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Reducing Legislative Gridlock:
The Case for Rank Choice Voting

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty and the Honors Program
Of the University of San Diego

By
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Political Science
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Abstract

American polarization has become extremely heightened in the recent political climate. As a result, partisan conflicts between Republicans and Democrats have caused a decrease in ideological moderation and a willingness to compromise, particularly within the legislative process. This has contributed to an increase in gridlock, which is the inability to pass legislation in an effective manner that actively contributes to the good of the American public. As bipartisan legislation efforts have decreased, America is in need of a reform that will contribute to reducing legislative gridlock caused by intensified partisan polarization. In this project, I analyze rank choice voting as a potential reform for reducing gridlock. After reading previous literature on the root causes of gridlock and the application of rank choice voting, I synthesize these theories with relevant case studies. I specifically focus on case studies within the United States that have instituted rank choice voting in the recent decades. I examine how the implementation of rank choice voting has contributed to reducing political extremism in campaigns, resulting in more moderate candidates being elected. With more centrist representatives in office, I analyze how this relates to a decrease in legislative gridlock, as polarization is reduced. The ultimate goal of this thesis is to establish a case for the benefits of rank choice voting by showing tangible evidence that rank choice voting has been successful in reducing legislative gridlock.

Reducing Legislative Gridlock: The Case for Rank Choice Voting

Entering into 2021, it has been a year since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. During the early weeks of the global outbreak, America was witnessing a time of uncertainty, fear, and frustration. These feelings were only heightened by the constant loop of disheartening news stories shared by the media. One of the major American news stories at the time was the status of the COVID-19 relief bill in Congress. For weeks, the American public witnessed the inability to compromise between Democrat and Republican legislators. While this extreme arguing occurred back and forth between representatives of the two parties, the health and financial wellbeing of the American people suffered.

While disagreement and compromise have always been prevalent in government, America's political system and climate has drastically evolved over the recent decades, leading to an increase in tension between Republicans and Democrats. According to a 2018 Axios poll, "approximately one-fifth of both Republicans and Democrats now consider the opposing party 'evil'" (Hart, 2018). In addition to this a 2017 *Washington Post* poll found that seven in ten Americans believe that America's political polarization has reached a "dangerously low point," similar to polarization levels during the Vietnam War era (Wagner, 2017). What we are witnessing is how American political parties have grown increasingly divided, becoming motivated by the idea of "us" versus "them" and claiming political victories in elections. As our parties grow increasingly motivated by these factors, effective policy-making suffers. When legislation becomes a second priority to elected officials, the good of the American people suffers. This increase in political competition and partisan polarization has resulted in an increase in legislative gridlock. The American government system has fallen into dysfunction,

and America is in need of a reform that will contribute to reducing legislative gridlock caused by intensified partisan polarization.

This is what the goal of my project seeks to achieve. In analyzing potential reforms to our political institutions, I am specifically investigating the election reform of rank choice voting. By the end of this research paper, I will have defined partisan polarization and identified its causes in modern America; explained how polarization contributes to gridlock; and analyzed how effective rank choice voting can be as a method for reducing both partisan polarization and gridlock. I hope my project eventually evolves into further research and study, as it is imperative for America to address these problems to ensure the future stability of the country.

Literature Review

Heightened Partisan Polarization

While the American political system has always maintained the dominance of two political parties, the deep partisan divide has not always existed. American history shows that political parties are integral, and beneficial, for democracy. However, parties fail to be effective for government when they are controlled by heightened social polarization. Many political theorists have sought to describe the reasons for heightened political partisanship, seeking to explain several factors that have contributed to increased partisanship in recent years.

The first cause is due to the “winner-take-all” mentality that American elections have inadvertently created. Politics and elections have transitioned to be primarily motivated by the idea of winners and losers, “us” versus “them,” which creates negative and hostile feelings for those that we perceive as “the other side.” This mentality is then further heightened by the radicalization of social polarization. Social polarization is defined as “prejudice, anger, and emotional volatility that increases political disagreements” (Mason, 2018.) Driven by these

negative feelings and thoughts, American partisans are more likely to fight with those they disagree with, those they view as the opposing side. When this occurs, politics no longer becomes simple disagreements about policy outcomes, but instead becomes refusing to even find common ground or similarities between the two sides or parties.

