Voter Participation with Ranked Choice Voting in the United States

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RCV Might Increase Participation

- Return of "deliberative" democrats.
- Reduce "wasted vote" concerns
- More candidates = more mobilization

RCV Might Reduce Participation

- Americans are used to plurality voting.
- RCV is more cognitively demanding.

[redacted] | CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS | NOVEMBER 5, 2013

OFFICIAL BALLOT
CITY GENERAL ELECTION BALLOT

Judge _____ Judge _____

RANKED CHOICE VOTING INSTRUCTIONS TO THE VOTERS
Rank up to 3 different candidates for each office.
Vote from left to right in each office in order of your preference.
Completely fill in the oval next to your choice, like this: ● CANDIDATE NAME

CITY OFFICES

MAYOR — Rank your first, second and third choice candidates in the columns below. One to be elected.

1 1st Choice Select One	2 2nd Choice, if any Must be DIFFERENT from your 1st choice. Select One	3 3rd Choice, if any Must be DIFFERENT from your 1st and 2nd choices. Select One
○ STEPHANIE WOODRUFF Democratic-Farmer-Labor	○ STEPHANIE WOODRUFF Democratic-Farmer-Labor	○ STEPHANIE WOODRUFF Democratic-Farmer-Labor
○ JOHN LESLIE HARTWIG Independent	○ JOHN LESLIE HARTWIG Independent	○ JOHN LESLIE HARTWIG Independent
○ DAN COHEN Jobs Downtown Casino	○ DAN COHEN Jobs Downtown Casino	○ DAN COHEN Jobs Downtown Casino
○ BOB "AGAIN" CARNEY JR Demand Transit Revolution	○ BOB "AGAIN" CARNEY JR Demand Transit Revolution	○ BOB "AGAIN" CARNEY JR Demand Transit Revolution
○ JAMES EVERETT Green Party	○ JAMES EVERETT Green Party	○ JAMES EVERETT Green Party
○ DON SAMUELS Democratic-Farmer-Labor	○ DON SAMUELS Democratic-Farmer-Labor	○ DON SAMUELS Democratic-Farmer-Labor
○ BETSY HODGES Democratic-Farmer-Labor	○ BETSY HODGES Democratic-Farmer-Labor	○ BETSY HODGES Democratic-Farmer-Labor
○ RAHN V. WORKCUFF Independence Party	○ RAHN V. WORKCUFF Independence Party	○ RAHN V. WORKCUFF Independence Party
○ BOB FINE Democratic-Farmer-Labor	○ BOB FINE Democratic-Farmer-Labor	○ BOB FINE Democratic-Farmer-Labor
○ MARK V ANDERSON	○ MARK V ANDERSON	○ MARK V ANDERSON

Participation in RCV and Plurality Elections

Research Design

Match RCV cities to similar cities with plurality elections on the same date.

