



RANKED CHOICE VOTING: DELIVERING ON ITS PROMISE IN NEW YORK CITY
Written Testimony on behalf of Common Cause New York and
Rank the Vote NYC before the Assembly Standing Committee on Election Law
July 19th, 2021

New York's first citywide ranked choice voting election ended smoothly, with an uneventful and accurate reporting of the nearly complete final election results. Eric Adams, elected with majority consensus, will be New York's second-ever Black mayor, receiving 404,391 votes (50.4%). He'll take office with a strong mandate, thanks to ranked choice voting. And with over 941,000 ballots cast, turnout was more than double 2017, and the highest New York has seen for a local election since 1989.

Already, Ranked Choice Voting has delivered on its promise and: increased the diversity of city leadership from the Mayor to the Council, more New Yorkers had a say in the final results, and voters loved it! None of this would have been possible without the extensive, collaborative voter education and outreach efforts.

The following testimony highlights our voter outreach and education campaign and the results we've seen so far from this historic election.

A Community-based, Five Borough Approach to Voter Education & Outreach

Rank the Vote NYC (RTV) spearheaded a yearlong education campaign that resulted in over 600 RCV online and in-person trainings, partnering with over 750 organizations, training nearly 250 candidates and campaigns citywide, and by election day we and our partners reached over a million and a half New Yorkers. Educational materials were printed in 13 languages and large print and working with partners like Citymeals on Wheels, Food Bank for New York, City Harvest, and the Brooklyn Public library. RTV ultimately distributed over 1 million pieces of informational literature.

Rank the Vote also deployed canvassers going door to door across the five boroughs and spoke with over 50,000 NYC voters, focusing on priority communities including neighborhoods in Assembly Districts 24, 29, 30, 32, 34, 35, 39, 55, 60, 68, 70, 71, 77, 79, 84 to talk directly with voters about ranked choice voting.

Educational Paid Canvass: Doors Knocked by Borough

Borough	Doors
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Bronx	15,560
Kings	15,634
Manhattan	14,684
Queens	8,928
TOTAL	54,806

Educational Paid Canvass: Doors Knocked by Assembly District

<i>Borough</i>	<i>Assembly District</i>	<i>Doors</i>
Queens	24	888
Queens	29	1,471
Queens	30	16
Queens	32	1,639
Queens	34	1,444
Queens	35	763
Queens	39	2,707
Brooklyn	55	4,211
Brooklyn	60	11,423
Manhattan	68	7,645
Manhattan	70	6,648
Manhattan	71	391
Bronx	77	2,801
Bronx	79	3,939
Bronx	84	5,831
Bronx	85	2,989

And during early voting when we were made aware of disinformation by candidates in a Queens Council District, we were able to send 22,000 text messages in language to Korean and Chinese voters to ensure they knew the proper way to cast their ranked choice ballots.

In addition, we were able to provide resources to trusted messengers to create their own programs and educate voters on RCV. These partners include but aren't limited to the New York State NAACP, United Neighborhood Houses, Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, Brooklyn NAACP, National Black Leadership Commission on Health (Black Health), Educational



Alliance, Catholic Charities of New York, CHHAYA, Dominicanos, Mothers on the Move, African American Clergy & Elected Officials, and North East Queens NAACP.

Ranked Choice Voting Leads to More Diversity in Elected Representation

Ranked choice voting delivered on its promise - and then some - to elect more women and BIPOC lawmakers. By eliminating vote splitting and incentivizing positive, substance-based campaigns, ranked choice voting gave us:

- **New York's first Mayor elected with majority consensus, Eric Adams, and will be the city's second-ever Black mayor.**
- **The history-making top three finishers in the mayoral race included two people of color and two women. For the first time, a woman came within striking distance of City Hall.**
 - In 2013, the last time a female candidate ran for mayor in a primary, then City Council Speaker Christine Quinn only garnered 100,020 votes (~16% of the vote).
 - Fast forward to 2021, and there are four women running for mayor in the primary and Kathryn Garcia, one of the finalists, quadrupled the vote share with nearly 400,000 votes after vote redistribution.
- **Several historic gains were made in City Council elections:**
 - 30 women are leading their races for City Council seats, and 86% of them are women of color. This is a HUGE leap from the previous record - in 2009, 18 women served in the Council.
 - There will be 6 openly LGBTQ members of the Council
 - And at least six foreign-born New Yorkers on the Council
- **Elected officials will enter office knowing they have the support of the majority of their district.**
 - Gone are the days of candidates winning with 10%, 20% or 30% of the vote.