Another reason for heightened polarization is based on the “cross-cutting” of social groups. Political parties tend to sort individuals into groups, however this is not done in isolation as there are many other social groups that overlap into party alignments. These social groups can be religious, racial, or socioeconomic. In the recent decades, there has been an increase in highly-aligned identities within the Democrat and Republican parties. This means that individuals who belong to one party will also belong to additional social groups composed of fellow party members. Because of this, individuals are less likely to interact with those belonging to different social groups, causing the biases and divide in partisan politics. It is important to note that the problem is not in the sorting itself, as Republicans and Democrats have always been sorted by social groups. The major issue now arises when partisan identities are merging with homogeneous social group identities, causing a decrease in exposure to other individuals and groups (Mason, 2018). Lack of exposure to diverse groups or individuals then increases intolerance and negative attitudes towards those who are perceived to be different.

The last cause of increased polarization is due to the wide-spread communication of radical political viewpoints. Studies have found that while only 5-15% of the American public hold such extremist views, their views create a ripple effect as they are communicated to millions of other Americans (Kalmoe, 2021). This communication has increased with the use of the Internet and social media, providing accessible platforms for groups to share radical beliefs. These extremist views include viewing partisan differences as opponents, the desire to win at all

costs, and considering those who disagree to be a national threat to the direction of politics. In recent political campaigns and elections, politicians have taken on these attitudes and behaviors, which increases further polarization from the electorate. Findings have shown that prominent leaders and politicians who use inflammatory rhetoric are increasing the radical partisanship among the public (Kalmoe, 2021). This creates a polarized cycle, as now both the public and political officials are partaking in a heightened polarized attitude.

All of these reasons have contributed to fueling the flames of heightened partisan polarization in the recent decades of the American government. As political parties have become so altered and divided, they gradually undermine the effectiveness of a democratic government. Partisanship grows irresponsible “when it sends partisans into action for the wrong reasons. Activism is almost always a good thing, particularly when we have so often worried about an apathetic electorate. But if the electorate is moved to action by a desire for victory that exceeds their desire for the greater good, the action is no longer, as regards the general electorate, responsible” (Mason, 2018). Because of heightened polarization within the government, policy takes a backseat to winning electoral political competition.

Legislative Gridlock

With the rise of polarization in political parties, the American government is faced with the issue of legislative gridlock. While the Founding Fathers believed gridlock to be a crucial component of a democratic government, they intended such conflicts to occur in the system of checks and balances between the three branches of government (Drutman, 2020). In the recent decades, American politics has greatly shifted away from what the Framers originally intended; gridlock is becoming more frequent, specifically within the legislative branch. Partisan gridlock has become the new norm.

Prominent political scientist, Sarah Binder, has deeply explored the relation between polarization and legislative gridlock. In explaining her findings, it seems as though Electoral factors play a significant role in gridlock (Binder, 2003). Binder explains that electoral districts are growing more homogeneous due to the sorting of social and political identities, as identified in the previous section. When districts are controlled by a single, homogeneous ideology, the electorate is more likely to vote for candidates who hold similar ideologies. As a result, these electing representatives enter into office and tend to possess homogeneous, ideologically extreme viewpoints. With an increase in polarization, there is a decrease in ideological moderation that results in frequent legislative gridlock.

Another electoral reason that explains the increase in gridlock is due to the relationship between representatives and their constituents. Partisan politics increases the desire for political victories, thus altering the focus of good governance. Legislators' should be focusing their attention and capacity to be responsive to their active constituents, yet legislators are growing more concerned with election outcomes. This affects the incentive to compromise on specific issues, as representatives "would rather have issues to use in the upcoming elections than accomplishments to point to" (Dodd, 2001). With pointed policy and ideological agendas, legislators have limited and decreasing incentive to craft moderate policy solutions and compromises to the public's problems (Binder, 2003).

