

RANKED CHOICE VOTING

A Path Toward a More Integral Politics

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ABSTRACT The application of Integral Theory to practical and near-term politics is as difficult as it is important. Because only a small percentage of the population acts consistently from integral levels of awareness, majority rule is problematic for the future of integral politics. Yet democracy (with its many forms and despite its many limitations) retains profound ideological and moral significance. Ranked choice voting (RCV) is a practice that offers considerable promise to begin to address this dilemma. It does so by creating and protecting a more civil commons where more perspectives are included, respect is encouraged, coercion and distortion are minimized, and intersubjective bridging is rewarded. RCV primarily serves an important translative function and improves the legitimacy of elections. It *may* facilitate transformation and improve the authenticity of elections. This article explains how RCV works, how it promotes more integral leadership, and how it improves the quality of political discourse.

KEY WORDS: election reform; Integral Theory; partisanship; politics; ranked choice voting

What the world needs now is the first genuinely second-tier form of political philosophy and governance...This is the great and exhilarating call for global politics at the millennium. We are awaiting the new global Founding Fathers and Mothers who will frame an integral system of governance that will call us to our most encompassing future, that will act as a gentle pacer of transformation for the entire spiral of human development, honoring each and every wave as it unfolds yet kindly inviting each and all to even greater depth.

– Ken Wilber¹

Proposing a world federation of leaders with integral consciousness is one thing, but building the vehicles that will get us from here to there is quite another. Some of the most respected thinkers on integral politics have proposed some rather elaborate and futuristic governmental structures (e.g., McIntosh, 2007, p. 317). In this article, my intention is to help bridge the gap between theory and practice, conception and execution, and from the cup to the lip for those of us who are thirsty for a politics that expresses more goodness, more truth, and more beauty.

Recently, both Steve McIntosh and Ken Wilber have promoted a more integral politics through changes *in systems of governance*. McIntosh promotes a tricameral World Federation (McIntosh, 2007, Appendix A) and Wilber a parliamentary system (Wilber, 2008). While these may, in the long run, be important or necessary to

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a more integral politics, we might see more practical and near-term results by focusing on *systems of election*. Wilber acknowledged this in a recent lecture (Wilber, 2008). Change to a parliamentary system, for example, would require a wholesale rewriting of the U.S. Constitution.

Elections are about choosing leaders, but more importantly they are a periodic conversation about values, identity, and direction within a society. Several key questions arise: Who is included in that conversation? How adequate is the quality of the conversation to the perceived challenges of the times? How do we create a politics of greater legitimacy (span) *and* authenticity (depth)? Ken Wilber recently said, “Integral politics is one of the most seriously difficult issues to consider” and, “If less than 10% of the voters are integral, democracy guarantees no integral” (Wilber, 2008). Is the only alternative a “philosopher king”? More probative questions might be: How might an integrally informed 5% to 10% of the population legitimately move us toward a more integrative politics? Are there tools and practices that could effectively move us in that direction? This article argues that there are other more palatable, practical alternatives.

Imagine an election system in which you can vote *for* your hopes rather than *against* your fears; where there are no spoiler candidates, no wasted votes, and the influence of negative campaigning and gerrymandering is minimized; where a greater variety of candidates discuss a wider range of policy options; where new and different candidates and parties have a greater incentive to learn from one another and to develop increasing support by building coalitions over time; and where elections become an opportunity for both candidates and voters to express greater honesty, creativity, and responsibility.

Such a politics is not pie-in-the-sky, but is currently being selected as the preferred system of elections in some of the most liberal *and* conservative communities in the United States and around the world. In this article, I will primarily address elections in the United States because: 1) this is the system with which I am most familiar; 2) U.S. politics carries crucial weight on global issues such as war and the environment; and 3) the U.S. electoral system was created in the 18th century and has missed some important electoral innovations that have been created since that time. Ranked choice voting (RCV) is a subset of a category of 19th-century electoral reforms generally described as proportional representation, which was adopted by much of the world in the 20th century. Although it is beyond the scope of this article, there is clearly a need for further research on how these electoral systems are working from an integral perspective.

It appears that the integral community has just begun to think about integral politics as a practical application. It is time to better complement sound theory with sound practice, and powerful vision with powerful real-world applications. The purpose of this article is to extend that conversation about integral politics in the direction of the more practical, specific, and near-term. I believe that the true test of such efforts must be the extent to which the practices lead to discourse and politics that are more adequate to the challenges of the times. The essential question that remains, of course, is: Adequate to what and to whose ends?

I want to be clear in the onset that I make no claim that RCV is an ideal or “an *integral* electoral system.” It is, however, a *more integrative* electoral system. RCV offers a practical path toward a more integral politics, by changing the rules of the electoral game. It does this by first including more honest and diverse perspectives and by better rewarding the bridging of those perspectives to solve real-world problems. RCV enhances healthy pluralism, which is a necessary foundation for a more integral politics. Wilber has said that “...it is only from the stage of pluralism (green altitude) that integralism can emerge” (Wilber, 2000a, p. 29).

This article is organized by asking the following questions:

1. What is ranked choice voting?
2. Why do we need a more integral electoral system?
3. What would a more integral politics look like?
4. How would RCV help us move toward a more integral politics?

For readers who are impatient to learn why I believe that RCV is important to a more integrative politics, go directly to the fourth section. However, most readers will benefit from an explanation of what RCV is before I evaluate its integrative merit.

What is Ranked Choice Voting?

