Impact of Ranked-Choice Voting on Incumbents

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I. Introduction

Ranked-Choice Voting

- Ranked-Choice voting is used in Minneapolis, San Francisco, Oakland, and has been approved for use in the State of Maine.
- Previous research has looked at how various electoral systems influence election results, but not if incumbents are helped.
- We look at whether or not incumbents in Minneapolis’ 2013 elections were afforded any sort of protection due to ranked-choice voting.
- We expect to see incumbents receive a higher percentage of second and third ranked votes on each ballot, if not receiving the first place vote.

II. Hypothesis & Methods

Hypothesis: Incumbents will see greater protection in Ranked Choice elections than traditional elections.

Data is taken from Minneapolis’ 2013 official elections results.

- Used ballot data from each voter in Minneapolis to look for patterns.
- Tallied up the number of first, second, and third ranked votes each candidate received.
- Looked to see where each candidate’s second and third ranked votes went, expecting to see the incumbent candidate receive many of those.

III. Results

- We expected to see evidence of incumbent protection in Minneapolis, but our results show the opposite.
- The only races where multiple rounds were needed, were for open seats.
- Nine incumbents sought reelection, meaning five races were open.
- Three of the nine incumbents lost the election

IV. Conclusions

- Ranked-Choice voting has seen a growth in American usage
- Incumbents have been shown to be at an advantage in all elections.
- We entered the project, expecting to see an additional protection for incumbents in instant-runoff elections, but we actually found the opposite. Three of the nine incumbents seeking reelection lost their races.
- Future research is still needed to look at other ranked-choice elections

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