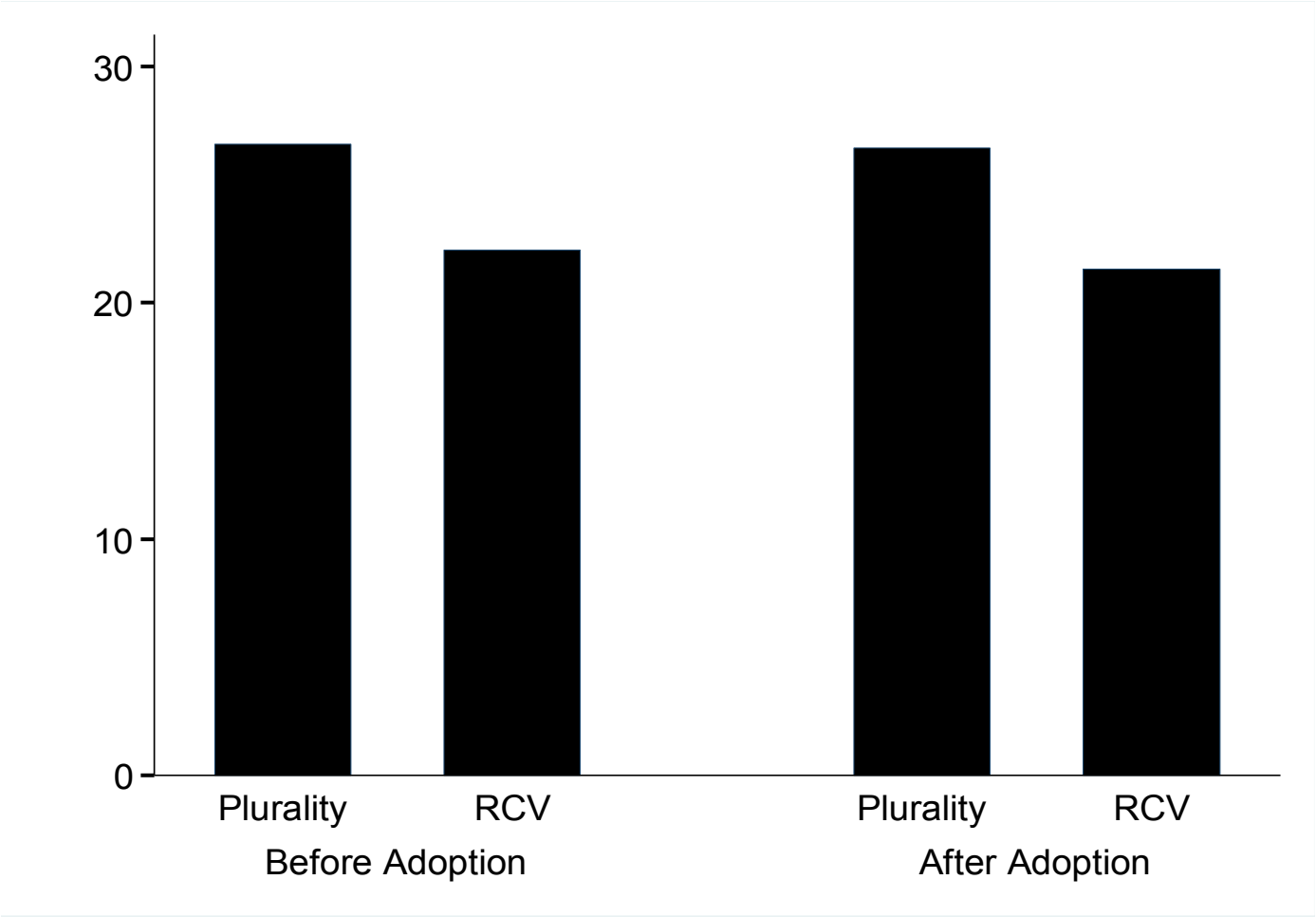
RCV City	Matched Plurality Cities	Elections before RCV	Elections after RCV
Minneapolis, MN	Boston, MA Cincinnati, OH Tulsa, OK Seattle, WA	2005	2009, 2013
St. Paul, MN	Cedar Rapids, IA Des Moines, IA Madison, WI Spokane, WA	2009	2013
Cambridge, MA	Ann Arbor, MI Lowell, MA Stamford, CT Worcester, MA	----	2013