After identifying the Electoral causes of gridlock, Binder expands her findings and examines institutional sources as causes of gridlock. Deadlock is significantly higher under divided party control than under unified control (Binder, 2003). In addition to this, gridlock is dependent on policy differences between the House of Representatives and the Senate. Legislative agreement is more difficult to achieve when policy differences between the chambers

grow more frequent (Binder, 2003). The House of Representatives is just as likely as the Senate to be a source of disagreement, resulting in gridlock, yet legislative committees have no effect on gridlock (Binder, 1999). Gridlock is also more likely to occur on bicameralism issues focused on domestic legislation rather than on foreign affairs. This is due to the dividing gap between parties, each organized and driven by their contrasting ideas for the future direction of America (Drutman, 2020).

Rank-Choice Voting

In order to mitigate the effects of polarization on gridlock, political scientists and theorists have been advocating for reforms that will allow America to restore its division and dysfunction. One of these proposed reforms is by instituting the electoral process of rank-choice voting (RCV). The process of rank-choice voting allows for voters to indicate their candidate preferences by ranking their choices on their ballot. Since voters have a choice, their top preference could either be the lowest or highest vote-getter. If the top choice has the lowest number of votes after the first round of vote counting, then that candidate gets removed, but the number two or number three choices then get counted (Drutman, 2020). This process continues until one candidate wins a majority support of the vote.

This system is not a new, revolutionary notion, as there are several countries that have previously adopted this system. Ireland uses rank-choice voting, combined with multi-representative districts. Australia has also been using this system for over one hundred years. This system has also recently been implemented within the United States, although on a smaller scale; the state of Maine instituted rank-choice voting in 2018, and Alaska will use it starting in 2022. Rank-choice voting is also used in several municipalities across the United States.

In examining governments that utilize rank-choice voting, research has shown that this voting system has led to multiple positive effects on the efficiency of government. First, rank-choice voting breaks down the negative effects of hyper-polarization. Rank-choice voting promotes better representation for diverse political preferences and viewpoints, allowing voters the opportunity to pick from a wider range of diverse candidates. Voters have the option to vote for candidates who come from different backgrounds or ideologies without worrying about spoiling an election or voting along partisan lines (Oestericher, 2021). By having more diverse candidates, there is a greater chance that more moderate or minority candidates can be elected.

Another benefit to rank-choice voting is that it reduces the negative aspects of campaigning and political behavior from candidates. Because candidates are competing for first, second, or possibly third choice, they do not have time to waste by attacking other candidates or participating in hateful rhetoric. They must be actively reaching out to voters, both supporters and opponents, in order to win a majority of votes (Drutman, 2021). In order to be successful in rank-choice voting, studies argue that candidates need to persuade the electorate that they are the best option; this cannot be done if a candidate only focuses on using negative rhetoric or insults to attack the other candidates (Drutman, 2021). This can have a positive impact on reducing the angry, hyper-polarized nature of politicians and voters that results from the two-party, winner-takes-all system.

Previous research also suggests that rank-choice voting can have an impact on voting behavior. A study was conducted to explore these effects during the 2012 French presidential election. Researchers gave eligible voters the opportunity to vote in two different manners, one by ranking their candidate preferences, a process similar to rank-choice voting, and by a single-round plurality vote. The results found that voting behavior stayed mostly consistent

under each voting method; however, there still was a sizable minority that altered their voting preferences. The study concluded that 11-14% of voters (out of 8,044) voted differently, allowing the “less-popular candidates to obtain slightly more first choices under AV [alternative voting] compared to the two rounds election” (Van der Straeten, 2013). In the alternate voting system of ranking preferences, smaller candidates from minority parties received an increase in votes, as voters felt there was a greater chance for political victory compared to a single-round election. The study also discovered “that 17% of the voters do not vote for their preferred candidate in the one-round election, and this dropped to 12% in the alternative vote method” (Van der Straeten, 2013). This signifies that many voters feel compelled to vote for the top two candidates under a single-round because that is the majority opinion. Voters pick one of the top two candidates despite not being their preferred choice because they feel voting for minority candidates will have no significant impact. Under the alternative voting method of ranking, voters felt an increase in political efficacy and felt that they had a better choice, thus increasing the votes for smaller candidates. While there was a sizable portion of voters who altered their voting preferences under an alternative voting method, this study was only done for one election. It is possible that this trend would continue over the course of multiple years or election cycles.