At this point in history, the most radical, pervasive, and earth-shaking transformation would occur simply if everybody truly evolved to a mature, rational, and responsible ego, capable of freely participating in the open exchange of mutual self-esteem. There is the ‘edge of history’. There would be a real New Age. (Wilber, 1996, p. 328)

The essence of RCV is that voters are allowed to rank candidates in order of preference rather than vote for just one person. If the first-choice candidate of voters does not get enough votes to win the election, then second and third choices of that voter will be counted toward determining who wins. It is ironic that in the United States if you are choosing breakfast cereal or toothpaste, you have many choices, but in choosing the leaders of your town or country, you effectively often have only a single opportunity and a binary choice.

RCV is a general term that describes a variety of electoral forms for different situations. Most simply, RCV is about “making choices” in choosing leaders. Where you have one leader (such as a president or mayor), the question is: What is the best single *choice* for the most participants out of many possibilities? Where more than one candidate is being chosen at the same time to represent the same district (such as an at-large city or county council) the question is: What are the best few *choices* for the most participants out of the many possibilities?

A Hypothetical Illustration of RCV

Imagine a small New England town (let us call it Integralville) where there are 99 voters. The citizens agree that their town meetings are more productive when they have a mayor to run those meetings. They also decide that it is prudent to have a town council to oversee the budget.

The good citizens of Integralville have a variety of choices as to *how to select their mayor*. If they choose a plurality system (the winner is the person who gets the *most* votes) and count only each voter’s first vote (both very typical in the United States), then the winner, George, needs 50 votes to win. At first blush, it seems hard to complain about the fairness or wisdom of that outcome. Notice, however, that in this scenario, as many as 49 voters may not be satisfied with the result of this election. Furthermore, 50 votes are required *only* when there are just two candidates competing.

Imagine a different election in which *three* candidates compete—George can now win with 34 votes (if, for example, Albert got 33 and Ralph got 32). This means that 65 voters would have a mayor that they did not vote for and might strongly oppose. If four candidates run, the threshold of victory is 26 votes, meaning that up to 73 voters could be similarly unrepresented for the duration of the mayor’s term. Note how the legitimacy or base of support of the winner decreases with each additional choice the voters have in the election.

What if the citizens of Integralville were wise enough to adopt RCV? In a race for a single-winner contest, RCV offers a method called instant runoff voting (IRV). With IRV, if no candidate wins a majority of votes in the first round, then voters’ second or third choices (if needed) from the weakest candidate are transferred to another candidate until a candidate achieves a majority of votes. If three candidates run for mayor, George’s 34 votes are no longer enough to win. As no candidate received a majority (50) of the 99 votes, the votes for the candidate with the lowest total (here Ralph) are not thrown away (or wasted) but *transferred* to those voters’ second choices. In one scenario, among Ralph’s 32 voters, the second choice of those voters could be 17 for Albert and 15 for George. If so, when second votes are counted, Albert wins 50 to 49. Everyone has one and only one vote counted in the final round, but the first or second choice of *every voter* is counted.

The elementary distinction between majority and plurality voting is very important to a more integral (more legitimate and more authentic) politics. It is important to recognize that election by majority vote is often *not* how executives are chosen in the United States. The vote count fiasco with Al Gore and George W. Bush in 2000 was more a problem of degree than of kind with the current U.S. electoral system, as a non-majority winner is neither a recent nor a rare phenomenon in U.S. presidential elections.²

There are many options for how to choose council members. If Integralville chooses to elect each member as the sole representative for a district, they are choosing a winner-take-all form of election. Such elections have all of the advantages and disadvantages examined above in the race for mayor. IRV would still prove useful. However, if the town chooses to elect its council (all or several members) at once, in an at-large election, more and important new options become possible. We have then effectively moved from a single-winner district to a multiple-winner district election.

In multiple-winner elections, the “threshold” of victory for a candidate is a bit more complicated, and depends upon the form of RCV chosen. In any case, the threshold is determined by the number of at-large members (seats) being chosen in that district election. For example, if Integralville decided to elect three council members for one district (at large), a candidate would need to get about one-third of the votes in order to be elected (see Fig. 1). This arithmetic applies no matter how many voters participate or how many candidates are on the ballot. The threshold to elect nine at-large candidates would be about one-ninth of the votes cast, etc.

The importance of the shift from *winner-take-all* to a form of *proportional representation* is that a minority (or minority viewpoint) may now have a seat at the table of discourse within the governing body. It does so by achieving the threshold fractions of the vote, which becomes smaller and smaller as there are more at-large seats per election. So RCV not only brings greater diversity to the governing body, but more significantly, it brings increased depth to the conversations (and potentially to the growth of the participants). Like-minded groups of voters in the city are now more likely to recruit a candidate to articulate their concerns in the campaign. Needing only one-third of the votes to get a seat on the council, both major parties are much more likely to be represented on the council. That diversity is likely to act as a balance to the majority party.