Participation in RCV and Plurality Elections

Statistical Model

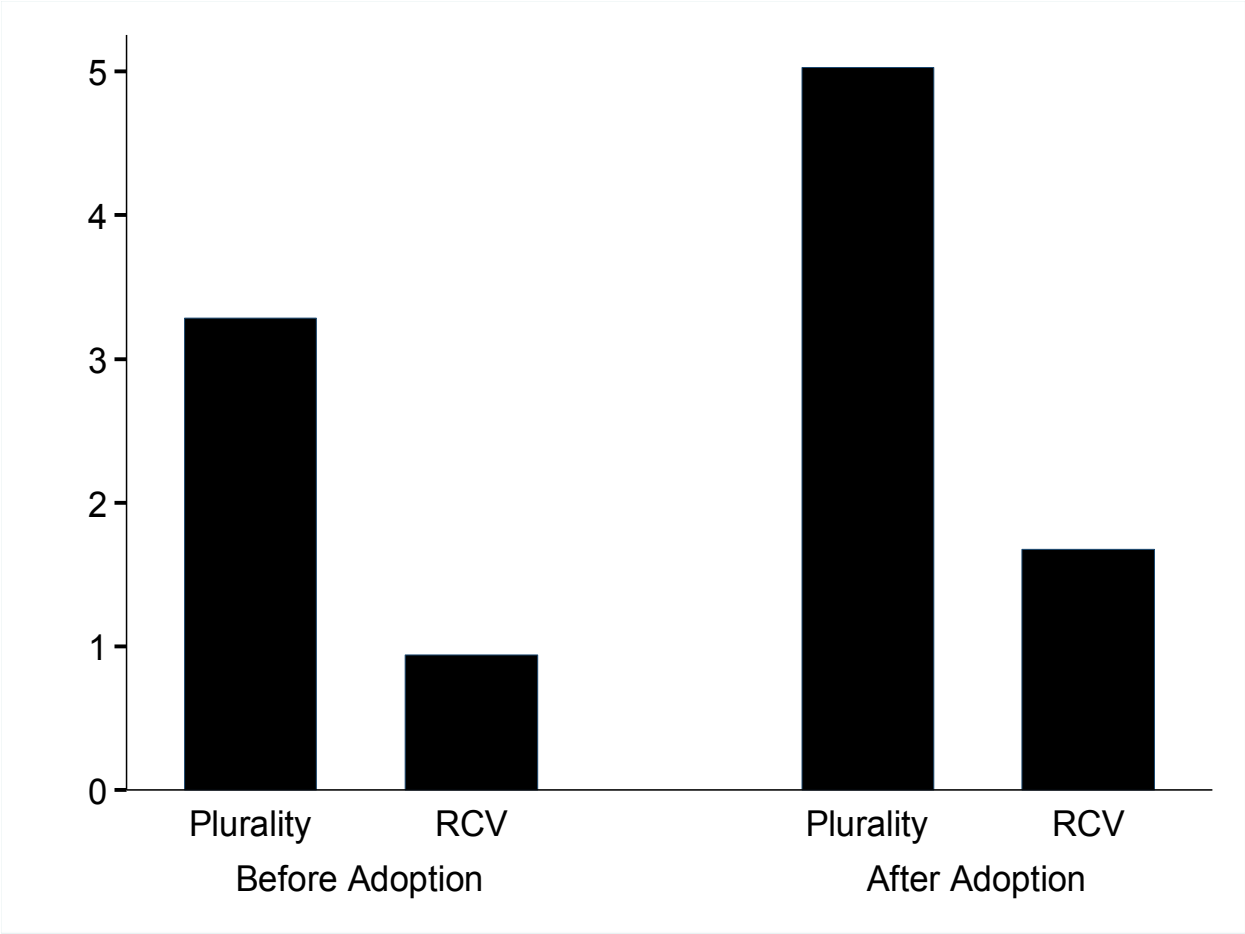
- Difference-in-difference (DID) method:
- $Y = \beta\downarrow 0 + \beta\downarrow 1\ RCV + \beta\downarrow 2\ After + \beta\downarrow 3\ RCV * After + \theta X$
- $\beta\downarrow 3$ *estimates the RCV treatment effect.*
- Measures of participation:
  - Turnout
  - Residual votes
  - Spoiled ballots