The last potential effect of rank-choice voting is its consequences on political parties themselves. Analyzing these effects in Ireland, a country that has used a single-transferable voting system since 1921, there is evidence that rank-choice voting will impact political party behaviors. One of the studied effects is that rank-choice voting will place a greater emphasis on candidates competing against both opposing parties and running mates within their same party (Copeland, 2010). Because rank-choice voting allows voters to pick candidates from any political party, including multiple candidates running from the same party, candidates are forced

to compete internally and externally. An analysis of Ireland's elections shows that "larger parties tend to suffer more intra-party defeats during elections than smaller parties" (Copeland, 2010). This means that larger party candidates might suffer a political loss at the expense of another candidate within that same party. This study shows that dominating political parties may experience more losses, just not at the hands of a minority or underrepresented party. There is a possibility that elections under rank-choice voting will force dominating political parties to continue pushing for candidates that have a better chance at being elected. This does diminish the effect that rank-choice voting can have on underrepresented parties. However, there is a benefit to smaller parties as they have an insignificant threat of having candidates of the same party, which could allow candidates to devote more time highlighting their platforms than fighting with opposing party candidates.

Having been using rank-choice voting for almost a century, Australia has been the subject of many political studies, trying to analyze the effects that this voting system has had on their government and political atmosphere. Rank-choice voting has significantly worked to solve the country's problem of political extremism, in which it reduces the number of candidates that belong to partisan ideology on the far right or the far left. It bolsters the number of moderate candidates within the government (Kambhampaty, 2019). During the campaign process, Australian politicians and candidates understand the importance of maximizing their chances of winning by appealing to a broad range of voters. This cannot be accomplished if candidates are solely focused on attacking other candidates or using negative rhetoric towards their opponents. In addition to this, Australian politicians strive to take moderate positions, as this appeals to a wider audience, rather than those who identify with extremist sides (Reilly, 2018). The result of this is that Australia's politics tend to stay in the center, without much room for heightened

polarization. This is a significant difference compared to American politics, in which the moderate and centrist politicians tend to be in the minority group within the government's political elites.

While there are many arguments for the effectiveness and impact of rank-choice voting, the purpose of this research project is to analyze rank-choice voting in relation to gridlock. When researching the effects of rank-choice voting, it seemed as though contemporary scholarly literature has yet to be heavily developed on the relation to gridlock, specifically within the United States. There is an argument to be made that less polarization can potentially lead to less legislative gridlock. This is an area of rank-choice voting that needs to be explored deeper in order to provide an answer, which this research project aims to do.

Methodology

In order to substantiate these claims, it is necessary to test if instituting rank-choice voting will have a positive impact on reducing legislative gridlock. I hypothesize that instituting rank-choice voting will produce more moderate and cooperative representatives, as opposed to those who fall on extreme sides of ideologies. With more centrist representatives elected to a government, legislative gridlock will be reduced, as partisan polarization is decreased. Having two dependent variables, candidate moderation and gridlock, means that both will need to be defined for testing.

Because I am specifically focused on the impact of rank-choice voting within the United States, I have selected the municipal government of Santa Fe, New Mexico to be my case study to analyze the effects of rank-choice voting. I have chosen Santa Fe as my case study due to its recent implementation of rank-choice voting. In 2008, Santa Fe voters adopted a charter

amendment to use rank choice voting; the amendment passed with 65% in favor of the change. However, rank choice voting was not officially implemented until ten years later.

