UNDERSTANDING ATTITUDES TOWARDS ALTERNATIVE ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

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In 2022, the City of Evanston became the first locality in Illinois to adopt Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) as part of their local elections. In doing so, Evanston joined a movement that began in the early 2000s with major cities, smaller localities, and states across America adopting RCV, or a variation known as Final Five Voting (FFV), as the electoral system utilized in their local elections. As the use of RCV spreads across the nation and Illinois, state and local government officials may wonder about voter attitudes toward such policies. Utilizing survey data collected of a representative sample of Illinoisans in fall of 2022, we explore voter attitudes towards the current and alternative electoral systems in Illinois. Specifically, this study explores three research questions: What are the attitudes of Illinois voters generally towards the current electoral system, RCV, and FFV? What group of voters are the most opinionated on the current and alternative systems? And what factors influence Illinois voters' support or opposition to RCV and FFV? Our findings suggest that at the state-level, Illinoisans are skeptical of alternative electoral systems. While approximately 70% of voters support the current system, only 57% support FFV, and 55% support RCV. A closer look reveals the most opinionated Illinoisans are those with high levels of trust in state government, individuals with a conservative ideology, and older voters. Of these groups, respondents with high levels of trust are more likely to support alternative electoral systems, while older voters and conservatives are more likely to oppose them.

INTRODUCTION

In November 2022, the City of Evanston became the first locality in the state to adopt Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) for all voters in their local elections. The change was supported by 82% of voters and followed the increased use of RCV in local governments across America, including New York City, Salt Lake City, San Francisco, Santa Fe, the Twin Cities, and elsewhere. At the state level, too, Maine has adopted RCV for federal offices, Alaska uses a modified version of RCV called Final Five Voting (FFV) for state and federal elections, and Nevada voters recently passed the first of two referendums needed to adopt FFV for state and federal elections.

While alternative systems like RCV and FFV have previously been used in some Illinois municipalities for members of the military deployed away from home and residents temporarily overseas, Evanston's adoption through a referred ballot measure marked the first time a locality voted to use it for all voters. In Illinois, there has been increased attention on the potential adoption of RCV in other communities, including the state's largest city, Chicago. At the state level, six Illinois General Assembly bills in the spring 2023 session focused on adopting some form of RCV for state or federal elections. Efforts in Illinois have been happening since 2002, when then-State Senator Barack Obama first introduced legislation on the subject.

Specific to local elections, the Illinois General Assembly enacted House Bill 2289 (P.A. 103-0154) in 2023. This bill formally allows RCV ballots to be adopted for municipal and township elections for members of the U.S. military and voters who will be out of the country for either the primary or general election. Beyond this bill, any municipality in Illinois can put the question of adopting an alternative electoral system on the ballot in the form of a referendum, like the City of Evanston did, and move forward with adoption if the municipal voters approve the switch.

While the debate surrounding alternative electoral systems in Illinois is currently most active in the legislature, the adoption of RCV and FFV has largely occurred in other settings following voter-led initiatives and referendums. Regardless of whether voters are directly or indirectly making decisions, state and local officials would benefit from understanding why some voters favor these systems while others oppose them.

Using survey data collected from a representative sample of Illinoisans in the fall of 2022, we systematically explored what may drive voter attitudes toward RCV and its FFV variation in the state. Specifically, this article will address three research questions: What are the attitudes of Illinois voters generally toward the current electoral system, RCV, and FFV? What group of voters are the most opinionated on the current and alternative systems? And what factors influence Illinois voters' support or opposition to RCV and FFV?

Our findings suggest that at the state level, Illinoisans are skeptical of alternative electoral systems. While approximately 70% of voters support the current system, only 57% support FFV and 55% support RCV. A closer examination reveals the most opinionated Illinoisans are those with high levels of trust in state government, individuals with a conservative ideology, and older voters.

Of these groups, respondents with high levels of trust are more likely to support alternative electoral systems while older voters and conservatives are more likely to oppose them.

These findings are important for Illinois policymakers for several reasons. Leaders need to understand the preferences and opinions of the people they represent. By examining public opinion toward RCV and FFV, policymakers can gain valuable insights into the feasibility and potential challenges of implementing these alternative electoral systems in their localities. If they understand the factors that influence public support or opposition to these systems, they can make informed decisions about whether to pursue RCV or FFV at any election level and identify which groups may support or oppose it. To be successful in any attempt to change the electoral system, policymakers will need to ensure that voters are properly educated about how these alternate systems work. By understanding the attitudes of Illinois voters toward RCV and FFV, policymakers can design effective voter education and outreach programs as part of any adoption efforts. As alternative electoral systems gain increased attention and adoption across the United States, policymakers must stay up to date on the latest research and trends on the topic.

