How Fred Ronstadt Won in Ward 6

Let's start with an important disclaimer. Fred Ronstadt was generally a good guy near the turn of the century who cared about Tucson and played by the rules as written into our city charter when, as a Republican, he won the Ward 6 Council seat twice.

It should be further noted that Ward 6 has now and did then have the most Democrats of any ward in the City of Tucson. So how in the world did this happen?

This is a paper about mathematics and not about personalities. Rules were followed and everything was above board, the rules are what are in question.

United States of America Representative Government

Tucson, Arizona, USA Not so much...
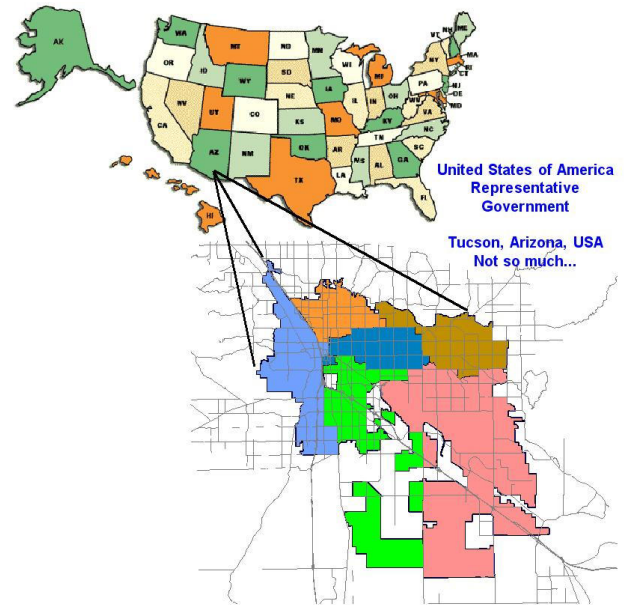
November 4, 1997: Council seats for Wards 3, 5 and 6 were on the ballot along with 12 propositions added by referendum. There was a great deal to vote on. At the time, there were 214,452 registered voters in the city. Of those voters, 79,497 (37.1%) would vote in this election. Nothing out of the ordinary here for an election without a mayoral race.

Propositions aside, let's concentrate on the Ward 6 Council race. Here are the numbers:

Ward 6 Council	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Total	% Voters	% Total
Hughes (Dem)	4059	4773	4403	3754	3259	7158	27406	35.3%	12.8%
Ronstadt (Rep)	3114	7868	3767	5879	2173	5560	28361	36.6%	13.2%
Dougherty (Lbt)	444	847	774	782	374	893	4114	5.3%	1.9%
Overvotes	39	27	22	31	34	34	187	0.2%	0.1%
Undervotes	1935	6296	2264	3407	1332	2287	17521	22.6%	8.2%
Percent Votes Cast	12.4%	25.5%	14.5%	17.9%	9.2%	20.5%		Reg.Voters:	214452
Percent Total Voters	4.5%	9.2%	5.2%	6.5%	3.3%	7.4%	36.2%	Ballots Cast:	79497
Percent Nobody	20.2%	31.8%	20.2%	24.6%	18.6%	14.4%	22.6%	% Turnout:	37.1%

Overall Turnout: Generally, a 37.1% voter turnout is not a sign of a vital democracy. It wasn't always this way, but in the past forty years it has been common. A turnout of 20.5% within Ward 6 while voting for a Ward 6 Council seat is problematic as well. Nonetheless, elections must be conducted with voters who choose to participate.

Electorate v. Turnout: Noting above the columns to the right labeled "% Voters" reflecting those who participated in the election versus "% Total" comparing votes to the number of registered voters. Note that 13.2% of registered voters chose the winner Also note these tallies by ward in the rows labeled "Percent Votes Cast" and "Percent Total Voters".

Voting for Nobody: Note the red oval that depicts a 14.4% of voters in Ward 6 who left the Ward 6 column blank. Basically they voted for "Nobody". Overall, "Nobody" would place third in a most votes format with 22.6% tally citywide. This can easily be read as a protest vote.

Ward Victories: Ronstadt won Wards 2 and 4, though "Nobody" gave him a run for his money in the east-side Ward 2. Ronstadt lost Wards 1, 3, 5 and his home ward 6. He lost his precinct as well. Here, a majority selected representation for a philosophical minority without their consent.

SO, IS THIS ANY WAY TO RUN A DEMOCRACY?

In Tucson we use an at-large system. This means we have Ward primaries and citywide general elections. This has been proven to disenfranchise voters and it can be easily noted that Ward 6 residents felt disenfranchised. They were being represented by a member of the council who they had voted against. That feature is why at-large systems were popular in the Jim Crow south. All this aside, Fred Ronstadt won reelection in 2001.

Council Fred Ronstadt (2001)

November 6, 2001: As in the election four years prior, Wards 3, 5 & 6 Council seats were on the ballot. In this election there were no propositions to bolster voter turnout. Registered voters numbered 193,969, a reduction of 20,483 voters. Of those voters, 53,332 would cast ballots (27.5%). Ward 5 would be running unopposed once again, but in Ward 3 the Democrat would have opposition.
    Without propositions this election should be quite different. Here are the numbers.

Ward 6 Council	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Total	% Voters	% Total
Hartmann (Dem)	3697	4571	3849	3297	2796	6024	24234	45.5%	12.5%
Ronstadt (Rep)	2847	8844	3035	5867	1653	4491	26737	50.2%	13.8%
Write-in Votes							0	0.0%	0.0%
Overvotes							0	0.0%	0.0%
Undervotes	258	543	461	397	254	381	2294	4.3%	1.2%
Percent Votes Cast	12.8%	26.2%	13.8%	17.9%	8.8%	20.5%		Reg.Voters:	193969
Percent Total Voters	3.5%	7.2%	3.8%	4.9%	2.4%	5.6%	27.5%	Ballots Cast:	53332
Percent Nobody	3.8%	3.9%	6.3%	4.2%	5.4%	3.5%	4.3%	% Turnout:	27.5%

Overall Turnout: At 27.5% the election shows a consistent lackluster performance. The reduced number for the previous election probably reflects the lack of propositions on the ballot and of the reduction of voters overall. The reduction of votes for "Nobody" (17,521 to 2294) adds viability to the correlation. As with most elections, the reasoning behind the will of the people is difficult to verify.

Ward Victories: Once again, Ronstadt lost Wards 1, 3, 5 and his home ward 6. His victories in east-side wards 2 and 4 match his previous election. Once again, he lost his precinct.

Dunbar v. Aboud: This time Ward 3 was a contested race. Republican Kathleen Dunbar matched Ronstadt nearly vote for vote, winning Wards 2 and 4. Like her compatriot, she lost Wards 1, 5, 6 and her home ward 3. With the election of Mayor Walkup two years earlier, the Council was now 4 to 3.

Omissions: Note that data for "Write -in" and "Overvotes" where not available from the City Clerk.

Thus: Fred Ronstadt did nothing wrong. He used a legal system to disenfranchise voters in his ward and take a seat on the City Council. Kathleen Dunbar did the same. A counter to this argument is that Democrats may be doing the same on the east side in Wards 2 and 4. If two wrongs don't make a correct, then perhaps there is a better way and we should be open to study, design and build a proposal for consideration. As in all election matters, it is the people who should decide on a ballot.
    If we look at the numbers, the Democratic Party does not need to rely on an unfair election system. To the contrary, this example shows that the opposite is more likely true. This system is not a benefit, but most likely a hindrance. Perhaps we can challenge ourselves to do better.