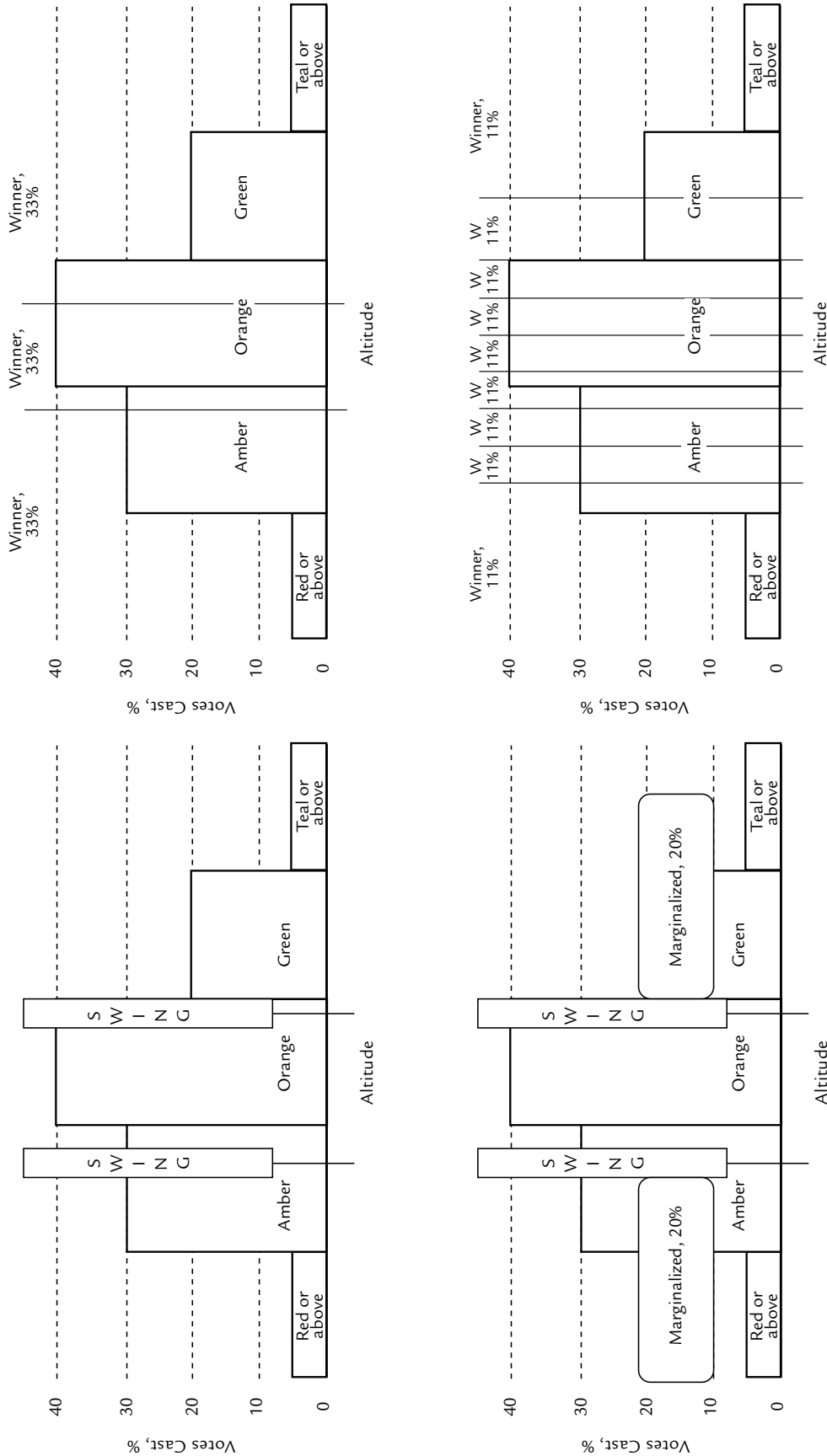


Figure 1. Multiple winner elections and the pyramid of development. **Top Left, Single-winner election (swing votes).** **Bottom Left, Single-winner election (marginalized voters).** **Top Right, Three-winner election.** **Bottom Right, Nine-winner election.** Note that the typical vertical pyramid of development has been turned on its side. Of particular interest is the center of gravity and the massive marginalization with a single-winner election. When three council members are elected at one time, note how green and teal should be having a rich conversation about values. When nine are elected, 5% at a teal center of gravity are within easy reach of one seat on the council. This would seem to be a good situation for those at green altitude who are ready to move, to be gently encouraged and supported to do so. How might a teal-centered member of your city council enliven policy conversations? Note: this figure is based on the work of sociologist Paul Ray.

With RCV, if your first choice does not pass the threshold of electability, you can still have the satisfaction of at least a percentage of your vote being applied to your second or third choice.³ Furthermore, you can have this satisfaction *without* having to sacrifice the honest expression of your first choice, which will be duly noted by future candidates in future elections. Imagine the conversations that might ensue to encourage voters to rank competing candidates.

Compare this to a winner-take-all, single-member district system where three town council members are elected one at a time in separate elections held every two years (which is typical in the United States). In that situation, 49 voters could fail to have *any* representative of their choosing *in every election*. It could be even more unrepresentative depending on the splitting of votes and the gerrymandering of districts. This could result in a large minority of voters having *no* effective representation election after election. Not only could this happen, it often does happen to Republicans in strongly liberal blue states and to Democrats in strongly conservative red states (or counties). In 2008, for example, New Mexico Republicans running for the U.S. House of Representative won 40% of the total vote, yet won none of the three seats (AOL News, 2008). Elections using RCV are more democratic in requiring that a candidate be acceptable to a majority in order to win. Its use increases both the legitimacy of the results and the candor of the civil discourse. Imagine Massachusetts U.S. House elections where, instead of 10 U.S. House districts, there were two five-seat districts (with about one-fifth of voters electing each seat in that district). Republicans would win representation in both districts, different perspectives among Democrats would win, and third parties would have a real opportunity to hold both Democrats and Republicans more accountable.

Why Do We Need a More Integral Electoral System?

We are taught that our system was created by unique genius (so that it could be run by idiots goes the joke). Yet it is not difficult to see evidence of the need for electoral reform. The current election system in the United States faces major challenges in terms of both *legitimacy* (or span) and *authenticity* (or depth). These terms have long been used by Wilber regarding integral spiritual practices (Wilber, 2005, p. 101) and may prove of considerable practical value when applied to the development of integral political practices (Wilber, 2008a). “Legitimacy” refers to growth *at* level, while “authenticity” refers to growth *between* levels of development (Wilber, 2005, p. 102).