On March 6, 2018, the city of Santa Fe held its first election using rank-choice voting. Rank-choice voting was used in the mayoral and city council races, and this election saw a record turnout in voting (Carrillo, 2018). The election resulted in a new mayoral administration and three new councilors. The city is governed by a mayor-council system, and the city is divided into 4 electoral districts; each district is represented by two councilors. The mayor is elected to a term for four years, with no limits on the number of terms. Councilors are elected to four-year terms, but the terms of the office of the two councilors from each district shall be staggered so that only one councilor is elected from each district at every regular municipal election. My dependent variables will be analyzed by the intervention of rank-choice voting, which is my independent variable. This study will then be divided into two periods for Santa Fe: 2016-2017 and 2018-2019. Because this study was conducted in early 2021, I am limited to a time constraint for the cycles of the city council. The next election cycle to use rank choice voting did not occur until March of 2020, thus making the next term for city council incomplete at the time of study. Because Santa Fe has such a short history with rank-choice voting, I am only able to study two municipal and legislative cycles in observing the impacts of rank-choice voting.

Dependent Variable #1: Candidate Moderation

The city of Santa Fe maintains that all city council positions are to be nonpartisan on the ballot. Although these positions are labeled as nonpartisan, it is important to recognize that many candidates will still hold specific ideologies or beliefs that can influence their decisions and platforms in governance. It is also important to note that Santa Fe is an overwhelmingly

Democratic city, located in a Democratic state. Many elected officials and candidates on ballots tend to possess more liberal ideologies. Taking this inherent political climate into consideration, I acknowledge that Santa Fe's city council may already face less gridlock compared to locations that experience a divided government. However, disagreement and conflict can still arise in a unified government due to a lack of moderation or willingness to work with others. Because of this, I have chosen to analyze how candidates' ideologies align with being more centrist or moderate, despite all candidates holding Democratic beliefs.

I decided to measure moderation by going through the local newspaper, *The Albuquerque Journal*, to code for language that discusses or highlights the willingness or ability to work with others. I analyze every single candidate article and interviews, looking for terms that signal a candidate's willingness to cooperate and work with others in order to determine moderation. For example, searching for words such as "commitment," "collaborate," "unite," "respect," and "maintain relationships" give the impression that candidates who use these words are actively striving toward cooperation, a characteristic of a moderate platform. I make no comment or judgement on the quality of the candidates themselves or their political platforms. This coding is simply a way to measure how moderate of a stance these candidates took due to the implementation of rank-choice voting. From these impressions, I count every mention of cooperation into a moderation tally for each candidate.

In the 2016 municipal election under plurality voting, there was no mayoral race, as this race is held every four years. As for the city council seats, District 1 was the only race to have more than one candidate running. There were four candidates, and even with plurality voting, one candidate earned victory with 65% of the votes. Districts 2, 3, and 4 all only had one individual listed on the ballot. These candidates can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1: 2016 Santa Fe Municipal Election

Candidate	District
Peter Ives	2
Chris Rivera	3
Mike Harris	4

Comparing 2016 to 2018 after the intervention of rank-choice voting, there was a noticeable increase in the number of candidates running in each district. For the 2018 mayoral race, there were five candidates. In District 1, there were two candidates. District 2 had three candidates, and District 3 only had one candidate. Lastly, District 4 had three candidates. My data sets only include candidate moderation tallies for those races in which there was more than one candidate running; I did not include district races that had a single name on the ballot.

Dependent Variable #2: Legislative Gridlock

In determining a mechanism to measure legislative gridlock, it is important to understand how previous political scientists have measured gridlock. One of these formulas comes from finding a single, overall percentage. Previous political theorists have identified gridlock as the overall number of legislative issues that fail to pass over the total number of possible bills (Bowling, 2001). An important distinction for this formula is that it encompasses the inclusion of smaller, more minor legislative bills, ones that may not truly represent serious issues addressed by the government.

