

In All Districts, Ranked Choice Voting Empowers Oakland Voters

A Comparison with Top-Two Runoff

Oakland's first use of Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) empowered more voters to fully participate in elections and did so in all districts of the city. The election of Oakland's mayor illustrates this when compared to the traditional top-two runoff (TTR) system that RCV replaced.

Three important observations are evident from the following figures:

- 1. By every measure in every city council district, RCV shows improvement over the system it replaced.**
- 2. In every city council district, there were more voters who fully participated with RCV than there were voters who just participated with the old top-two runoff system, even after adjusting for the district growth in registered voters, as shown in Figure 2.**
- 3. The biggest challenge to improving voter participation was and still is getting people to register to vote and getting them to vote. These factors are also the leading cause of variation between districts.**

Figure 1 compares, by district, the number of voters participating in the Oakland Mayor's election using RCV in 2010 and top-two runoff in 2006.

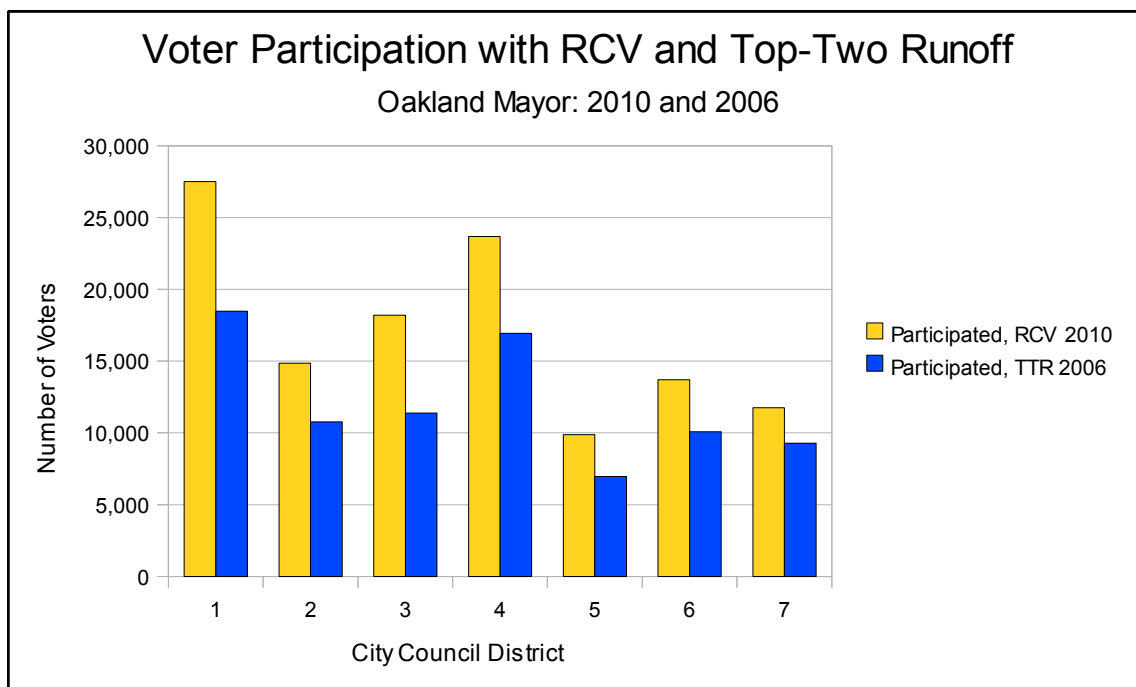


Figure 1. RCV increases voter participation

The comparison in Figure 1 includes the effects of increased voter registration, which at most was only partially related to the introduction of RCV. From 2006 to 2010, voter registration increased city wide by about 8.4% and increased in city council districts by amounts ranging from about 6% for districts 7 and 4, up to about 13% for district 3. To remove the effects of growth in registered voters, Figure 2 shows the participation and full participation rates as a percentage of registered voters in each district for the respective elections.