Mean Turnout in RCV and Plurality Elections



Participation in RCV and Plurality Elections

Mean Residual Vote Rate for Top Contest in RCV and Plurality Cities

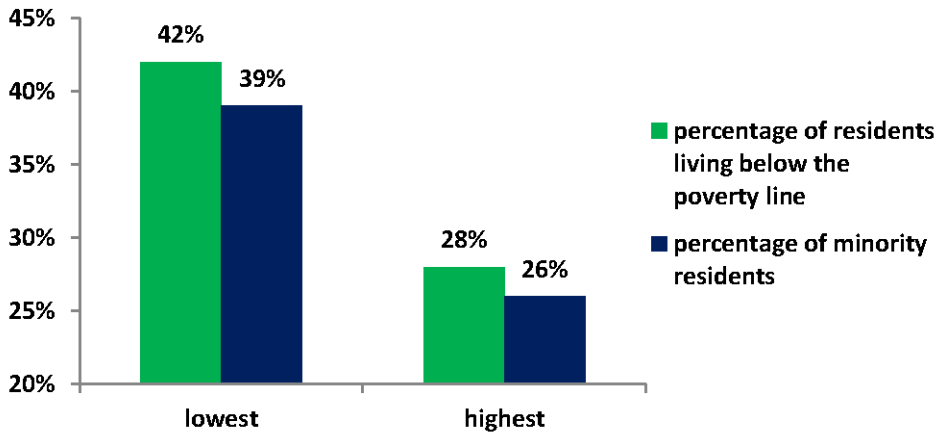


Participation in RCV and Plurality Elections

The Minneapolis Case: 2013

- In 2013, turnout was higher in high income and white majority wards (Jacobs and Miller 2014).
- Is this bad?

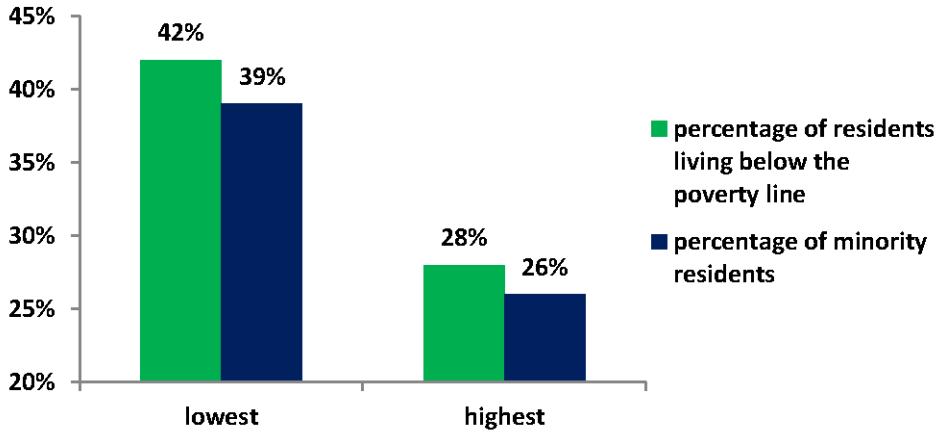
Figure 3. Turnout Percentage, 2013 Minneapolis Election