Another mechanism can be modeled after Sarah Binder's work in "The Dynamics of Legislative Gridlock." Her measurement of gridlock is defined by going through *The New York Times* editorials, coding for language that discussed Congress. She then takes the number of legislative issues that failed into a percentage, with the total number of issues discussed in the

editorials as the denominator. In coding through *The New York Times* editorials, Binder specifically highlights the more significant or unique issues that have been mentioned four or more times, rather than taking the simple average amount.

Due to the time restraints surrounding this research project, I have decided to use the overall gridlock formula in order to measure changes in gridlock for Santa Fe. I label this measurement as “Overall Legislative Gridlock.” My numerator is defined on the number of bills that failed to pass before the Santa Fe City Council due to lack of majority vote or a tied vote. My denominator will be based on the total number of proposed legislation discussed before the members of the city council. I take this number by analyzing the city council minutes for every meeting in the four-year time period. Looking at the meeting minutes, I count every legislation issue placed before the city council, regardless of the issue’s subject matter. I assume that any proposed legislation discussed during the city council meeting is significant to addressing the city and public’s needs. In my analysis, I strictly focus on the measure of gridlock; I do not discuss the quality of the legislation or the public’s opinions on the bill.

Data Analysis

To evaluate my hypothesis, I measure candidate moderation and legislative gridlock of the Santa Fe City Council from 2016-2017 and 2018-2019. I then assess the impact that the intervention of rank choice voting had on candidate moderation and legislative gridlock.

Dependent Variable #1: Candidate Moderation

Because each district race is unique, I am going to present a detailed breakdown of each race, with five races in total for both the 2016 and 2018 municipal elections. For each race, I present a table containing the list of candidates and their candidate moderation tally. I follow up my findings with a discussion of the election results and present contextual evidence for each

candidate's moderation tally. After analyzing each race individually, I discuss my findings as a whole and how it directly relates to my hypothesis.

Table 2: Tally of Candidate Moderation in 2016, Plurality Voting

City Council District 1 Candidates	Moderation Tally
Marie Campos	0
Frank Montano	1
Kate Kennedy	0
Renee Villarreal*	5

*Indicates winner of municipal election

In 2016, the Santa Fe City Council election was conducted under plurality voting, and there was only one city council seat that had more than one candidate. For District 1, there were 4 candidates: Marie Campos, Frank Montano, Kate Kennedy, and Renee Villarreal. Renee Villarreal won the election with 65% of the vote. Running for office for the first time, Villarreal repeatedly described her personality as being someone who, although a registered Democrat, would bring a “balanced, thoughtful approach” to the council if elected (Last, 2016). Villarreal considered herself to be a “bridge builder, a strong communicator, and someone who can bring people together to solve problems.” Compared to the other candidates, Villarreal stressed a willingness to work with others the most, making 5 comments overall in the local press (Last, 2016). This tally comparison is shown in Table 2. Despite the election being conducted with plurality voting, Villarreal made the largest effort to show a willingness to find compromise, which could have contributed to her victory.

Table 3: Tally of Candidate Moderation in 2018, Rank-Choice Voting

Mayoral Candidates	Moderation Tally
Peter Ives	3
Alan Webber*	1
Kate Noble	3
Joseph Maestas	1
Ronald Trujillo	1

*Indicates winner of municipal election

After rank choice voting was established for the 2018 Santa Fe City Council elections, there were four seats that were on the ballot, including the seat for Santa Fe City Mayor. For the mayoral race, there were five candidates, and Alan Webber won 66% of the vote after four rounds of voting. In analyzing Webber’s campaign statements, he focused on stressing his successful past in politics and his personal business endeavors, rather than commenting on his ability to work with others. He made no comment about his opponents, other than acknowledging that he is willing to learn from others about aspects of the city that he had not been previously familiar with (Last, 2018). Despite making the least number of comments on working with others, Webber won the race, as seen in Table 3. This could be explained due to his large name recognition, as he ran for the Democratic Party nomination for governor of New Mexico in 2014. His electoral victory could also have been influenced by possessing the largest campaign financial backing, as Webber amounted \$209,009 in contributions (Last, 2018).

