

Problems with California's Voting System

California's top two open primary process was supposed to enable more moderate voters to have a bigger say regarding the results of elections. Based on most evidence, that has not been the result. Just three problems with top two are summarized below.

Relatively few registered voters (about 40%) participate in primary elections. They tend to have more polarized politics. So, top two often leaves just two politically polarized candidates for voters to choose from in the general election in November.

Top two preserves California's Democrat and Republican duopoly despite the growing number of independent voters.*

It is especially challenging to reach out to diverse voters in presidential election years, when the primary is in March. That gives candidates just three Winter months to appeal to polarized voters.

* Of about 136 Million votes cast for all offices in California in the 2020 general election, over 95% were cast for Democrats or Republicans. 79% of elective offices are held by Democrats, the rest are Republicans.

California's Politically Homeless

About 30% of voters are independents or registered as small party voters. Another significant portion of voters identify as moderates. But because the two major parties dominate politics so thoroughly and because California's top two primary system often yields candidates with more extreme positions, many voters can be described as politically homeless.

The top two system and the dominance of the two major parties, especially Democrats, also provide significant challenges for independent, small party and moderate candidates who often 1. have limited incentive to run for office and 2. have difficulty promoting more reasonable/moderate positions, making the politically homeless problem even worse.

The politically homeless problem leaves many voters to choose the lesser of two evils in general elections.

California's Broken Voting System



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California's "Top Two" System

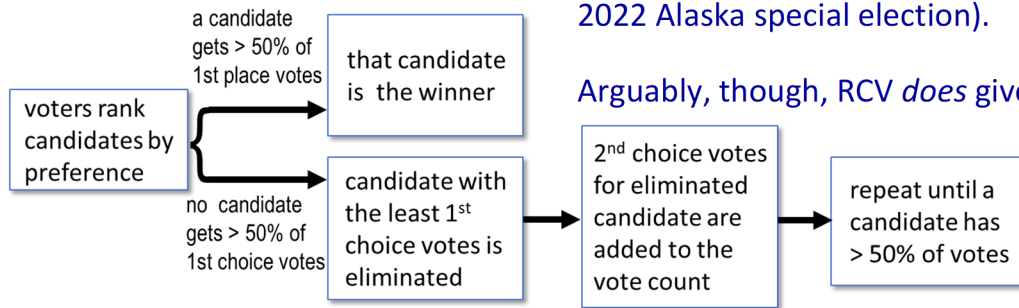
California uses an unusual "top two" voting system with an "open primary".

The term top two refers to primary elections after which the first- and second-place candidates move on to the all-important general election in November when a candidate is actually elected to office.

The term open primary means that all candidates are listed on the same primary ballot, regardless of party affiliation. So, voters select from among all candidates, from all parties including independents.

Ranked Choice Voting

Ranked choice voting (RCV) allows voters to rank candidates, from most to least favorite. (Or they may rank only one or just some candidates.) In 2022, RCV was used in 55 state and local jurisdictions, and it is



used by many private institutions elect their officers.

RCV moderates the influence of parties' extremes by encouraging candidates to appeal to preferences of a broader spectrum of voters than those of the two dominant parties' base.

So RCV enables more voters, including independents and small party voters, to have a more equitable influence on elections regardless of political affiliation.

Opponents contend, with little evidence, that RCV is:

1. too complicated,
2. too time-consuming,
- and 3. error

prone. Some opponents cynically claim that RCV may disenfranchise a majority of voters (e.g., an example cited is the 2022 Alaska special election).

Arguably, though, RCV *does* give

voters a better chance to influence election outcomes than the vote-for-one approach used now. Surely voters can

understand RCV. And modern ballot counting technology can be programmed to count votes in a timely manner and correctly. RCV also eliminates the need for expensive primary elections.

Approval Voting

Approval voting (AV) allows voters to cast votes for one, some or all candidates. The candidate receiving the most total votes wins, even if there is no majority.

As with Ranked Choice Voting, AV encourages candidates to appeal to a wider spectrum of voter preferences, regardless of party affinity, by enabling voters

to express approval for any, some or all candidates on the ballot.

So, AV provides an opportunity for a broader spectrum of voters to influence election results.

AV also eliminates the need for expensive primary elections.

AV is less complicated than RCV and may be easier for voters to understand than the top two system.

California primary and general elections cost about \$150 Million dollars, about \$8.5 per voter.