EXPLAINING THE STATUS QUO: RANKED CHOICE VOTING AND FINAL FIVE VOTING

The current electoral system for state and federal offices in Illinois is the most commonly used system in the United States. Elections are partisan competitions with two stages — one where candidates compete for a political party's nomination in a primary election and another where those nominees compete against each other in a general election. At both stages, the winner is the candidate with the most votes regardless of whether that candidate has the support of a majority of voters.

Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) is an electoral system based on the premise that a candidate should be elected with more than 50% of the vote cast in the election. Voters rank the candidates in order of preference rather than just choosing one. If no candidate attains a majority after the first-choice votes are counted, the candidate with the fewest first-choice votes is eliminated, and the votes they received are redistributed to the remaining candidates according to

those voters' second choices. The process repeats until one candidate achieves a majority. In most jurisdictions where it has been adopted, this process takes place for both primary and general elections.

First Five Voting (FFV) is a variation of RCV where voters start with selecting their one preferred candidate from a pool of all the candidates running in the election regardless of their party affiliation. This approach, commonly referred to as a "jungle primary," aims to be nonpartisan in that party affiliation is not what determines who moves out of the primary. In fact, multiple members of the same party may advance to the general election. Based on the results of the jungle primary, the top five candidates with the most votes (some localities use the top four) compete in a runoff election that is conducted using the RCV method.

Proponents of RCV and FFV argue that they increase voter turnout, especially among younger voters. These assertions are supported by academic research (Citizens Union, 2021; Juelich & Coll, 2021; Kimball & Anthony, 2016). Those who support this system suggest RCV fosters a more positive campaign tone, reducing mudslinging and promoting cooperation between opponents. Research supports these claims (Donovan et al., 2016; John & Douglas, 2017; Robb, 2011). Real-world examples of these behaviors include New York City (Fitzsimmons & Mays, 2021), Alaska (George, 2022), and Maine (Anthony et al., 2021). RCV proponents also assert it will change the type of candidates who win elected office. Research finds that RCV may result in more moderate politicians (Igersheim et al., 2022; Williamson, 2023) and improves electoral outcomes for racial minorities (John et al., 2018), women (Buckley et al., 2015), women minorities (John et al., 2018), and third-party candidates (Simmons et al., 2022).

Opponents argue RCV and FFV confuse voters, but studies show that voters generally understand these systems (Alaskans for Better Elections, 2022; Boudreau, Colner, et al., 2020; Boudreau, Merolla, et al., 2020; Cerrone & McClintock, 2021; Coll, 2021; Rank the Vote NYC, 2021). However, recent studies indicate voters may struggle with coherent decision making due to information overload (Simmons & Waterbury, 2023), which can be mitigated by providing voters with additional information about the parties or candidates (Green, 2015a; Green, 2015b; Boudreau et al., 2019; Boudreau et al., 2020; Reilly, 2021; Santucci, 2021). Critics of RCV and FFV point to concerns about "ballot exhaustion," where some ballots become inactive when preferred candidates are eliminated. But simulated RCV elections suggest there is around 12% ballot

exhaustion (Coll, 2021), with real-world numbers ranging from 6% (Alaska Division of Elections, 2022) to 15% (Board of Elections in the City of New York, 2021).[1]

EXISTING RESEARCH ON ATTITUDES TOWARD ALTERNATIVE ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

Drives to adopt new electoral systems are part of a larger movement to address perceived issues with democracy in America. Polls suggest that over 75% of Americans think that U.S. democracy is not working well, and approximately two-thirds agree that "significant changes" are needed in the design and structure of U.S. democracy.

When it comes to what influences citizens' support for electoral reforms, previous literature suggests that partisanship (Alvarez et al., 2011; Biggers, 2019; Bowler & Donovan, 2016; Bowler & Donovan, 2018; Kane, 2017; Mann et al., 2020; McCarthy, 2019), political knowledge (Gronke et al., 2019), attitudes toward political leaders (Mann et al., 2020), and election results (Anderson et al., 2005; Bowler & Donovan, 2007; Fougere et al., 2010; Gronke et al., 2019; Karp & Tolbert, 2010; Simmons et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2010; Tolbert et al., 2009) all shape preferences for electoral systems. Satisfaction with how government works, in particular, has been found to be a sizeable influence on public opinion of reforms (Bowler & Donovan, 2007; Coll et al., 2022; McCarthy & Santucci, 2021). When voters are dissatisfied with the way government is working, they are more likely to support changes.