Another effect that rank choice voting had on the 2018 mayoral race was the overall perception of the election by the Santa Fe public. A report in the *Albuquerque Journal* claimed that “the candidates agreed with each other more than they disagreed” in hopes to better appeal to voters (Carrillo, 2018). *Albuquerque Journal* also wrote, “If there’s one thing that has stood out about this year’s race, it’s been civility... Nary a negative word has been spoken by any

candidate about another” (Last, 2018). One of the researched effects of rank choice voting is that it reduces the negative effects of campaigning in elections. This seems to be the case for the first rank choice voting election in Santa Fe. In addition to this, all of the candidates seemed to agree on the most pressing issues facing the city. These included affordable housing, boosting the city’s economy, fixing the city’s budget deficit, and improving water supply and sanitation. While each candidate had differing opinions on how to address these issues, it was encouraging to voters that all candidates understood the importance of fixing such pressing issues.

Table 4: Tally of Candidate Moderation in 2018, Rank-Choice Voting

City Council District 1 Candidates	Moderation Tally
Signe Lindell*	4
Marie Campos	0

*Indicates winner of municipal election

For the City Council District 1 race, there were two candidates in the running: Signe Lindell and Marie Campos. As the incumbent, Lindell won the election in a single round with 68% of the votes. In her campaign statements, Lindell discussed her desire to finish ongoing initiatives from her first term and to continue establishing relationships with fellow councilors and city employees. She was endorsed by her fellow council members who were not up for reelection in 2018. Lindell commented that “it’s all about relationships, this tells me that they like working with me” (Bennett, 2018). Lindell’s campaign approach was very different from her opponent, Marie Campos. This race was Campos’s fourth time running for a city council position. She made no comments about her opponent or her willingness to work with others to get issues resolved. Lindell and Campos’s candidate moderation tally can be seen in Table 4.

Table 5: Tally of Candidate Moderation in 2018, Rank-Choice Voting

City Council District 2 Candidates	Moderation Tally
Nate Downey	0
Carol Romero-Wirth*	3
Joe Arellano	2

*Indicates winner of municipal election

Similar to District 1, there was only one round of voting, consisting of three candidates on the ballot. Carol Romero-Wirth won with 52% of the votes. In her candidate statements, Romero-Worth highlighted her background as a lawyer and education in public policy; she also made several comments about her previous accomplishments, crediting her success to her willingness to work with others (Albuquerque Journal, 2018). Her opponents, Nate Downey and Joe Arellano, focused on their personal experiences and success in local newspaper interviews. No candidate talked poorly about another candidate in this race, a benefit to rank choice voting as mentioned before. Their tally for candidate moderation can be seen above in Table 5.

Table 6: Tally of Candidate Moderation in 2018, Rank-Choice Voting

City Council District 4 Candidates	Moderation Tally
JoAnne Vigil Coppler*	2
Eric Holmes	1
Greg Scargall	0

*Indicates winner of municipal election

The last city council race was for District 4. The race was composed of three candidates: JoAnne Vigil Coppler, Eric Holmes, and Greg Scargall. Coppler won 56% of the votes after two rounds of voting. Compared to her opponents, Coppler had the highest number of moderation statements, seen in Table 5. With her background in politics and the state judiciary offices,

Coppler pointed to her “proven track record of professionalism, ability and integrity” for her success in working on city projects with other individuals (Carrillo, 2018). Eric Holmes made one mention to the local press of his teamwork abilities, claiming “I believe I have the tools to build great teams and work with others to get the job done” (Bennett, 2018). Greg Scargall, who never mentioned his ability to work with others, focused his campaign on the lack of leadership on the city council. Scargall was also the only candidate in the 2018 city council elections to not have registered with any major political party. Although this could be perceived as a benefit under rank choice voting, Scargall made no mention of this in his candidate profiles.

