

Court affirms ranked choice voting in Minneapolis

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In a unanimous opinion, the Minnesota Supreme Court affirmed the Minneapolis ranked choice voting (RCV) law.

The Court said the RCV system satisfies constitutional requirements because all votes are treated equally: “[e]very voter has the same opportunity to rank candidates when she casts her ballot, and in each round every voter’s vote carries the same value.” The Court also found that there was “no indication, much less proof” that RCV would impose a burden on the right to vote. Chief Justice Magnuson said since Minneapolis voters chose this voting method held the court would not interfere with that choice.

The ruling sets the stage for other communities to consider RCV initiatives. The Saint Paul City Council voted in 2008 to uphold a citizen’s petition to place RCV on the ballot in 2009 upon resolution of the law suit in Minneapolis. Duluth may see RCV on the ballot for municipal elections next year.

Jeanne Massey, executive director of FairVote Minnesota, applauded the Minnesota Supreme Court [decision](#) .

FairVote Minnesota attorneys James Dorsey and Nicole Moen praised the Court’s decision: “The Court also noted that RCV promotes many legitimate state interests, such as increasing voter turn-out and decreasing election costs,” they said in a statement to the press.

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Dorsey and Moen also dismissed the impact of the plaintiffs' intention to appeal the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court: "The Minneapolis City Attorney has already determined that a ruling from the Minnesota Supreme Court requires the city to implement RCV for this election cycle. The Court's decision rests on a thoughtful and solid analysis of Minnesota and United States Supreme Court precedent. If the plaintiffs pursue their claims in federal court, the outcome will likely be the same."

In 2006, Minneapolis voters approved the use of RCV by a nearly 2-to-1 margin, 65 percent to 35 percent. The case, *Minnesota Voters Alliance v City of Minneapolis* (27-cv-08-15), was filed in December 2007 to challenge implementation of the voting method, but was rejected last January by Hennepin County District Judge George McGunnigle.

RCV is a tested, accepted and implementable system by which voters rank candidates in order of preference, ensuring majority winners in single-winner races where there are more than two candidates on the ballot. Under RCV, voters cast their vote for their favorite candidate knowing that if he or she doesn't gather enough votes to be one of the top two finishers, their votes will count toward their second choice. Votes cast for the least popular candidate are not "wasted", but rather redistributed to more popular candidates, based on the voters' second choices, until one candidate emerges with a majority of votes. In multi-winner elections, like the Minneapolis Park Board RCV ensures majority rule while empowering small groups of voters with greater opportunity to elect a candidate that represents them.

RCV is already in use in more than a half a dozen jurisdictions around the United States and in democracies such as Ireland and Australia.

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Eight jurisdictions in six states – California, North Carolina, Maryland, Vermont, Colorado and Washington – currently use RCV voting methods without legal challenge. Nearly a dozen other cities are slated to use RCV in the near future; nowhere has RCV been legally challenged.