

From: PS em@editorialmanager.com  
Subject: Decision for PS-D-21-00081 submitted to PS: Political Science & Politics  
Date: June 8, 2021 at 10:11 PM  
To: Jonathan Cervas cervas@cmu.edu

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CC: cszymanski@apsanet.org

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.

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. 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). 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.

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.

Technical:

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

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.

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.)

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.)

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.

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. 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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).

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.

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