Dissatisfaction with government in the United States is often associated with age. Younger voters, particularly those under the age of 40 in the so-called millennial and Gen Z cohorts have consistently been shown to be the most opposed to the status quo (Dalton, 2005; Foa & Mounk, 2016; Foa & Mounk, 2019; Ladd et al., 2018). Scholars suggest that because of their dissatisfaction, younger voters may be more open about changes to the electoral system (Blais et al., 2021; Diamond, 2019; McCarthy & Santucci, 2021; McGuinness & Hardacre, 2011). Further, research finds the inverse is true as well; older voters are less supportive of adopting RCV (McCarthy & Santucci, 2021). Younger voters are also more likely to use candidate ranking in real-world elections compared to older voters (Carman & Wendland, 2022; Wendland & Carman, 2023).

Further sources of dissatisfaction are also related to support for alternative electoral systems. According to Simmons et al. (2022), individuals who support candidates that lose elections are more likely to support alternatives like RCV over existing plurality systems. In contrast, status quo bias — the belief that the current voting method is the best because it has been used for a long time — is a critical explanation for attitudes toward alternative systems (Anthony et al., 2021; Blais et al., 2021; Cerrone & McClintock, 2021).

Partisanship may also influence support for reforms, with Democrats appearing to be more supportive than Republicans (Anthony et al., 2021; Kimball et al., 2021; McCarthy & Santucci, 2021; Santucci, 2021; Simmons et al., 2022). Further, it has largely been municipalities that tend to vote for the Democratic Party and liberal politicians who have adopted RCV, such as New York City, Oakland, San Francisco, and the Twin Cities. Still, other research adds important nuance and finds no partisan impact (Blais et al., 2021). The fact that alternative electoral systems have been adopted in Republican-leaning or battleground states such as Alaska, Maine, and Utah while RCV has been banned in other Republican-leaning states such as Florida and Tennessee also complicates the partisan narrative.

Voter understanding and support for electoral systems like RCV and FFV may be influenced by how the system is explained to voters, although previous work is inconclusive. Detailed explanations of how votes are transferred to candidates do not seem to affect support for alternative systems (Kimball et al., 2021), but increased overall political knowledge has been shown to increase engagement within and positive attitudes for electoral reforms (Boudreau, Colner, et al., 2020).

Finally, additional demographics may offer further explanations for attitudes. Previous studies indicate that Asian, Black, and Latino Americans are more likely to support RCV than white Americans (Kimball et al., 2021; McCarthy & Santucci, 2021) and that providing true information on the positive impact of RCV on the election of women and minority candidates increases support among minority voters but not white voters (Kimball et al., 2021). There have been ambiguous results on a voter's level of education and their support for alternatives depending on the study (Kimball et al., 2021; McCarthy & Santucci, 2021). Few, if any studies, have looked at the effects of gender, geography, income, and union membership on voter attitudes. What remains is to determine how attitudes toward alternative electoral systems are specific

to certain jurisdictions and how important the characteristics that affect voter attitudes are relative to one another.

In our analysis, we investigate the attitudes of Illinois voters and look at characteristics and relationships that may be unique to Illinois. For example, partisanship in Illinois may have an unexpected influence on attitudes toward RCV and FFV relative to other states. As mentioned, Democrats tend to be more supportive of electoral reforms, so we might expect Democratic partisanship to be a predictor of support in Illinois. However, Illinois is increasingly a state dominated by the Democratic Party. In 2018 and 2022, the Democratic Party's nominee for governor and other statewide offices won their races by more than 10 percentage points, a traditional cutoff point for a race being considered noncompetitive. Further, Democrats have had a majority in the state legislative branch for the past 20 years. Based on the literature on the importance of electoral results for electoral reform support, it is possible Illinois Republicans may be driven to support electoral changes given their "outparty" status in Illinois politics.

We further add to this line of study by looking at multiple potential explanations of support simultaneously within our survey. Our analysis allows us to draw conclusions about which characteristics of those reviewed here are the most likely to influence an Illinois voter's position on the status quo, RCV, or FFV.

