

01/30/2024

SB368

Opponent Testimony

Tim Tarkelly

Libertarian Party of Kansas Legislative Director

Chairman Thompson and Members of the Committee,

This proposed bill very plainly bans all uses of Ranked Choice Voting in any election within the state. We cannot support such a bill, as it will promote distrust in our elections and threaten autonomy of communities throughout the state.

The scope of this bill is troubling, as it seeks to ban RCV in elections at every level. Kansas is home to countless small communities with unique challenges. The citizens of these communities understand their own needs, including how best to choose the mayors, council members, clerks, and sheriffs who preside over them. This bill will be an affront to the autonomy of counties and municipalities throughout the state.

Ranked Choice Voting promotes election integrity. In the era of crowded primaries, increasing political tension, and widespread mistrust in our voting systems, we should not dismiss any innovations in the democratic process. By looking at how RCV has been effectively used elsewhere and by considering the unique needs of varying Kansas communities, it is clear that this bill will be harmful for Kansans.

The use of Ranked Choice Voting is spreading throughout the country, with a number of states demonstrating outright success. Recently, Virginia has embraced RCV in a number of ways. In 2021, Virginia primaries utilized RCV for its primaries. This prevented media sensation and media prescribed “front runners” from dominating. Republican Glen Youngkin advanced to win this primary. His broad appeal then allowed him to win the general election, making him the first Republican to hold that office since 2009. This entire process was viewed so favorably by Virginians, that a similar model was used in the following congressional elections. That year, Center for Campaign Innovation studied the results of Republican races that used RCV and compared them to Republican races that didn’t. They found that “Both the nominee and the runners-up in a ranked-choice contest had a more favorable image among voters, and voters perceived the contest as a less negative campaign.”<sup>1</sup> RCV elections leave a more positive imprint on the public conscience. Without the inherent negativity associated with modern elections, even those who didn’t win are viewed more positively by voters. Furthermore, Ranked Choice Voting eliminates the threat of “spoilers” who seek to damage election integrity by courting enough votes from one person to bolster the chances of another.

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<sup>1</sup> Saul Anuzis and Stan Lockheart. WHY RANKED CHOICE VOTING IS A WIN FOR REPUBLICANS. The Hill. June 23, 2023. Retrieved at: <http://tinyurl.com/ms5rzse4>

A 2022 poll showed only 20% of Americans having full faith in the integrity of our elections<sup>2</sup>. A bill that seeks to prohibit adjustments to our elections, will surely make that number even lower. We can certainly understand members of this committee may feel uncertain about the future of Ranked Choice Voting in Kansas, but banning something that could improve trust in our elections before it is even tried at a local level seems unwise.

We urge all members of the committee to bear these thoughts in mind, and for the sake of election integrity, vote against this measure.

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<sup>2</sup> Brittany Shepherd. AMERICANS' FAITH IN ELECTION INTEGRITY DROPS: POLL. ABC News. January 6, 2022. Retrieved at: <http://tinyurl.com/rw746zvr>