More New Yorkers Had a Say in the Final Outcome

Even after all the absentee ballots had been counted, no candidate achieved the 40% threshold to avoid a runoff in the Democratic primaries for Mayor and Comptroller. Runoff elections in New York City have an abysmal track record as low turnout and high cost affairs. Voter drop-off between primaries and runoff elections have been steep:



- **In 2013, 73.6% fewer voters showed up at the polls between the primary election and the runoff election for Public Advocate.** 772,241 eligible voters voted in the primary and just 203,696 eligible voters participated in the run-off.
- **In 2009, 27.1% fewer voters showed up at the polls between the primary election and the runoff election for Public Advocate and Comptroller.** 330,659 eligible voters voted in the primary and just 241,206 eligible voters participated in the run-off.

Instead, 85% of voters had a say in the final result this year thanks to ranked choice voting.

Exit Polling Showed Voters Embraced Ranked Choice Voting

Common Cause New York and Rank the Vote NYC contracted with Edison Research to conduct exit polling during the city's first citywide Ranked Choice Voting election. The survey was conducted from June 12 – June 22, 2021 among a representative sample of 1,662 Democratic in-person voters in New York City.¹ Full results will be available in late-July, which will include results from absentee and Republican voters, however early data clearly demonstrates:

- **New Yorkers embraced Ranked Choice Voting at the ballot box.**
 - 83% of voters ranked at least two candidates on their ballots in the mayoral primary. The majority of those who opted not to rank did so because they only had one preferred candidate.
 - 42% of voters maximized their newfound power and ranked five candidates.
- **New Yorkers understand the promise and the power of Ranked Choice Voting.²**
 - 51% ranked because it allowed them to vote their values
 - 49% ranked because it allowed them to support multiple candidates
 - 41% ranked because it gave them more of a say in who gets elected
- **New Yorkers found Ranked Choice Voting easy to use.**
 - 95% of voters found their ballot simple to complete.
 - 78% of New Yorkers said they understood Ranked Choice Voting extremely or very well.
- **New Yorkers want Ranked Choice Voting in future elections.**
 - 77% of New Yorkers want Ranked Choice Voting in future local elections.

¹ Interviews were conducted via multiple modes including by telephone and in-person exit polling at 17 early voting locations and at 30 election day voting locations. Interviews were offered in both English and Spanish. 70% of the sample were polled on election day and 30% were polled before the election during the early voting period. Absentee exit polling is ongoing and will be included in the final results in mid-July.

² Multiple responses allowed



A complete analysis of the exit poll results is included as an appendix to this testimony.

Ranked Choice Voting Is Not the Problem, A Calcified Patronage Mill Masquerading as a City Agency Is

Ranked Choice Voting was a wild success. Now that the city has five RCV elections under its belt, it's fair to say Ranked Choice Voting has run smoothly. Exit polling from all five elections has consistently shown voters find their ballot easy to use and voters have embraced their new options by ranking their ballots.

There is no question the last 18 months has presented numerous election administration challenges for the New York City Board of Elections. It has met the moment admirably. And, despite an unfortunate error by a staff member in the primary, the system has largely run smoothly as intended.

However, that does not negate the longstanding structural issues perpetuated by boards of elections across the state. The Boards, as currently structured, are ultimately functions of the county-level political parties. Until the New York State Legislature gets serious about reforming state law and the state constitution, New York voters will be subjected to subpar elections.

Thank you for allowing our organizations to testify at this hearing. Please contact Common Cause New York (nyoffice@commoncause.org) with any questions or for any follow-up.



APPENDIX A

EXIT POLLING SHOWS NEW YORK CITY VOTERS EMBRACE RANKED CHOICE VOTING

Preliminary results from largest Ranked Choice Voting exit poll and election in US history

Over 941,000 New Yorkers made history voting in the largest and most diverse ranked choice voting election in the United States. **After three years of ongoing efforts, the city held the largest ranked choice voting election in US history in time for the most consequential local election cycle since 9/11.**

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 - 42% of voters maximized their newfound power and ranked five candidates.
- **New Yorkers understand the promise and the power of Ranked Choice Voting.⁴**
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⁴ Multiple responses allowed



With nearly a million New Yorkers voting across the five boroughs, the highest turnout for a municipal primary in thirty plus years, Ranked Choice Voting has delivered on its promise for New York City: our elected representation reflects the will of the majority of voters, not the minority, and puts power back in the hands of voters during local elections.