DATA AND MEASURES

To better understand Illinois voter attitudes toward the current and alternative electoral systems, we fielded a survey with likely Illinois voters before the 2022 General Election. The survey measured individual attributes such as partisanship, income, education, etc., and exposed voters to descriptions of the various types of alternative electoral reforms used in other states and localities. The sample was made up of 1,000 respondents and was representative of the Illinois voting population based on previous exit polls in Illinois. The sample was representative with respect to race, education, income, religion, partisanship, gender, and geographic location. For certain characteristics where our sample was not representative (e.g., union membership), we weighted the survey responses to be consistent with statewide demographics.[2]

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

We began by measuring voters' attitudes toward the current two-stage partisan plurality election system. We included the following explanation to respondents:

> *Currently, Illinois uses a plurality voting system for general elections between candidates who won a party's primary (which also uses a plurality system). A plurality voting system is an electoral system in which the winner of an election is the candidate that received the highest number of votes. The candidate does not need to win a majority of votes to be elected.*

We then asked voters, "On the whole, are you very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the current way general elections work in Illinois?" For analysis purposes, we collapsed respondents into a dichotomous variable coded as zero for those not satisfied with the current system and one for those satisfied with the status quo.

To capture attitudes toward RCV, we began by including the following explanation:

> *Some states and localities have adopted an electoral system known as Ranked Choice Voting for their general elections. Ranked Choice Voting is an electoral system where voters pick a first-choice candidate and have the option to rank backup candidates in order of their choice: second, third, and so on. If a candidate receives more than half of the first choices, that candidate wins. However, if there is no majority winner after counting first choices the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and voters who picked that candidate as 'number 1' will have their votes count for their next choice. This process continues until a candidate wins with more than half of the votes.*

This description, which is in line with similar research in this area and actual educational statements released by government officials in areas where new RCV elections are taking place, focused on the transferable nature of the ballot and has been found to not bias survey respondents for or against reforms (Kimball et al., 2021). We then asked voters, "Would you support or oppose moving Illinois general elections to a Ranked Choice Voting system?" The four-point response options ranged from "strongly oppose" to "strongly support."

For analysis purposes, we collapsed respondents into a dichotomous variable coded as zero for those who oppose RCV and one for those who support RCV.

To capture attitudes toward FFV, we began by explaining nonpartisan primaries as elections where:

> *All candidates run on one single primary ballot, regardless of party affiliation. All voters vote from the same list of candidates regardless of voter party affiliation, with a set number of the highest vote getters moving on to the general election.*

We then included the FFV explanation:

> *Some states and localities have adopted a system that combines a nonpartisan primary system with a Ranked Choice Voting general election system, sometimes referred to as Final Five Voting system for the number of candidates who move on to the general election.*

Following that explanation, we asked voters, "Would you support or oppose moving Illinois elections to a Final Five Voting system?" The four-point response options ranged from "strongly oppose" to "strongly support." For analysis purposes, we collapsed respondents into a dichotomous variable coded as zero for those who oppose FFV and one for those who support FFV.

AGGREGATE ANALYSIS

TABLE 1

AGGREGATE SUPPORT FOR ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

ELECTORAL SYSTEM	SUPPORT
Current Election System	70%
Ranked Choice Voting	55%
Final Five Voting	57%

Table 1 shows the general levels of support for each electoral system. These results, which are essentially equivalent to a poll of Illinois voters, indicate that

both the status quo and the alternative electoral systems are supported by a majority. Still, the status quo is by far the most popular with 70% of respondents indicating satisfaction with the current two-stage partisan plurality electoral system. This suggests that, at the moment, the demand for a statewide shift may not be particularly strong, though attitudes may change if the possibility were to move from being in theory to a real possibility following legislative action or a ballot initiative movement. A closer look at the characteristics of voters that are predictive of their support or opposition to alternatives is more useful to decision makers. In our analysis, we include a number of subsequent variables that capture characteristics of voters relevant to their support or opposition of electoral systems that are derived from existing studies and salient to Illinois.

VARIABLE ANALYSES

ATTITUDINAL VARIABLES

First, we used a common measure of political knowledge based on asking respondents three questions about Illinois government. We created a four-point scale based on respondents getting none of the questions correct through getting all three correct. The questions asked Illinois voters who the Secretary of State was at the time (then Jesse White, who had held the position for more than 20 years), which party controlled the Illinois Supreme Court (Democrats), and which party had a majority of seats in the Illinois House of Representatives (Democrats had a supermajority).

