5): 623–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414005285032>.
- Fraenkel, Jon, and Bernard Grofman. 2007. "The Merits of Neo-Downsian Modeling of the Alternative Vote: A Reply to Horowitz." *Public Choice* 133(1–2): 1–11.
- Gelman, Andrew, Sharad Goel, Douglas Rivers, and David Rothschild. 2016. "The Mythical Swing Voter." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 11(1): 103–30. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1561/100.00015031\\_supp](http://dx.doi.org/10.1561/100.00015031_supp) (June 10, 2018).

---

Midwest, in Dearborn, Michigan, many Wallace voters eventually became Republicans and were already moving in that direction in 1968.

- Grofman, Bernard, and Jonathan R. Cervas. 2018. "Can State Courts Cure Partisan Gerrymandering: Lessons from *League of Women Voters v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (2018)." *Election Law Journal: Rules, Politics, and Policy* 17(4): 264–85. [www.liebertpub.com](http://www.liebertpub.com) (May 13, 2019).
- Grofman, Bernard, Scott L Feld, and Jon Fraenkel. 2017. "Finding the Threshold of Exclusion for All Single Seat and Multi-Seat Scoring Rules: Illustrated by Results for the Borda and Dowdall Rules." *Mathematical Social Sciences* 85: 52–56.  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S016548961630172X>.
- Grofman, Bernard, and Scott L. Feld. 2004. "If You like the Alternative Vote (a.k.a. the Instant Runoff), Then You Ought to Know about the Coombs Rule." *Electoral Studies* 23(4): 641–59.  
<https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S026137940300060X>.
- 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. <http://www.nowpublishers.com/article/Details/PIP-0012>.
- Herron, Michael C., and Jeffrey B. Lewis. 2007. "Did Ralph Nader Spoil Al Gore's Presidential Bid? A Ballot-Level Study of Green and Reform Party Voters in the 2000 Presidential Election." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 2(3): 205–26. <http://www.nowpublishers.com/article/Details/QJPS-5039>.
- John, Sarah, Haley Smith, and Elizabeth Zack. 2018. "The Alternative Vote: Do Changes in Single-Member Voting Systems Affect Descriptive Representation of Women and Minorities?" *Electoral Studies* 54(April): 90–102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2018.05.009>.
- Kilgour, D. Marc, Jean Charles Grégoire, and Angèle M. Foley. 2020. "The Prevalence and Consequences of Ballot Truncation in Ranked-Choice Elections." *Public Choice* 184(1–2): 197–218.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-019-00723-2>.
- Lacy, Dean, and Barry C. Burden. 1999. "The Vote-Stealing and Turnout Effects of Ross Perot in the 1992 U.S. Presidential Election." *American Journal of Political Science* 43(1): 233.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2991792?origin=crossref>.
- Magee, Christopher S. P. 2003. "Third-Party Candidates and the 2000 Presidential Election \*." *Social Science Quarterly* 84(3): 574–95. <http://doi.wiley.com/10.1111/1540-6237.8403006>.
- McGhee, Eric et al. 2014. "A Primary Cause of Partisanship? Nomination Systems and Legislator Ideology." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(2): 337–51.  
<http://doi.wiley.com/10.1111/ajps.12070>.
- Nagle, John F. 2019. "What Criteria Should Be Used for Redistricting Reform?" *Election Law Journal: Rules, Politics, and Policy* 18(1): 63–77. <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/elj.2018.0514> (June 8, 2019).
- Saxon, James. 2020. "Reviving Legislative Avenues for Gerrymandering Reform with a Flexible, Automated Tool." *Political Analysis*: 1–23.  
[https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/S1047198719000457/type/journal\\_article](https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/S1047198719000457/type/journal_article).
- Wang, Samuel, Jonathan Cervas, Bernard Grofman, and Keena Lipsitz. 2021. "A Systems Framework for Remedying Distortions in U.S. Democracy." *SSRN Electronic Journal* XXX(Xx): 0–2.  
<https://www.ssrn.com/abstract=3800433>.

Wuffle, A. 1986. "Reflections on Academia." *PS* 19(1): 57.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/419291?origin=crossref>.