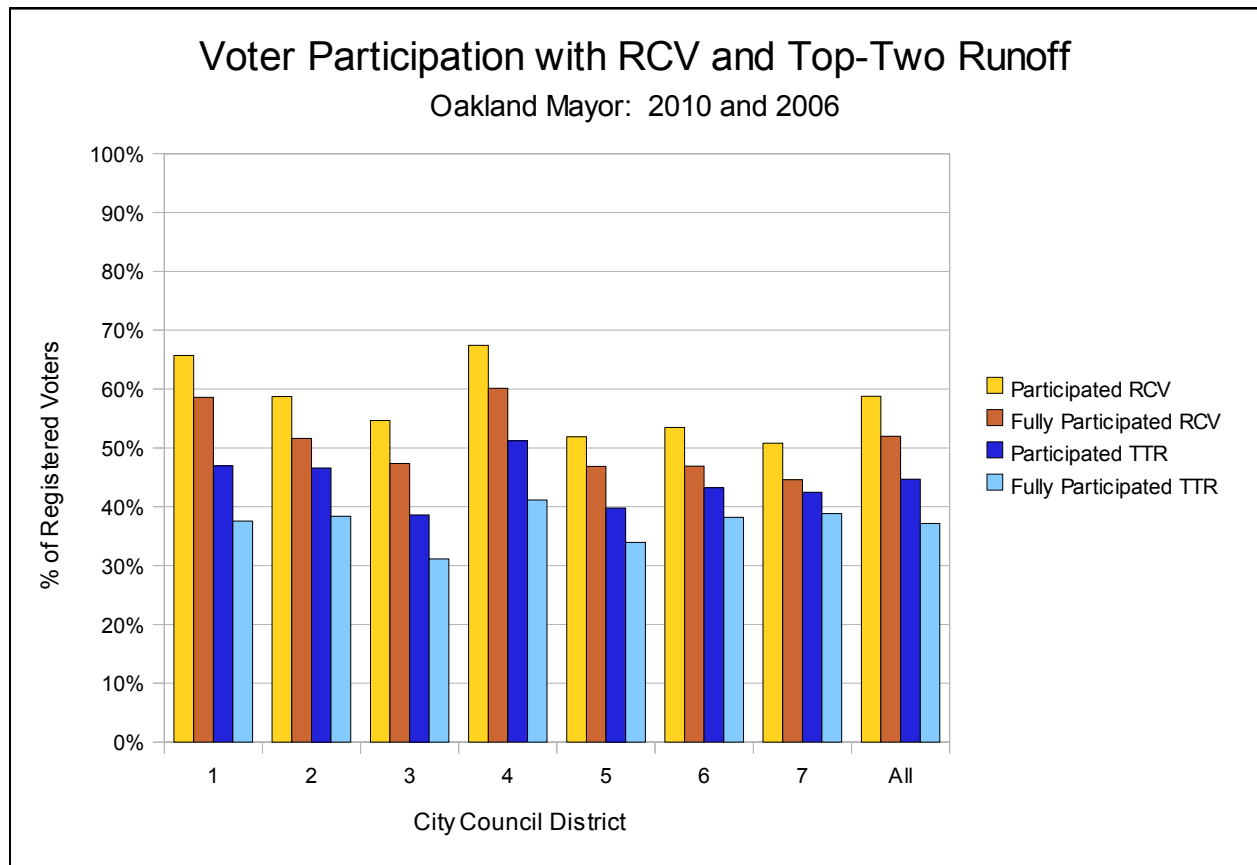


Figure 2. RCV increases voter participation after adjusting for growth in the number of registered voters

Figure 2 shows that in every district:

- voter participation increased with RCV
- voter full participation increased with RCV
- full participation with RCV was higher than just participation with top-two runoff

Top-two runoff systems typically rely on at least one low-turnout election. For Oakland, it was the low-turnout, first-round election in June. Low-turnout elections reduce the legitimacy of the democratic process and allow government to be less responsive and less accountable to voters.

For this analysis, a voter participates if that person cast a ballot that counts for any candidate in at least one round. Undervotes and overvotes are excluded. A voter fully participates if that person's ballot also counts for a candidate in every round effectively and decisively – the ballot counts for the winner(s) of the round or for the runner up. The 2006 race using top-two runoff was decided in a single round, so fully participating means having the vote count for the winner or

the runner up in that round. Undervotes, overvotes, and wasted votes are excluded. In the 2010 race using RCV, fully participating means having the vote count for a candidate in every round, including the last round. Undervotes, overvotes, and any ballots that ever became exhausted are excluded.

Some detractors of RCV have focused on how Oakland's first use of RCV may have missed some standard of perfection, on how some voters did not fully participate. Some of the reported problems are real, some are exaggerated, and some are the result of misinterpreting the election results. As an early adopter and first-time user of RCV, it will be important for Oakland to accurately assess where and how future uses of RCV can be made even better. Top-two runoff systems on the other hand are mature systems that offer no significant opportunities to improve their clearly worse performance.

Most of all, it is important to recognize that despite any of its possible first-use imperfections, RCV has already significantly empowered Oakland voters, and done so across all districts of the city.

Without choice, voting is nothing.

Don't take our
ranked **choice** voting
away!