THE MAJORITY OF VOTERS RANKED THEIR BALLOTS
VOTER BEHAVIOR IN THE DEMOCRATIC MAYORAL PRIMARY

- Overall, 83% of voters ranked at least two candidates in the mayoral primary.
- In fact, contrary to fears that Ranked Choice Voting would harm voters by creating a knowledge tax, most voters ranked three or more candidates in the mayoral primary.
 - Overall, 72% of voters ranked three or more candidates.
 - 66% of Black voters ranked three or more candidates, 64% of Hispanic voters ranked three or more candidates, 80% of white voters ranked three or more candidates and 72% of Asian voters ranked three or more candidates.
- While the majority of voters ranked their ballot, there is a strong voter preference to maximize their choices by utilizing all their available rankings in the mayoral primary.
 - Overall, 42% utilized all five rankings on their ballot.
 - 43% of Black voters ranked five candidates, 40% of Hispanic voters ranked five candidates, 45% of white voters ranked five candidates, and 33% of Asian voters ranked five candidates.

Mayoral primary: Ballot utilization by voter type

	<i>All voters</i>	<i>Black voters</i>	<i>Hispanic voters</i>	<i>White voters</i>	<i>Asian voters</i>
<i>Ranked 1 candidate</i>	17%	25%	20%	10%	13%
<i>Ranked 2 candidates</i>	11%	9%	16%	10%	15%
<i>Ranked 3 candidates</i>	18%	16%	14%	20%	24%
<i>Ranked 4 candidates</i>	12%	7%	11%	16%	15%
<i>Ranked 5 candidates</i>	42%	43%	40%	45%	33%

- Overall, the majority of voters who did not rank did so because they only had one preferred candidate in the mayoral primary.⁵

⁵ Multiple responses allowed.

- 65% of voters did not rank because they only had one preferred candidate.
- 28% reported they did not rank because they didn't know enough about other candidates.

VOTERS UNDERSTAND AND APPRECIATE THE VALUE PROPOSITION OF RANKED CHOICE VOTING⁶

- Overall, 51% of voters ranked in the mayoral primary because it allowed them to vote their values and 49% ranked in the mayoral primary because it allowed them to support multiple candidates.
- Black, Hispanic and Asian voters were most likely to say they ranked in the mayoral primary because it allowed them to vote their values.
- White voters were most likely to say they ranked in the mayoral primary because it allowed them to support multiple candidates.

Why Voters Ranked in the Mayoral Primary

<i>Why did you rank?</i>	<i>All voters</i>	<i>Black voters</i>	<i>Hispanic voters</i>	<i>White voters</i>	<i>Asian voters</i>
<i>Vote my values</i>	51%	54%	56%	49%	57%
<i>Support multiple candidates</i>	49%	40%	42%	59%	52%
<i>More of a say in who gets elected</i>	41%	34%	30%	50%	42%
<i>My voice will be better heard by elected officials</i>	29%	27%	25%	31%	33%
<i>I'll feel better about the outcome, regardless of who wins</i>	24%	24%	23%	24%	27%

NEW YORKERS UNDERSTAND AND FIND RANKED CHOICE VOTING SIMPLE

NEW YORKERS UNDERSTAND RANKED CHOICE VOTING

- **Overall, 78% of New Yorkers said they understood Ranked Choice Voting extremely or very well.**
 - 46% of voters said they understood Ranked Choice Voting extremely well and 33% of voters said they understood Ranked Choice Voting very well.
- **Regardless of age, voters understood Ranked Choice Voting.**

⁶ Multiple responses allowed

- 46% of 18-39 year olds said they understood Ranked Choice Voting extremely well and 34% said they understood Ranked Choice Voting very well.
- 44% of 40-59 year olds said they understood Ranked Choice Voting extremely well and 34% said they understood Ranked Choice Voting very well.
- 47% of 60+ voters said they understood Ranked Choice Voting extremely well and 31% said they understood Ranked Choice Voting very well.
- **There was nominal overall variability between ethnic groups.**
 - **Overall, 77% of Black voters said they understood Ranked Choice Voting.** 47% of Black voters said they understood Ranked Choice Voting extremely well and 29% said they understood Ranked Choice Voting very well.
 - **Overall, 80% of Hispanic voters said they understood Ranked Choice Voting.** 41% of Hispanic voters said they understood Ranked Choice Voting extremely well and 38% said they understood Ranked Choice Voting very well.
 - **Overall, 77% of Asian voters said they understood Ranked Choice Voting.** 39% of Asian voters said they understood Ranked Choice Voting extremely well and 38% said they understood Ranked Choice Voting very well.
 - **Overall, 81% of white voters said they understood Ranked Choice Voting.** 48% of Hispanic voters said they understood Ranked Choice Voting extremely well and 33% said they understood Ranked Choice Voting very well.