Many other important integral concepts demonstrate the importance of this fundamental tension: translation-transformation, fundamental-significant, fullness-freedom, and so on (Wilber, 2005, chap. 4; Wilber, 2000b, pp. 25-35). A more integral politics honors and integrates these notions as expressed in the following familiar expressions: “Everybody is right” must be tempered with “not equally right”; “amber has a right to stop at amber” with “integral supports the development of the greatest potential for all”; “valuing the contribution of every level and perspective” with “leading from the highest level available.” One goal of integral politics is to integrate the best and the most.

Legitimacy and Contemporary Politics: The Challenge of Span

One need only scan the news to recognize that politics faces major challenges to its legitimacy. Disputed election results, low voter participation, and a president who meets only with members of the public who already

support his views are only three of many examples. Bumper stickers such as “He’s Not My President” or “Don’t Vote, It Only Encourages Them” indicate an alienation to politics that we would do well to consider. Let us now examine two symptoms of challenges to legitimacy in greater detail: low voter participation and disputed election results.

Low Voter Participation

The United States has one of the lowest voter participation rates in the world. One respected scholar reports that the United States ranks 139th among voting nations in the rate of voter participation since 1945 (Institute for Democracy, n.d.). While voter turnout in U.S. Congressional elections when the presidency is not on the ballot is typically 35% to 40%, many other industrial democracies average between 80% and 90% (Institute for Democracy, n.d.). Turnout is often only 20% to 30% for crucial primary or run-off elections (Fairvote, n.d.[a]), which means that candidates with little more than 10% to 15% win. In recent legislative elections for the same year (where a form of RCV was used), Swedish voter turnout of eligible adult voters was 78%, compared to 38% in the United States (The Local, 2006). The turnout for the 2008 presidential election was significant, but was a “less than overwhelming” 1.6% increase over 2004 numbers (61.7% from 60.1%) (McDonald, n.d.).

One logical reason for low voter participation is that, in the United States, elections rarely change the status quo. Most incumbents have “safe” seats. Ninety-eight percent of incumbents won re-election in every election between 1998 and 2004 (Fairvote, n.d.[b]). Between 1996 and 2002, over one-third of state legislators ran unopposed by a major party opponent (Fairvote, n.d.[c]). Most of these races were in areas that are so fundamentally one-sided that they are beyond what changes in districting practices could address. Compare for a moment the rather hollow promise of a recent MTV promotion aimed at young voters, “Every Vote Counts,” with what we know about election practices in Florida and Ohio in recent presidential elections. Of course, fundamental fairness requires “counting the votes,” but even more important may be casting “a vote that counts.” That is what RCV is all about.

Citizens might conclude that elections are a game played by others primarily for their own benefit because of the high costs of campaigns and who finances them. Two brief examples: 1) according to former U.S. Senator Ernest Hollings of South Carolina, the typical senator spends an average of one-third of his or her working hours over the entire term raising money for their next campaign (*Washington Post*, 2006) and 2) one zip code in New York City donated \$41.15 per resident to candidates, compared to \$0.11 per resident in another zip code only a few miles away (Brennan Center, 2007). Which district is likely to get the attention of the person elected?

Perhaps low voter participation is just as well if Wilber is correct that 70% of the population is at an ego-centric or ethnocentric stage of moral development. However, consider the long-term consequences of an electoral system in which the life conditions and viewpoints of substantial minorities are not accurately represented in our governing bodies. Is it not apparent that those with minority views and values will exercise other, less civil ways of securing social status and power? Might not there be a high cost to those who do the marginalizing as well as to those who are marginalized?

Disputed Election Results

Many people believe that the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections were not won fairly. A sensible next question would be: What aspects of that “unfairness” was the result of less-than-adequate people, and what aspects were the result of a less-than-adequate electoral system? What is the relationship between the two?

The zero-sum nature of winner-take-all and plurality election systems means that huge policy consequences are often determined by a shift of a very few votes. In Washington state’s 2004 governor race, after more than 2.8 million votes were cast and after two recounts, the difference between the major party candidates in the end was 129 votes (more than 63,000 votes were cast for Ruth Bennett, the nominee of the Libertarian Party). An obvious but important example is how RCV may have changed the results of the 2000 presidential election. Setting aside the question of the justness of the Supreme Court decision, it is clear that a shift of only a few hundred votes in Florida or a few thousand votes in New Hampshire, from Nader to Gore, would have changed who was elected president in 2000, with Nader having won 97,488 votes in Florida. The 2000 Senate race in Washington state mirrored the presidential race that year. The Democrat Cantwell beat the Republican incumbent Gorton by 2,229 votes out of more than 2.4 million votes cast. A Libertarian candidate, Jeff Jared, received 64,734 votes. Contrary to the Bush-Gore election, it is widely acknowledged by both parties that the second choice for the great majority of Libertarian voters would have been the Republican Gorton.

To students of political science, Nader and Jared are called “spoilers.” They are said to “spoil” the election because when a voter chooses a candidate that she wants the *most*, she often causes the winner to be the candidate she wants the *least*. An act of conscience becomes an act of betrayal to the supporters of Gore or Gorton. This is a particularly pernicious effect of the current U.S. electoral system. It diminishes the honest expression of life conditions by many voters and distorts the conversation of needs and values that is central to a mature and civil discourse. Voters want a range of choices in candidates and should not be punished for expressing an honest range of views on Election Day.