Second, we employed trust in government as a four-point measure, coming from the question "How much of the time do you think you can trust the Illinois state government in Springfield to do what is right?" with the options of "never at all," "only sometimes," "most of the time," and "just about always."

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Our demographic-based variables included a number of key characteristics:

- Age was a five-point measure, with groups including "18 to 29 years old," "30 to 44 years old," "45 to 64 years old," and "65 and older."
- Education was also a five-point measure, with groups including "high school diploma, GED, or less," "some college but no degree," "associate's degree or trade certificate," "bachelor's degree," and "graduate or professional degree."

- We accounted for a respondent's race by asking whether a respondent self-identified as "white," with white respondents coded as one and non-white respondents coded as zero.
- Sex was included through a dichotomous variable, with respondents who self-identified as female coded as one and all others coded as zero.
- The effect of employment was captured by first asking respondents, "Which of the following best describes your current employment status?" Those who were unemployed (not including retirees) were coded as one, and all others were coded as zero.
- We asked, "Do you or anyone else in your household belong to a labor union or to an employee association similar to a union?" Voters who responded "yes" were coded as belonging to a union household while respondents saying "no" were not.
- Income was accounted for on a five-point scale of household annual income.
- We captured voters' geographic location by asking for the county or city in which they lived at the time they completed the survey. We then divided the respondents into five groups: City of Chicago resident, suburban Chicago resident, northern Illinois resident, central Illinois resident, and southern Illinois resident.[3]

POLITICAL VARIABLES

We also included political variables in our analysis. For a measure of ideology, we turned to the standard measure used by political science, which is a seven-point measure of conservative ideology phrased as "One way that people talk about politics in the United States is in terms of liberal, conservative, and moderate ideology. The political views people might hold are often arranged from extremely liberal (1) to extremely conservative (7). Using that scale, where do you place yourself?"

To capture partisanship, we asked respondents to self-identify as either a Democrat or Republican. For those who initially identified as neither, we asked whether they thought they were closer to the Republican Party, Democratic Party, or neither. In line with previous research, we treat these independents who feel closer to one of the two parties as belonging to the party they identified being closer to, with the remaining independents and supporters

of other parties combined into their own variable (Klar & Krupnikov, 2016). We also created an independent variable for respondents who persisted in not identifying with either political party.

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics for the variables as they were coded for our analysis. Overall, our sample is representative of the Illinois electorate in the last decade of federal elections conducted in the state.

TABLE 2

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR VARIABLES

VARIABLE	AVERAGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM
Political Knowledge	2.16	0.66	0	3
Trust in State Government	2.23	0.82	1	4
Age	2.78	0.95	1	4
Education	2.94	1.38	1	4
Income	3.21	1.54	1	6
Female	0.54	0.50	0	1
White	0.75	0.44	0	1
Unemployed	0.15	0.36	0	1
Union Household	0.16	0.37	0	1
City of Chicago Resident	0.20	0.40	0	1
Suburban Chicago Resident	0.44	0.50	0	1
Northern Illinois Resident	0.11	0.31	0	1
Central Illinois Resident	0.14	0.34	0	1
Southern Illinois Resident	0.11	0.32	0	1
Democrat	0.54	0.50	0	1
Republican	0.41	0.49	0	1
Independent	0.05	0.39	0	1
Conservative Ideology	3.92	1.70	1	7

Table 3 provides an initial glance at support for electoral systems by political party. Based on these results, Illinois Democrats are the most supportive group of each electoral system, with particular enthusiasm for the status quo that has brought them recent success. Independents are the least supportive of the

current system while Illinois Republicans are the least supportive of FFV and RCV. These results are interesting, but we need to dig deeper to understand the effect of partisanship relative to other factors that influence electoral system support.

TABLE 3

SUPPORT FOR ELECTORAL SYSTEMS BY PARTY

ELECTORAL SYSTEM	POLITICAL PARTY	SUPPORT
Current Election System	Democrat	78%
	Republican	57%
	Independent	52%
Ranked Choice Voting	Democrat	63%
	Republican	42%
	Independent	58%
Final Five Voting	Democrat	64%
	Republican	47%
	Independent	61%

GROUP ANALYSIS

We were interested in learning what groups of Illinois voters are the most opinionated on the question of current and alternative electoral systems and the direction of their attitudes. To accomplish this task, we employed a statistical method known as Bayesian Model Averaging to compare the explanatory power of all the variables in our analysis against one another. Essentially, this method allowed us to test all possible combinations of variables (65,536 in total) to see which voter characteristics are consistently and significantly related to certain values in our dependent variables. It also allowed us to determine how many variables actually have a meaningful effect. We were able to identify which and how many variables do the most explaining (which groups are most opinionated) and whether their relationship with the dependent variable (support for an electoral system) is positive or negative (support or opposition).