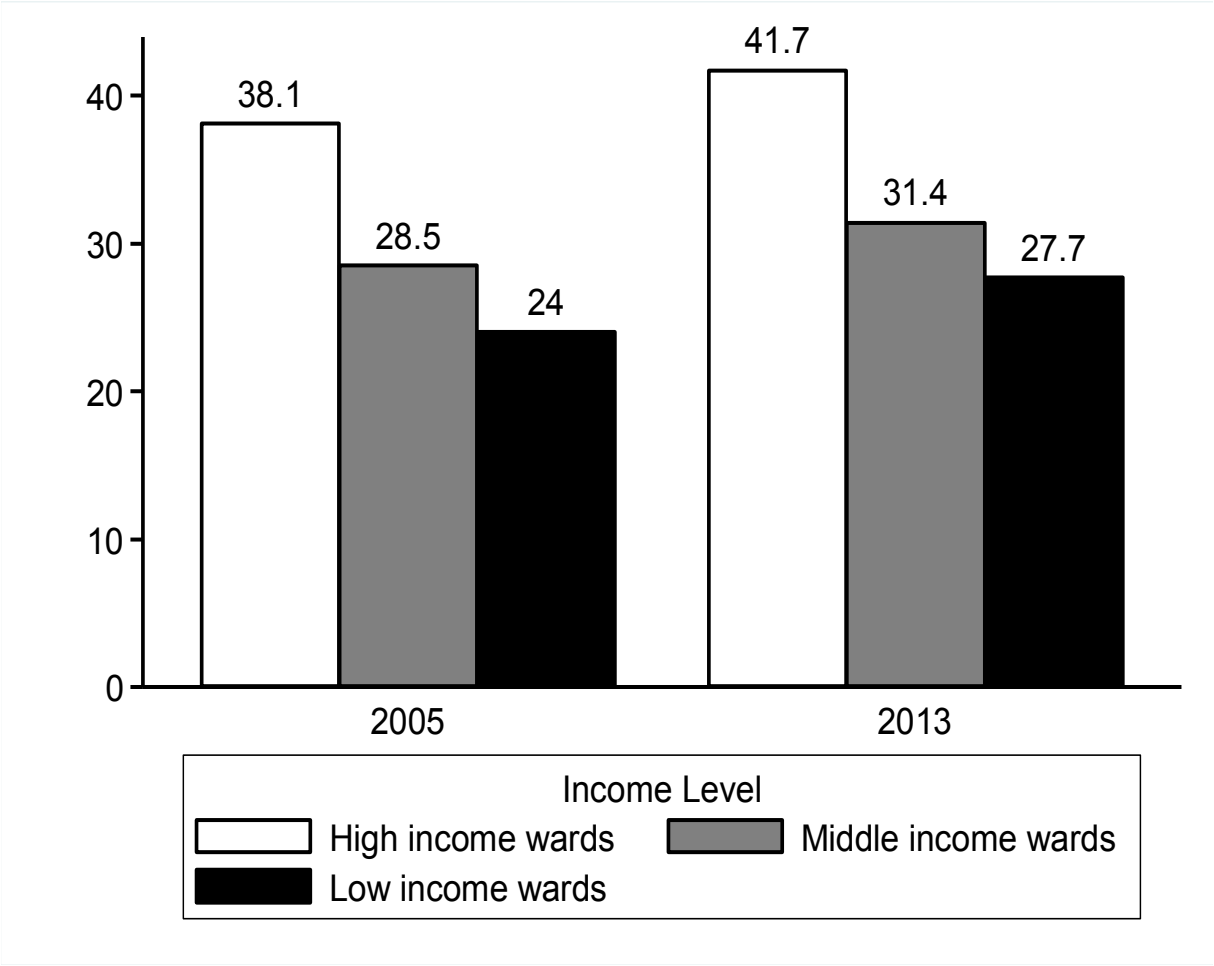
The Minneapolis Case: 2013

- In 2013, turnout was higher in high income and white majority wards (Jacobs and Miller 2014).
- Is this bad? Compared to what?

