

## Ranked-choice voting is flawed, and Minneapolis knows it

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By Devin Rice

Suppose a chicken farmer lost 10.5 percent of his chickens from his coop. Would it make sense for the farmer to hire a fox from the area to determine how to best prevent future losses and analyze the security of the coop?



Minneapolis City Hall.

Dennis McGrath, Star Tribune

Well, that is exactly what the city of Minneapolis did when it engaged Prof. David Schultz to analyze the results of ranked-choice voting in the 2009 election. Schultz is a past board member of FairVoteMN and a longtime supporter of RCV, and he provided legal advice in the amicus brief filed before the Minnesota Supreme Court arguing the voting method's constitutionality.

I respect Schultz and his vast knowledge on RCV. However, in his May 27 commentary ("This year we see what RCV is all about"), he made an error and perpetuated the myth that RCV ensures that there will always be majority winners. He claimed that every winning Minneapolis candidate received a majority of votes in 2009. Not true. In the Park and Recreation Board's Fifth District race, the winning candidate received 46 percent of the total votes cast in the race, after all ballots were counted. To suggest that RCV voting ensures a majority winner is wrong.

RCV advocates also claimed before the state Supreme Court that voter participation would increase and that the cost of elections would go down. Both predictions proved to be false. The 2009 turnout was the lowest in a century, and costs were higher.

There were other serious flaws with RCV in 2009 that Schultz correctly notes. In all, 10.5 percent of the votes cast in the 2009 city election were spoiled ballots or contained voter errors. And a higher incidence of spoiled ballots and voter error occurred in low-income, high-minority population areas, not affluent, predominantly white voting precincts. The study by Schultz in 2010 makes no mention of this higher incidence of error and spoiled ballots occurring in low-income minority precincts. I discovered the correlation and reported it to the Minneapolis Charter Commission in February of this year, testified about it before the Minnesota Legislature and discussed it in my March 6 commentary on this page ("Ranked-choice does minority voters no favors").

The Star Tribune Editorial Board supports RCV. In the past three months, it has published four commentaries on the voting method, including mine. The other three were from RCV proponents. Two of them made inaccurate claims about majority outcomes. The other stated that every ballot was counted and that voter intent was discerned. That is correct. However, any error resulted in no third choice being counted. And in half the identified categories of error, no second choice was recorded.

I feel like the American judge at the Olympic ice-skating final sitting with four judges from Eastern Bloc countries.

This November, Minneapolis will conduct an RCV election that will demonstrate a new dynamic on how campaigns are run, change what candidates say and do, create potential alignment among competing candidates, and provide voters with multiple choices on the ballot. Six or seven City Council seats are hotly contested, and we will elect a new mayor.

This could be the most historic and transformational election since Hubert Humphrey was elected mayor in 1945. What would the Happy Warrior have thought of 10.5 percent of ballots being cast in error or spoiled, where the incidence was dramatically higher among minority and lower-income voters?

Devin Rice is a member of the Minneapolis Charter Commission.

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