Note that the number and identity of the most explanatory variables are not necessarily the same for each electoral system. Other methods, like those used in many of the studies cited here, only allow researchers to test the effect of one

variable or rely on a host of empirical assumptions that are often violated and can produce erroneous results. We encourage readers interested in learning more about this methodology to consult the Appendix, where we explain this method in more detail and provide references for additional reading.

STATUS QUO

Our results indicate that three groups of voters are particularly opinionated on the current electoral system in Illinois.[4] Voters with high levels of trust in the Illinois state government are the most opinionated and are very supportive of the current system. In addition, Democrats, who have experienced a great deal of success in recent statewide elections are supportive of the current system. In contrast, voters from southern Illinois are dissatisfied with the current electoral system. It is important to note that these results hold even when accounting for other factors. That is, even though southern Illinois is often considered a conservative or Republican stronghold within the state, there is something unique about that region irrespective of its political leanings. Voters from southern Illinois are generally more dissatisfied with the current system than Republicans or conservatives.

FIGURE 1

GROUPS WITH THE STRONGEST OPINION ON THE CURRENT ELECTORAL SYSTEM

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS
(Oppose)

DEMOCRATS
(Support)

TRUST IN GOVERNMENT
(Support)

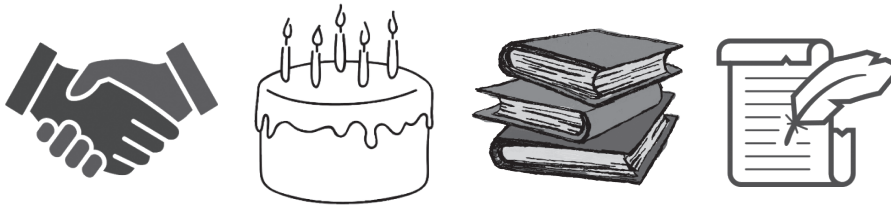
RANKED CHOICE VOTING

Turning to RCV, four groups of respondents stand out as the most opinionated on this alternative electoral system.[5] Voters with high levels of trust in state

government support RCV in addition to the status quo, and, in fact, are the only group with meaningfully positive attitudes toward RCV. Older voters, conservative voters, and voters with a high degree of political knowledge all oppose RCV, suggesting some of the trends in the national studies we reviewed hold true in Illinois. Interestingly, neither partisanship nor geography are significant predictors of attitudes toward RCV. Despite the adoption of this very system in Evanston and its consideration in Chicago, the city and its suburbs are not strongly opinionated on this issue.

FIGURE 2

GROUPS WITH THE STRONGEST OPINION ON RANKED CHOICE VOTING (RCV)



TRUST IN GOVERNMENT ***(Support)***

GREATER AGE ***(Oppose)***

HIGH POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE ***(Oppose)***

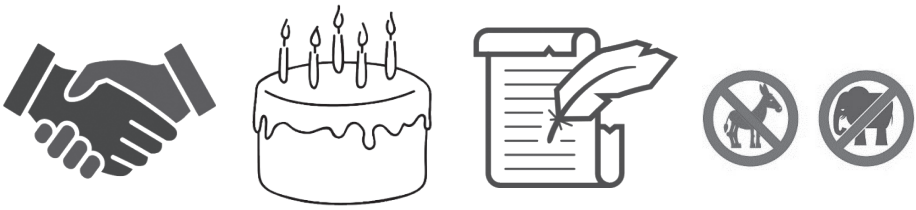
CONSERVATIVE ***(Oppose)***

FINAL FIVE VOTING

Finally, there are four groups of voters with significant attitudes toward FFV.[6] Again, respondents with a high amount of trust in state government are supportive of the system, seeming to trust the state to conduct any sort of election in a way that satisfies them. Older voters and conservative voters, in contrast, are also opposed to FFV. The new addition to this portion of the analysis is independent voters. Independents, likely impressed by the nonpartisan primary component of FFV, strongly approve of the system relative to other voters. When compared to strong partisans, 62% of independents support FFV compared to 54% of Republicans and Democrats.