The current electoral system leads not only to spoilers, but to several forms of “gaming the system,” such as gerrymandering and negative campaigning. The rules of the current electoral game discourages candor while encouraging manipulation and deceit. Using a winner-takes-all system and single-member districts means that 49% (66% in a three-person race) can be ignored. For the length of the term, that “minority” has effectively no representation, and the district is essentially a one-party district. In 2008, Barack Obama won the U.S. Presidential election by a relative landslide by the standards of the 20th century. Yet it has been calculated that his opponent John McCain would have won the Electoral College, even while losing the nationwide popular vote by 8.5 million votes, if a mere 400,000 votes in seven key states had switched to him (Fairvote, n.d.[d]).

Authenticity and Contemporary Politics: The Challenge of Depth

We use the term *authenticity* in at least two senses. First as the honest expression of one’s life experience, and secondly in the integral sense of growth between levels of development. Politics in our time faces challenges in both senses of the term. The role of the spoiler, for example, penalizes the honest expression of both voters and candidates.

The quality and depth of our current political discourse does not seem adequate to the challenges of our times. Thoughtful discourse on the big issues of war, poverty, ecology, or energy policy are largely absent from electoral campaigns, while both candidates and media feed us a thin broth of empty slogans like “change” or “strength.” Such banalities and sound bites pass for policy discussion. A narrow range of policy options are considered, and woe be it to any candidate who steps beyond this orthodoxy with a fresh perspective or a new idea, for that is often an invitation to be written off as “elitist” or as “unelectable.”

Politicians and media moguls are not stupid. They feed us this thin soup because it sells. In a mass market society, there is more money (and votes) to be gained in speaking to the lowest common denominator (fundamental) than to those at more developed stages of consciousness (significant). Because more fundamental levels of development are by definition more egocentric and ethnocentric, it is easy to see why candidates pander to expressions of lower value memes such as greed and racism. Yet one person’s “pandering” is another person’s “common touch.” Although appeals to the baser emotions have clear strategic value, they also promote a herd mentality and benefit those candidates who lack vision or innovation, or who fail to express those qualities for fear of criticism. The result reinforces cynicism, disrespect, and hopelessness about the role and value of politics.

What Would a More Integral Politics Look Like?

The promise of integral politics is to facilitate a more conscious, mature, and enlightened politics. This would be evidenced by incorporating more perspectives, stages, lines, states, and types within the ways that we understand our collective experience, analyze issues, choose our leaders, and hold our leaders accountable. In sum, integral politics would encourage more voices and a deeper dialog—it would be a politics of healthy synthesis. We must not fall into the binary trap of either-or thinking, however, believing that a candidate or leader either is or is not integral. There are many shades of being integrally informed. We will know that our politics is headed in a more integral direction when our voters, candidates, and elected officials use more integral practices and demonstrate more skillful means in their political application. Such skills and applications will be learned and demonstrated gradually.

A more integral politics would improve *horizontal health*. This quality would emphasize balance among the quadrants at any given level (Kofman, n.d.). Horizontal health would encourage everyone’s capacity to experience “fullness” at any stage. For all of our drive for vertical growth, it is important to remember that growth to the next level comes in large part from experiencing the limitations and contradictions of *being full at the current level*. Wilber (2006) stated well the crucial importance of horizontal health: “Healthy translation is what we spend 99% of our lives trying to do” (p. 128). In short, with politics it must be recognized that we rarely express the “farther reaches of human nature” (Wilber, 1995, p. 127), but are often focused on meeting more fundamental needs and strengthening the foundation from which growth can arise.

A more integral politics would also improve *vertical health*, encouraging the growth of all to better fulfill their potential (both as individuals and as collectives). Vertical health would also mean that everyone has the freedom to stop growing at whatever stage they deem appropriate. In integral politics, vertical health would make room for the mystery of growth. Of particular importance are the Lower-Right quadrant social systems, which act as both a pacer and limiter of growth. Wilber has said that, “the mode of techno-economic production is the single strongest determinate for the average level of consciousness in a society” (Wilber, 2002c).

Promoting Integral Leadership

Integral political thinkers are fond of saying that although “everyone is right,” integral leadership must come from the highest levels of consciousness available (Wilber, 2008). How does a voter begin to evaluate which candidates have the “highest consciousness”?

Citizens have a complex relationship to their political leaders. We want our leaders to be “one of us” (hence their bowling scores make the news), but we also want them to be better than we are, and to have greater vision, intelligence, and wisdom to handle a difficult job that most of us acknowledge is beyond our abilities. Leaders can serve as “pacers” to raise the average level of consciousness of their time (for example, Martin Luther King, Jr.) or pander to our baser instincts such as greed or racism (e.g., George Wallace). Leaders chosen on personal charisma are often projected with a variety of shadow material and seen as either saviors or demons. Their supporters and movements are also much more vulnerable to co-optation or assassination.

Consider how RCV might have affected the 2008 presidential primaries. How much support did Ron Paul or Dennis Kucinich really have in your state in January of 2008? There is no way of accurately knowing whom the voters most honestly preferred. In a system of plurality voting and counting only first choices, even in the earliest contests, great weight is apparently given to the “Who can win?” question, often overriding the “Who best represents my values and priorities?” question.

While we often hear that “red has the right to *stop* growing at red,” it is less often said that “teal has the right to *continue* growing to turquoise.” Basic Moral Intuition asserts that “the best” have as much right to fulfill and to express their full potential as do “the most.” By empowering honest minority views, RCV improves the likelihood that the “best” will at least be a meaningful participant in political discourse. This is essential to the goal of “governing from the highest level of consciousness available,” which should not be confused with the much more challenging goal of electing integral candidates.