NEW YORKERS FOUND THEIR RANKED CHOICE VOTING BALLOT SIMPLE TO COMPLETE

- **Across the city, a whopping 95% of voters found their ballot simple to complete.**
 - 75% of voters found the ballot “very simple” to complete and 20% of voters found the ballot “somewhat simple” to complete.
- **Regardless of age, voters understood their new ballot.**
 - 97% of 18-39 year olds found their ballot simple to complete. 78% found the ballot “very simple” to complete and 19% found the ballot “somewhat simple” to complete.
 - 94% of 40-59 year olds found their ballot simple to complete. 76% found the ballot “very simple” to complete and 18% found the ballot “somewhat simple” to complete.

- 94% of 60+ voters found their ballot simple to complete. 71% found the ballot “very simple” to complete and 23% found the ballot “somewhat simple” to complete.
- **There was nominal overall variability between ethnic groups.**
 - 93% of Black voters found their ballot simple to complete. 72% found the ballot “very simple” to complete and 22% found the ballot “somewhat simple” to complete.
 - 95% of Hispanic voters found their ballot simple to complete. 75% found the ballot “very simple” to complete and 20% found the ballot “somewhat simple” to complete.
 - 97% of Asian voters found their ballot simple to complete. 80% found the ballot “very simple” to complete and 17% found the ballot “somewhat simple” to complete.
 - 95% of white voters found their ballot simple to complete. 76% found the ballot “very simple” to complete and 19% found the ballot “somewhat simple” to complete.

NEW YORKERS WANT RANKED CHOICE VOTING FOR FUTURE LOCAL ELECTIONS

- **77% of voters think Ranked Choice Voting should be used in our local elections.**

Percentage of Voters Who Support RCV in Local Elections

Gender	
Male	76%
Female	78%
Age	
18-39	86%
40-59	74%
60+	72%
Ethnicity	

White	78%
Black	75%
Hispanic	79%
Asian	82%
Borough	
Bronx	72%
Brooklyn	77%
Manhattan	85%
Queens	71%
Staten Island	68%

VOTER OUTREACH & EDUCATION EFFORTS ARE WORKING

- **Voters are receiving RCV-related information and education from a variety of sources.**
 - Television was the top source of RCV-related information and education for voters during the June primary.

Top 5 RCV Educational Resources for Voters during the June Primary

	All voters
#1	TV (53%)
#2	Mailed brochure (39%)
#3	Newspaper (27%)
#4	Social media (23%)
#5	Radio (20%)

Edison Research Exit Poll Methodology



The survey was designed to measure the attitudes and experiences of New York City voters in the first citywide experience using Ranked Choice Voting for the NYC Mayoral Primary.

The survey was conducted June 12 – June 22, 2021 among a representative sample of 1,662 Democratic voters in New York City. Interviews were conducted via multiple modes including by telephone and in-person exit polling at 17 early voting locations and at 30 election day voting locations. Interviews were offered in both English and Spanish. 70% of the sample were polled on election day and 30% were polled before the election during the early voting period.

Absentee exit polling is ongoing and will be included in the final results in mid-July.

The in-person early and election day polling locations were randomly selected using a cluster sample design and are a probability sample of voting precincts. Within each polling location an interviewer approached every voter as they exited. The exact number of questionnaires depends on voter turnout and voter cooperation.

The data was weighted by sex, age and race, using the observed characteristics of those who refused to participate or who were missed, combined with the demographics of the known respondents who completed the questionnaire. The data was also weighted by education and to match the first-round results from the mayoral Democratic primary election.

Sample Data and Crosstabs

[Complete crosstabs can be found here.](#)

Demographics of Preliminary Sample for June Exit Polling

Total Respondents	1,662
Gender	
Male	43%
Female	56%
Age	
18-39	28%
40-59	32%
60+	38%

Ethnicity	
White	44%
Black	31%
Hispanic	17%
Asian	9%
Other	6%
Borough	
Bronx	11%
Brooklyn	40%
Manhattan	28%
Queens	29%
Staten Island	4%