FIGURE 3

GROUPS WITH THE STRONGEST OPINION ON FINAL FIVE VOTING (FFV)



TRUST IN GOVERNMENT ***(Support)***

GREATER AGE ***(Oppose)***

CONSERVATIVE ***(Oppose)***

INDEPENDENTS ***(Support)***

CONCLUSION

As states and localities continue to be laboratories of democracy — with voters serving as both the scientists driving the innovations and the subjects engaging with the experiments — understanding what factors drive support or opposition to such changes is important. We've provided evidence that, at the state level, voters currently prefer the status quo electoral system. In particular, we found that those with higher trust in Illinois state government and members of the Democratic Party are strong supporters of the current Illinois electoral system while voters from southern Illinois are most dissatisfied with it. Interestingly, we also observed that those with higher trust in state government seem to be strong supporters of changing to RCV or FFV systems. We consistently found that older voters and more conservative voters are strong opponents of changing to either system. Our findings also suggest that those with higher levels of political knowledge tend to be strong opponents of RCV. And, perhaps unsurprisingly, we noted that independents strongly support switching to a FFV system, which would allow them to vote in primaries without having to declare a party.

While providing useful insights into what factors shape attitudes toward electoral systems, much work remains to be done in future research. For example, a better understanding of why certain groups support or oppose particular electoral systems may be useful for policymakers. Further, it is likely that as discussions around adopting RCV in some capacity around the state

continue, politicians, newspapers, and donors will adopt policy positions on the system that they promote publicly. What impact might these "elite cues" have on voter attitudes? Also, as individual Illinois localities adopt RCV around the state, what impact might this exposure have on attitudes toward RCV at the state level, especially if such adoption occurs in Chicago? RCV and FFV continue to spread to other states and localities, increasing the awareness of and knowledge about such systems and potentially impacting attitude. Lastly, this study looks at attitudes toward electoral systems at the state level. Future research will want to explore whether voters form attitudes about local electoral systems differently than they do about state electoral systems and whether the level of the election influences who supports or opposes the status quo, RCV, or FFV.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Additional discussion around the assertions made by proponents and opponents can be found at https://blogs.uofi.uis.edu/view/8598/1650413886.

[2] Our online panel was provided through Marketing Systems Group, and the survey respondents completed the survey through the online Qualtrics Research Suite. Successful respondents passed attention checks within the survey in keeping with best practices (Simmons et al., 2022).

[3] For empirical reasons, "northern Illinois resident" and "central Illinois resident" were used as reference categories of this geographic variable and were omitted from the analysis.

[4] See Table A1 of the Appendix for the full results of this analysis.

[5] See Table A2 of the Appendix for the full results of this analysis.

[6] See Table A3 of the Appendix for the full results of this analysis.

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APPENDIX

BAYESIAN MODEL AVERAGING

Bayesian model averaging (BMA) is a statistical method designed for researchers with many potential explanatory variables, all of which may have an effect on the dependent variable of interest. In such a scenario, BMA enables researchers to determine a variable's individual effect and its effect relative to the other variables the researcher has collected. In this way the variables can be ranked based on their overall explanatory power.[1] BMA finds the value of relevant inclusion statistics for each variable over all possible combinations of variables in a model to learn more about a variable's explanatory power. Montgomery and Nyhan (2010) show that BMA is an effective method for testing competing variables within the same theoretical framework and argue that a variable's posterior inclusion probability (PIP) is the best metric for drawing comparisons with other variables. Formally, the PIP for a given variable is the sum of the posterior model probabilities — the probability that a model is true given the data collected — for all model specifications in which the variable is included (Zeugner and Feldkircher, 2015). Informally, it is a measure of how likely it is that a variable is in the true model.

The BMA analysis in this paper considers the entire number of model specifications made possible by the 16 relevant variables derived from our review of existing theory. The number of specifications is 2^{16}, equal to 65,536. Consistent with most BMA analyses in the social sciences, we use a uniform prior that assumes the number of variables in the true model is approximately half the number of variables included in BMA (e.g., Bartels, 1997).

Tables A1, A2, and A3 in this appendix present the inclusion statistics for each variable, sorted by their PIP. The maximum PIP a variable can have is 1.000, indicative of a variable with high explanatory power. A PIP near 0 indicates low explanatory power. The posterior mean is the average value of a variable's coefficient across all models and suggests a variable's influence on the dependent variable with its absolute value while also suggesting the direction of the influence. Also presented are the variables' posterior standard deviations and the posterior probability of a variable having a positive coefficient.