What are the qualities of an integral leader? Clearly good leaders would have those qualities of character that we identify with being a good human being, such as honesty, compassion, and awareness. Yet to be an integral leader one would need to demonstrate qualities that contribute to a more integral perspective and a more integrally informed life, such as curiosity, courage, respect, self-reflection, discernment, humility, and open-minded skepticism. Steve McIntosh has identified three lines that I agree are very important in identifying healthy integral leadership. These are the cognitive line, the values line, and the emotional line (McIntosh, 2007, p. 265). He suggests corresponding metrics, which he calls the IQ, VQ, and EQ.

Surely one practical measure of a more integral politician is her ability to both speak to and listen to the most levels and perspectives of the electorate (span), while retaining and communicating a healthy hierarchical vision of what is most important in terms of development (depth). After acknowledging the necessity of a healthy holarchy (worthy elite) in political leadership, this criterion returns us to a more mature expression of democracy. It turns out that a healthy political leader (with the highest consciousness available) is one who: 1) facilitates rather than dominates the conversation; 2) meets citizens where they are in their life experience and yet encourages the “better angels” of their nature; and 3) is most skilled at Integral Methodological Pluralism (IMP) and intersubjective bridging.

Distinguishing Individual Holons from Social Holons

Wilber asserts that confusing individual holons with social holons is a “calamitous” fallacy and is “the very definition of fascism, whether political fascism, eco-fascism, or values fascism” (Wilber, 2002a). In order to evaluate whether RCV is an effective tool to help move the United States toward a more integral politics, it is important to distinguish holons from artifacts, and individual holons from social holons. Electoral systems are human conceptual artifacts, and therefore a tool imprinted with the consciousness of the toolmaker. What is considered to be a legitimate and authentic method for choosing a group’s leader can and will be changed as the center of gravity of the toolmakers evolve in relation to perceived changes in life conditions.

Because politics can be seen essentially as the relationship between various parts and wholes (e.g., an individual and a group), understanding social holons is one of the keys to understanding the promise of an integral politics. Fred Kofman (n.d.) defines a “social holon” as “a relational space, the pattern and organization in which the individual holons find a common affiliation” (p. 12). Individual holons are composed of “parts” while a social holon is composed of “members.” Because a social holon does not have individual agency, its sum and substance is its shared relational space, its degree of mutual resonance or intersubjective understanding.

Such “relational exchange” is level-specific for various lines of development. Members can only fully belong or participate with others at or below their level (which they have already experienced or grown through). Higher levels are “over their heads” and therefore as yet unavailable to them. What one sees as relevant relational exchange in politics therefore depends on the levels of the participants: Words or fists? Ballots or bullets? Dialogue or gulag? Language is described as the dominant means of mutual resonance, and therefore may be the ultimate artifact with transformative power (Kofman, n.d.). Because of the centrality of dialogue, it is crucial to a more integral politics to examine the breadth and depth of our political discourse. How free and how fettered is it? How honest and how duplicitous?

A social holon is created where an individual holon engages an artifact (Kofman, n.d.). I have spoken about how the individual shapes the artifact (imprinted with the consciousness of the toolmaker), but such influence goes both ways. It is also important to see how the artifact helps to shape the individual. “Artifacts become embedded in social holons. They become media of relational exchange that influence the development of the holon” (Kofman, n.d.). As I describe in the next section, RCV *could* be an artifact with significant transformative potential. Such Lower-Right quadrant systems can be seen as the “rules of the game” and therefore as great influences on behavior and growth.

How RCV Would Move us Toward Integral Politics

Integral politics must provide a transcendent vision for the future. It must vividly describe what positive political evolution will look like *and it must show us how to get from here to there.* [emphasis added] (McIntosh, 2007, p. 104)

In its many forms, RCV is being used by men and women of good will in a wide range of situations, from electing national legislatures in Ireland and Australia to selecting Oscar nominees in Hollywood (Institute for Democracy, n.d.). Computer technologies now make its use practical in elections with millions of voters.

RCV is within current constitutional authority. Its adoption does not require a social revolution, a great leap in consciousness, or even a Constitutional amendment. A school board, a city or county council, or a state legislature typically has ample authority to choose RCV. People can start using it now, and gain experience with its use in a variety of low-risk situations.

Ranked choice voting, or related forms of proportional representation, are now used in dozens of countries around the world, including Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland (Amy, n.d.). In the United States, RCV is used in many local elections for a variety of purposes (Fairvote, n.d.[a]). It is used in Minneapolis, Cambridge, San Francisco, Oakland, and Burlington, to name a few cities. It was recently adopted by overwhelming margins in the Colorado communities of Aspen and Telluride; in Sarasota, Florida; in Memphis, Tennessee; and was introduced for elections in Cary, North Carolina, and Pierce County, Washington. It is used in many places for soldiers who vote absentee. Non-RCV proportional methods like cumulative voting and limited voting are used in dozens of local elections in the south to increase racial minority representation. RCV is also endorsed by the League of Women Voters and the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, and is used by Major League Baseball and college football to choose their best players. Remarkably, RCV had in prior years been endorsed by both of the 2008 major party presidential nominees, John McCain and Barack Obama (Fairvote, n.d.[c]). (It will be interesting to note whether Senator Obama acts on that endorsement during his presidency.) Although beyond the scope of this article, I would encourage research from an integral perspective to examine the experience of citizens who have participated in RCV.

Ranked choice voting is of course only one path toward a more integral politics. It will *not* magically induce growth or moral development. In fact, RCV will surely have the effect of clarifying and legitimizing points of view from lower as well higher stages of development. It would be used by a white racist party, too! This is a central challenge of integral politics, for which there are no assurances. At least the value and identity differences between perspectives will then be explicitly on the table of civil discourse. RCV offers a practical test of Habermas' insight that there is a relentless pressure built into language that moves toward mutual understanding (Habermas, 1985). RCV does not obviate the need for such long awaited but rarely delivered improvements in campaign finance or media reform.

