

## 2019. RCV by the Numbers - St. Louis Park and St. Paul

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### Overview

2019 was the first Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) municipal election in St. Louis Park and the fifth in St. Paul. The following 2019 election outcomes in St. Paul and St. Louis Park are based on election results posted on city and Secretary of State websites. In addition, we commissioned Edison Research to poll first-time RCV voters in St. Louis Park similar to polling conducted in Minneapolis and St. Paul in previous RCV election cycles. St. Louis Park also provides a cast vote record which tells us more about how deeply voters ranked their ballots and who voters' second- and third-choice preferences were.

In both cities, we interviewed voters as they exited the poll to ask about their experience using RCV and recorded their responses on video.

In St. Paul, Wards 1 and 6 went to an RCV runoff as did the city council at-large race in St. Louis Park.

### Summary of Results

***By every measure, Ranked Choice Voting was a big success again in 2019. The numbers tell the story and detail how RCV overwhelmingly met voters' expectations.***

- In St. Louis Park, where Edison Research polled voters on election day, 92% of first-time St. Louis Park voters said they found RCV simple to use.
- 64% of first-time St. Louis Park voters ranked their ballots in the competitive at-large city council race.
- Nearly 60% of voters said they prefer RCV over the old system and more than 70% want to expand it to other local and statewide elections.
- Turnout was up significantly in both St. Louis Park and St. Paul compared to the last similar city council elections.
- In the 3 races that went to a runoff, all the winners received a majority of all ballots cast in the final round.
- The candidate fields and the resulting councils in both cities were the most diverse in history..

### Turnout Was Up with RCV

In St. Louis Park, voter turnout increased by nearly 50% in the November general election, from 4,436 to 6,619 voters citywide, over 2015, the last similar election with the Mayor and both at-large council seats on the ballot. Overall, effective voter participation increased by nearly 10 times by eliminating the low-turnout August primary. In the last citywide municipal primary in 2015 for Mayor just 1,041 voters or 3.5% turnout. Effective voter participation is higher under

RCV because every voter participates in every stage of elimination in a single high turnout General Election as opposed to the current system in which a small sliver of primary voters determine who is on the ballot in November.

In St. Paul, we continued to see November voter turnout increase under RCV. This year, St Paul set a city council cycle voter-turnout record that was 90 percent of the historic turnout seen in the mayoral cycle in 2017! **This year 56,192 St. Paul voters cast their ballots, more than doubling the turnout in the last council election.**

In the two most competitive and most diverse wards in the city, Wards 1 and 6, turnout skyrocketed from the last city council election in 2015. In Ward One, 3,736 more voters showed up and the turnout doubled from 15% to 30%. In ward 6, which had its first open race in over 20 years, 3,672 more voters showed up and the turnout more than doubled from 12% to 29 percent.

We also took note that a controversial ballot question on trash collection was also a factor in turnout this year. But more voters voted for city council than the ballot question in these two wards, indicating that the level of choice and competition fostered by RCV in these races had a positive impact on turnout.

### **Vast Majority of Voters Ranked**

Once again, voters demonstrated a deep and thorough understanding of Ranked Choice Voting with 64% of St. Louis Park voters ranking at least two choices in the at-large city council race.

In this race, Larry Kraft won with 56.5 percent of ballots in the final round, and 51.2 percent of all ballots cast. Kraft appeared on 74 percent of all ballots, Deb Brinkman on 69 percent, and Steve Hallfin on 60 percent.

In St. Paul, we don't have the cast vote record to evaluate the rate of ranking like we do in St. Louis Park, but we do know that in Ward 1 and Ward 6 which went to runoffs, the winning candidates received a majority of all ballots cast demonstrating that the vast majority ranked their ballots and had them transfer if their first choice was eliminated. In Ward 1, which went to one round of elimination, only 8.5 percent of voters did not mark a second choice and had their ballot exhausted. In Ward 6, where there were four rounds of elimination, more than 80 percent of ballots were still active in the final round.

### **RCV Was Easy for Voters**

**In St. Louis Park, 92% of polled voters said they found RCV simple to use**, including 93 percent of people of color and 90 percent of those aged 55 and older. This is remarkably consistent with previous RCV election polls in Minneapolis and St. Paul across different levels of income, age and education, which counters the argument from critics that RCV might be too much for some voters to understand.

### **RCV Is Familiar to Voters**

Voters came to the polls on Election Day ready to rank their vote. **An impressive 83 percent of St. Louis Park voters said they were "very or somewhat familiar with RCV before going to the polls."** This strong finding demonstrates the importance and success of the outreach and education efforts undertaken by city election officials and FairVote Minnesota in partnership with community organizations like the League of Women Voters. While we didn't poll voters in St. Paul in their 5th election using RCV, we know by previous polls and the continued high degree of ranking that voters knew what to do when they came to the polls on Election Day.

## Voters Want to Keep RCV

Voters liked and wish to continue to use RCV. In fact, **79% of all Saint Louis Park voters said they want to continue to use RCV in future municipal elections and 72% would like to see it used for state elections.** This is consistent with polled first-time voters in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

## RCV Fostered More Civil Campaigns

An overwhelming 71 percent of polled St. Louis Park voters said that candidates spent no or very little time criticizing each other. This is, again, highly consistent with previous findings in Minneapolis and St. Paul and other cities across the country.

## Technology Improves Speed of Results

In St. Louis Park, election results for the at-large race that required additional rounds of tabulation were available the next day. The city uses the Minneapolis method of tabulation which uses the exported cast vote record (record of how all voters ranked preferences) to complete results manually with the assistance of spreadsheets. [See results.](#)

In St. Paul, there is not an available cast vote record for spreadsheet tabulation and so a manual hand count of the ballots was required. The count was completed in one day on Friday following the election. [See results.](#)

The process in both cities was transparent, open, and highly accurate.

By 2021, it is anticipated that there will be certified software available to automate results in cities that use Ranked Choice Voting.

## Post Election Media Briefings

Following the election, we invited candidates who won and lost to speak about their experience running under Ranked Choice Voting and the value the system brought to the campaign process.

- [See St. Louis Park media briefing](#)
- [See St. Paul media briefing](#)

*Prepared by FairVote Minnesota Foundation, December 2019*

*Sources: Edison Research, St. Louis Park Cast Vote Record, and the Minnesota Secretary of State Election Results*