Figure 3. Turnout Percentage, 2013 Minneapolis Election

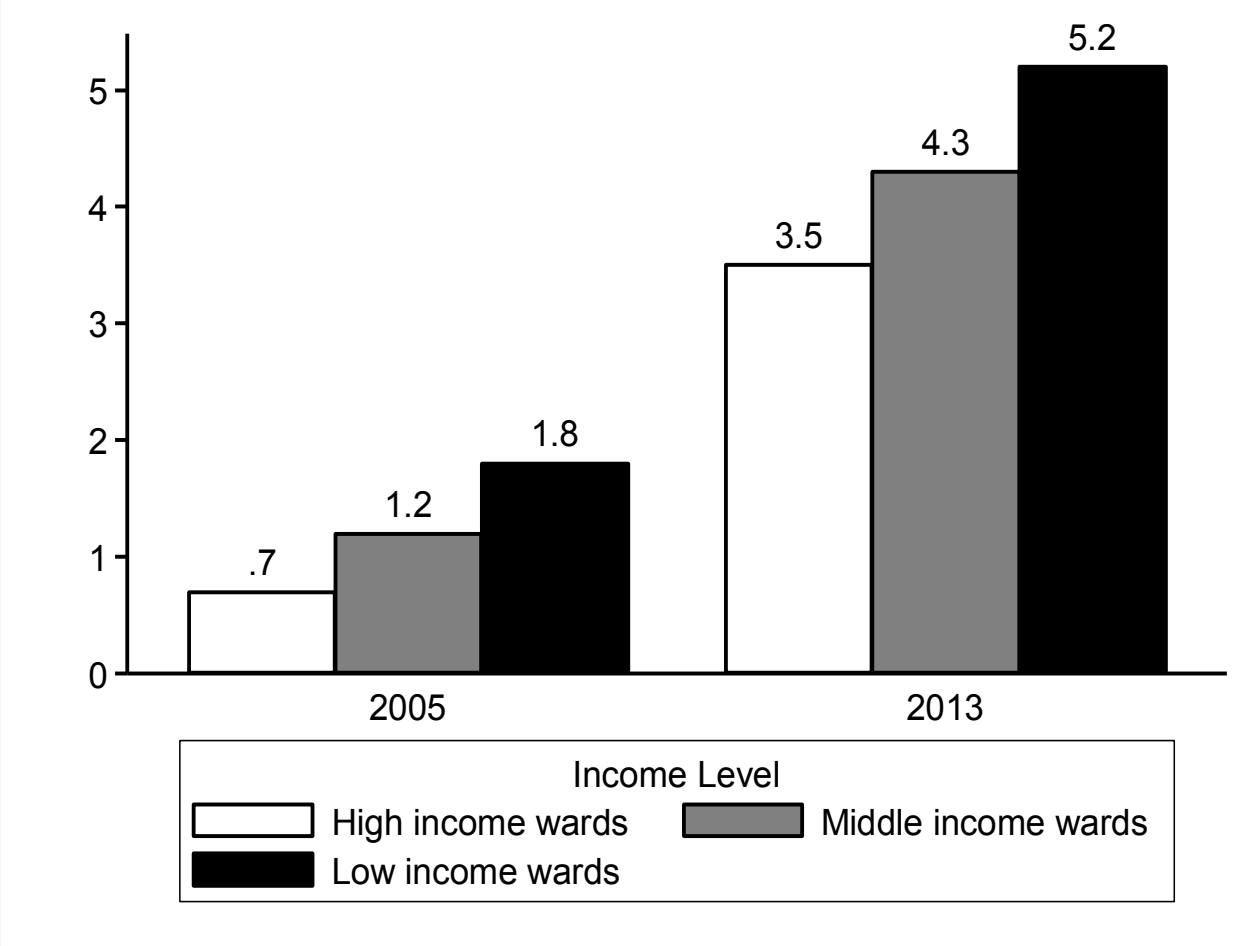


Minneapolis Voter Turnout by Ward Before and After RCV Adoption

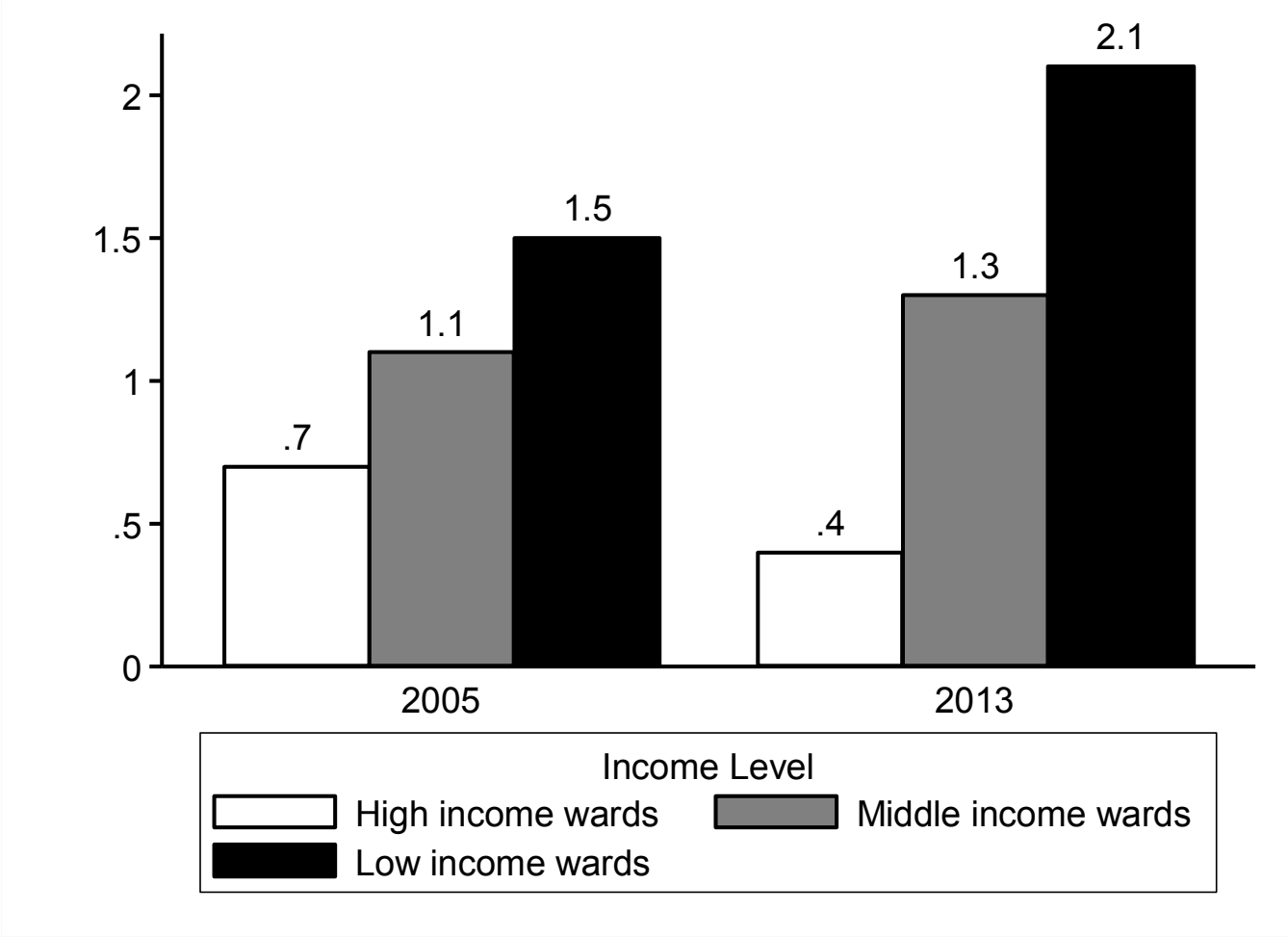


Participation in RCV and Plurality Elections

Spoiled Ballot Rates by Ward Before and After RCV Adoption

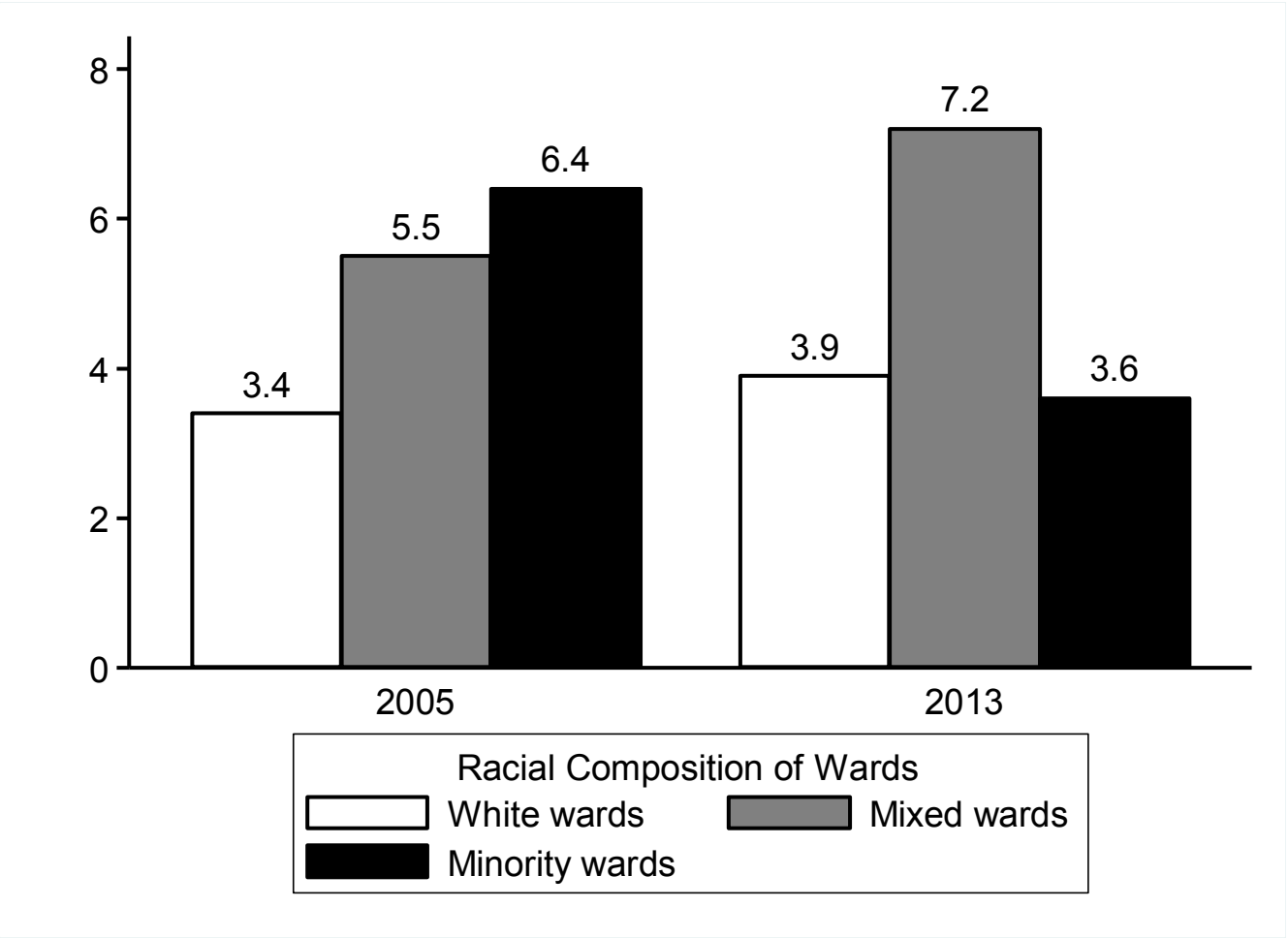


Residual Vote for Mayor (1st choice) Before and After RCV Adoption



Participation in RCV and Plurality Elections

Residual Vote for City Council (1st choice) Before and After RCV Adoption



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Conclusion

- Preliminary results
- Caution: small amount of evidence
- Database will be expanded
- Careful comparisons are needed to assess electoral reforms.

Additional Sources

- Shaun Bowler, Todd Donovan, and David Brockington. 2003. *Electoral Reform and Minority Representation*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press.
- Francis Neely and Corey Cook. 2008. "Whose Votes Count? Undervotes, Overvotes, and Ranking in San Francisco's Instant-Runoff Elections." *American Politics Research* 36:530-554.
- Neely, Francis, Corey Cook, and Lisel Blash. 2006. *An Assessment of Ranked-Choice Voting in the San Francisco 2005 Election: Final Report*. Public Research Institute, San Francisco State University.