RCV as Practice, Not Mere Theory

Ranked choice voting may disclose and illumine new data and evidence of the real-world condition of members of the social holon known as the body politic. It provides a structured opportunity to explore intersubjectivity, and to create overlapping horizons of mutual understanding. RCV encourages the second-tier potential for those who are approaching the readiness to use it. It requires citizens to make more nuanced distinctions among perspectives and provides practical incentives to stretch beyond monism and the binary world of "us or them." Moreover, RCV can be seen as a vehicle for people to better fulfill their potential, as a way to ease the "pain of partialness," and as an incentive for a drive toward greater wholeness.

RCV and Political Discourse

Ranked choice voting encourages a wider range of participants to more honestly express their life experiences in a search for truth in its many forms. It is about the promise of intersubjective bridging and the potential of

mutual understanding. “Can we recognize ourselves in one another?” is a question with considerable integrative and transformative potential. The more who participate and acknowledge one another’s views, the more likely that there will be a push toward Eros, or transformation (Wilber, 2002a). A more civil discourse would minimize coercion and distortion and maximize respect. A more integral politics would be evidenced by *law that protects* and a *politics that promotes* these qualities of civil discourse.

Integral practitioners often speak of individuals at orange or green altitude as if they are in separate realms, but they are more accurately viewed as part of different “probability waves.” I may be at amber in a subculture that reinforces homophobia, but if I learn that my neighbor (for whom I care) has a daughter who is a lesbian, this shared horizon could easily become the impetus for my growing into a broader circle of care. With RCV, I could more likely express that growing care effectively in the political arena. Consider an example of how RCV might encourage movement on one most stubborn and important policy issue:

Of the 20 declared major-party candidates for president in 2008, Dennis Kucinich was the only one to endorse a single-payer healthcare financing system. One could conclude from this fact that there is very little support for such a system. Yet, this was a time when healthcare was seen by authoritative sources as the second most important issue in the nation among Democrats and the fourth most important issue among Republicans (Harvard School of Public Health, 2008). Furthermore, single-payer healthcare had broad popular support as an answer to the problem (*Washington Post*, 2003). It is supported by 42% of physicians (Medscape, n.d.), with 59% of physicians supporting universal health care (Reuters, n.d.). Despite such support, the single-payer option is rarely given meaningful consideration by mainstream media, candidates, or elected officials. What is going on here? One can certainly point to media coverage or the role of the insurance and pharmaceutical industries and their lobbyists, but I suggest that our current system of elections is also an important part of the explanation.

Imagine if a system of RCV was in place, and a candidate who did not expect to win was willing to run as a single-issue candidate on a subject of great importance (such as single-payer healthcare). If that candidate were an articulate spokesperson for the cause and were willing to “fall on their sword” to further that cause, and if a substantial minority of voters were willing to vote for that candidate to publicly record the importance of that policy position to them, then a much more meaningful political conversation would be furthered without spoilers and wasted votes. Votes from substantial minority views would be noticed by candidates with a good chance to win. At that point, all forms of dialog, compromise, and “horse trading” would ensue to shift those votes to candidates whose position was now acceptable enough on single-payer healthcare to win the vote of those who expressed strong support for that issue in earlier elections. This example illustrates how a system of RCV could, at least on the highest priority issues, make progress over time and across ideological divides. RCV would encourage direction and discourage the endless repetition of shallow debate.

RCV and Election Legitimacy

By counting more than a voter’s first choice and requiring a candidate to win a majority of the votes, an effect of RCV is that far fewer votes are “wasted,” and therefore an individual’s vote really is more likely to make a difference in choosing leaders or influencing policy discussions. Eliminating the role of spoiler candidates means that more (and a more diverse range of) candidates can be voted for without ruining the chances of a more mainstream candidate. RCV allows a wider range of policy options to be considered and improves

legitimacy by encouraging the more honest expression of both candidates and voters. With RCV, regardless of the developmental level of the participants, conversations about values and meaning will better clarify the expressions of identity and loyalty that are the foundation of voters' choices.

When fewer participants (and their genuine life experiences) are excluded from the election process, then minority viewpoints must be more seriously considered—including those of the minority of integrally informed participants. While preserving and enhancing majority rule, RCV paradoxically establishes a much lower threshold to be included within the civil dialog. Even one vote for an “extremist” candidate will be recorded in the first round of voting and given its due weight. RCV creates and maintains a more “loyal opposition,” which keeps the majority party more accountable and minority views more within the civil and legal process. And with RCV, those with minority viewpoints will no longer be able to merely criticize from the “back bench.” They will more likely be included within the governing bodies and therefore be *both empowered and constrained* by the rule of law. The percentage of citizens who can justify throwing rocks from outside the system (or using fists or guns) should substantially decrease as the legitimacy of those tactics diminishes as their point of view becomes more heard and respected.

Once minority viewpoints are included within a more respectful and less coercive civil discourse, more citizens will recognize the opportunity and utility of more civil forms of relational “exchange.” One need not be second tier (or integrally informed) to engage in rudimentary negotiation within a system that will give voters a fair opportunity to get “enough” of what they need and value to stay within the civil political game.