BMA also suggests the appropriate size of models of support for the electoral systems. The posterior expected model size is calculated by summing all variables' PIPs. An expected model size of 2.94, for example, indicates the

optimal model contains between two and three variables. Variables should be selected for inclusion in the optimal model based on their PIP. For our purposes, these are the characteristics of respondents most opinionated on the given electoral systems.

STATUS QUO *(Expected Model Size: 2.94 variables)*

TABLE A1

STATISTICS OF INCLUSION FOR VARIABLES IN POSTERIOR MODEL

	PIP	POST. MEAN	POST. SD	COND. (+) COEFF.
Trust in State Government	1.000	0.149	0.021	1.000
Southern Illinois Resident	0.461	-0.052	0.064	0.000
Democrat	0.407	0.034	0.047	1.000
Independent	0.169	-0.012	0.030	0.000
Education	0.125	0.002	0.007	1.000
Age	0.101	0.002	0.008	1.000
Republican	0.100	-0.004	0.022	0.188
Female	0.097	-0.004	0.015	0.000
Income	0.060	0.001	0.003	1.000
Conservative Ideology	0.058	-0.000	0.003	0.017
Union Household	0.057	-0.002	0.0132	0.000
Political Knowledge	0.053	-0.001	0.007	0.000
Suburban Chicago Resident	0.047	0.001	0.008	0.984
City of Chicago Resident	0.040	-0.001	0.009	0.023
White	0.036	0.000	0.007	0.920
Unemployed	0.032	0.000	0.007	0.979

Note: Bolded variables are variables indicated by the model to be significant predictors

RANKED CHOICE VOTING *(Expected Model Size: 4.12 variables)*

TABLE A2

STATISTICS OF INCLUSION FOR VARIABLES IN POSTERIOR MODELS

	PIP	POST. MEAN	POST. SD	COND. (+) COEFF.
Age	1.000	-0.124	0.016	0.000
Trust in State Government	1.000	0.104	0.022	1.000
Conservative Ideology	0.872	-0.028	0.0143	0.000
Political Knowledge	0.513	-0.031	0.034	0.000
Female	0.296	-0.019	0.034	0.000
Union Household	0.051	0.002	0.012	1.000
Republican	0.047	-0.001	0.013	0.176
White	0.046	-0.001	0.010	0.000
Suburban Chicago Resident	0.044	-0.001	0.008	0.000
Independent	0.042	0.001	0.010	0.999
Democrat	0.039	-0.000	0.010	0.196
City of Chicago Resident	0.038	0.001	0.009	0.999
Income	0.035	0.000	0.002	0.995
Unemployed	0.033	0.000	0.008	0.999
Southern Illinois Resident	0.033	0.001	0.009	0.997
Education	0.031	-0.000	0.001	0.431

Note: Bolded variables are variables indicated by the model to be significant predictors

FINAL FIVE VOTING *(Expected Model Size: 3.20 variables)*

TABLE A3

STATISTICS OF INCLUSION FOR VARIABLES IN POSTERIOR MODELS

	PIP	POST. MEAN	POST. SD	COND. (+) COEFF.
Age	1.000	-0.127	0.016	0.000
Trust in State Government	0.985	0.085	0.025	1.000
Conservative Ideology	0.634	-0.018	0.016	0.000
Independent	0.108	0.007	0.023	1.000
Political Knowledge	0.092	-0.003	0.012	0.000
Unemployed	0.051	0.002	0.013	1.000
Democrat	0.043	0.001	0.010	0.546
Republican	0.041	-0.000	0.010	0.530
Female	0.041	-0.001	0.008	0.000
Suburban Chicago Resident	0.036	-0.001	0.007	0.000
City of Chicago Resident	0.034	-0.000	0.008	0.033
Southern Illinois	0.034	0.001	0.009	0.999
Union Household	0.032	0.000	0.008	1.000
Education	0.032	-0.000	0.002	0.021
White	0.031	-0.000	0.006	0.589
Income	0.031	-0.000	0.002	0.153

Note: Bolded variables are variables indicated by the model to be significant predictors

APPENDIX ENDNOTES

[1] See Montgomery and Nyhan (2010, 248) for a succinct derivation of BMA in a linear context.

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