It seems as though the intervention of rank choice voting in Santa Fe resulted in a positive impact on the overall tone and political atmosphere in the 2018 municipal election. This relates to previous scholarly literature that has claimed rank choice voting has the potential to reduce the negative aspects of campaigns and candidate behaviors. In the Santa Fe municipal election, the local newspapers reported that the tone of the election was extremely civil and that the candidates spoke positively about one another.

For my research question, my hypothesis predicted that rank choice voting would produce more moderate, centrist candidates, thus leading to a reduction in representatives who hold extremist ideologies or viewpoints. However, because Santa Fe’s municipal elections are designated as non-partisan, it was difficult to determine if candidates held extremist viewpoints. In addition to this, all candidates that ran in the election identify with the Democratic Party, as Santa Fe is a predominantly Democratic city. To account for these factors, I had analyzed the candidates’ positions on compromise and working with others. In my findings, I found that three of the four victorious candidates under rank choice voting for each seat had the highest indication of a willingness to work with others in order to get action done. The outlier

candidate was Alan Webber in the mayoral race; however, this could be explained due to his large name recognition and financial backing in his campaign.

Dependent Variable #2: Legislative Gridlock

The second part of my hypothesis stated that with the election of more centrist representatives, legislative gridlock will be reduced, as partisan polarization decreases. To study this effect of rank choice voting, I calculated the amount of gridlock for two legislative cycles of Santa Fe’s city council. The first cycle was after the 2016 municipal election, in which the city used plurality voting to elect its members. From 2016 through 2017, the Santa Fe City Council faced 175 proposed bills, based on their city council minutes from those two years. Out of those 175 bills, 10 bills failed to become law due to disagreements and divide between city council members. This resulted in 5.71% legislative gridlock for the city council elected under plurality voting, as seen in Table 7.

Table 7: Overall Legislative Gridlock, 2016-2017

Bills Considered	Bills Failed
175	10

5.71% Gridlock

Comparing these findings to the consecutive legislative cycle, there was a sizable decrease in legislative gridlock after the implementation of rank choice voting. After the 2018 municipal election, the city council faced new leadership and new members, all who campaigned on the promise of working with others and to compromise in order to address the city’s most pressing issues. From 2018 through 2019, the city council faced more proposed legislation than the council had in the two years prior. The city council faced 184 proposed bills and only 1 bill failed to pass. This calculated to about 0.54% legislative gridlock for the city council elected by

rank choice voting, seen in Table 8. This estimates a 90% decrease in legislative gridlock from the legislative cycle prior.

Table 8: Overall Legislative Gridlock, 2018-2019

Bills Considered	Bills Failed
184	1

0.54% Gridlock

Conclusion

The analysis in this paper provides an introductory explanation into the relationship of rank-choice voting on candidate moderation and legislative gridlock. The implementation of rank-choice voting in Santa Fe led to important changes in the city's overall election and legislative cycles. Although rank-choice voting resulted in an increase in candidate cooperation and a decrease in gridlock, the direct correlation could be explained by additional factors that were not expressed in this paper. Other factors that could have contributed to these findings include constraints on the city budget, degree of public demand for specific issues, or the salience of issues placed before the city council. The results in this paper suggest a significant start, and it would be necessary to explore these findings in further research.

It is possible that the evidence found in this paper could be replicated if a similar study was conducted in another case study utilizing rank-choice voting. Rank-choice voting is gradually being implemented in other areas across the United States, leaving much room for expansion on this topic. Due to the temporal nature of this research project, rank-choice voting had only recently been utilized in many cases beginning in 2018. As it is 2021 at the time of this project's completion, there is a limit to the time periods in studying the effects of rank-choice voting. It is possible that this study could be conducted in the future years to develop a larger

time period in order to analyze long-term effects of rank-choice voting in America. It would be beneficial to conduct further research on the states of Alaska and Maine, as they are to institute rank-choice voting on a statewide scale. As rank-choice continues to grow and evolve in America, political research will be better equipped to study the promising relation this electoral change can have on partisan polarization and legislative gridlock.

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