RCV and Election Authenticity

Authenticity always and absolutely carries a demand and duty: You must speak out, to the best of your ability....If you fail to do so, you are betraying your own authenticity. You are hiding your true estate. (Wilber, 2000b, p. 33)

If “authentic” is used in the sense of the honest expression of one’s life experience and as the essential foundation of a less coercive and less distorted civil discourse, this will be improved by RCV. However, it is much more problematic if by authenticity one means vertical growth of RCV participants, as we know that growth between levels of development is difficult, slow, multifaceted, and mysterious. Although it shows promise, the questions if and how RCV facilitates vertical growth remains an important and worthy of considerable examination.

While only a minority of citizens consistently operate at or above a green level of cognition, many of them claim to have superior ideas. Therefore, they should have a particular interest in how their “minority” can effectively influence both the quality of political discourse and who is elected to political office. When implemented as a Lower-Right quadrant artifact, RCV should have a healthy, if gentle, pluralizing effect. By counting second and third preferences in elections and insisting upon majority rule, citizens have a strong practical incentive to recognize and consider the views of others to accomplish practical results. With RCV, whether you want to stop the war or fix the potholes on Main Street, it is now to your advantage—even if your center of gravity is egocentric or ethnocentric—to stretch to find common ground with your neighbors. Practical results will come from compromise and the ability to build coalitions across relatively minor differences and over time. Gradual but significant growth in authenticity should result.

Ranked choice voting should encourage growth through political dialogue over a longer time frame. Candidates such as Ralph Nader or Ron Paul, with 5% of the vote in one election, may get 1% or 10% in the next. That candidate will be encouraged to stay in the game (rather than be exiled as a spoiler) and his or her strength will be more accurately reflected over time. Therefore, RCV encourages better dialog between elections. RCV also encourages a practical and applied expression of the Basic Moral Intuition by better delivering the best choice for the most participants in an election. Greater respect becomes strategic (especially in multi-member district elections), where it then makes sense for a candidate to argue: “If you prefer my opponent, remember that we agree on certain issues, so please rank me as your second choice.”

Another major challenge of a more authentic politics is to distinguish more healthy hierarchies from less healthy ones. Human history is full of pain inflicted by a rigid or pathological system or leader who claims to help us, but savages us instead; those who claim to know what is best for us, but fail to include us in their considerations. People are rightfully skeptical of the promises of philosopher kings. There is much practical wisdom in the concern that if regular people are too flawed to run their own lives, why should they trust another flawed human to run it for them?

Implementing RCV: How to Get from Here to There

Based on the assertion that RCV is a *practical* tool to help the United States move toward a more integral politics, there should be many real-world opportunities to encourage its adoption and use. I suggest a few very practical directions:

- Begin to use RCV in the organizations to which you already belong.
- Support city, county, and state efforts to adopt instant runoff voting and proportional representation. (See Fairvote.org for many current resources.)
- Learn how elections operate in other parts of the world. The system used in the United States does not use many 19th- and 20th-century improvements that are recommended for other countries (see Amy, n.d.).
- Encourage candidates and office holders to support such efforts.
- Teach RCV to children in schools, scouts, and social organizations.
- Learn and teach mediation skills. There are mediation centers in many communities where disputants are taught to take the perspective of the “other,” which is a foundational skill for a more integral politics.
- Support diverse and independent media and internet neutrality. Advocate for the fairness doctrine in television and radio.
- Support organizations and candidates who respect the use of independent science in public policy making.
- Support greater accountability, transparency, and checks and balances to the exercise of power.
- Protect civil liberties and promote civil responsibilities.
- Create or participate in trans-partisan and trans-ideological conversation groups, where the explicit goal is to create safe places to listen and even to try on perspectives different from your own.

Conclusion

Some feel Eros rumbling within the body politic. Some want to make democracy safe for the world. Many are seeking practical tools to move toward a politics of greater legitimacy and authenticity. I began this article by challenging myself to help “bridge the gap” between the big ideas of integral philosophy and the smaller, short-term ideas of practical politics. Because creating a truly second-tier politics is such a daunting challenge, I believe that we need to create practices to help gradually achieve a more integral politics. Perhaps on our way to a “Council of *all* Beings,” we need to first create town councils of more perspectives. Politics, particularly electoral politics, may be a most fruitful and challenging place to explore the “miracle of we.”

Perhaps it is enough of a challenge for integral politics in our time to develop practices that will strengthen both legitimacy *and* authenticity. RCV is primarily a tool to improve translation (growth at level) and as such, is a modest reform. RCV does not have to be wonderful; it only needs to be better than the current system and to move us in more integral directions. If it does nothing more than create and protect a more “civil commons” where more are included, respect is encouraged, and coercion and distortion are minimized, then it is no small step toward a more integral politics. RCV helps citizens to learn more about other existing life experiences and worldviews, and helps them realize that they are not alone in their life experience. It also provides opportunities and practical incentives to express political courage, and to experience some level of mutual resonance with their neighbors. RCV should act as a legitimizing check on narcissism and some unconscious power drives by changing the “rules of the game,” as it encourages the gradual expansion from a more contracted sense of self toward a larger, second-person experience. In sum, RCV assists marginalized people to reclaim their roles as agents of history, including those who claim to be the most enlightened among us.

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NOTES

¹ See Wilber (2000a, p. 90).

² The 1992, 1996, and 2000 presidential elections (and 18 of the last 46 such elections) were won by candidates winning less than a majority of the popular vote. For example, J. Q. Adams was elected in 1824, in a four-man race, with 32.2% of the popular vote (see Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections. Retrieved June 15, 2008, from <http://www.uselectionatlas.org>).

³ You may have noticed that this favors the last voters who have the benefit of knowing which candidates have “extra” votes before they vote. This would give those voters an advantage in choosing their second or third choices and would surely encourage “gaming” of the system. In the real world this would not occur, as voting would be done by secret ballot, thus a later voter would not have such information.

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