

# [***Refusing to Limit Ballots to Five Candidates Could Stop Ranked Choice Voting | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BHS-FBS1-DY68-10KW-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** The only place in the U.S. where ballots offered an unlimited number of candidates 60 years ago was in Cambridge, Mass. Shortly afterwards, dozens of additional liberal localities adopted their own ranked choice voting.

**Body**

For a century, Australia has been using ranked choice voting (RCV) ballots, giving their voters the option of picking backup choices if they fear their first choice would not get a majority of votes.

If the Australian model was used in our U.S. presidential elections, the 98.2 percent of Wisconsin voters who prefer either [*Joe Biden*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joe-biden?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) or [*Donald Trump*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/donald-trump?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) would not even need to mark down a second choice because they would know the race would come down to those two candidates. However, the 1.8 percent of the remaining voters who picked either of the three alternate candidates that finished third, fourth, or fifth place would have had the option of choosing Trump over Biden as their second choice.

The only place in the U.S. where ballots offered an unlimited number of candidates [*60 years ago was in Cambridge, Mass.*](https://www.rcvresources.org/history-of-rcv) Shortly afterwards, dozens of additional liberal localities adopted their own ranked choice voting.

A recent [*study*](https://www.takebackaction.org/rcvgave-trump-24-percent-median-vote) identified 43 localities across the country that allow an unlimited number of candidates on their ranked ballots. Those localities only gave Trump a 24 percent median vote in the 2020 election. Ranked choice advocates nationwide are now trying to follow this system used by the 43 localities that is only accepted, thus far, almost exclusively in liberal communities.

Suddenly in 2021 and 2022, a series of events provided the opportunity for substantial Australian-style RCV and the completely unrelated issue of pro-life legislation to both spread throughout the U.S.

The pro-life opportunity occurred with a bang. In the summer of 2022, the U.S. [*Supreme Court*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/supreme-court?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) [*Dobbs*](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392_6j37.pdf) decision allowed pro-life advocates to attempt to pass substantial pro-life laws. This was the first time since the [*1973 Roe v. Wade*](https://www.history.com/topics/womens-history/roe-v-wade) decision that tossed out pro-life laws around the country, that state legislators are now allowed to pass state pro-life laws.

Earlier, on March 25, 2021, Georgia had passed the [*Election Integrity Act*](https://gov.georgia.gov/press-releases/2021-03-26/governor-kemp-responds-president-bidens-attack-election-integrity)that tightened election laws and created the first ranked ballots in Georgia, but were limited to overseas military members. Less than two months later, [*Virginia Republicans used ranked ballots*](https://www.politico.com/news/2021/05/10/youngkin-virginia-gop-nomination-governor-486854) to counter the Democratic legislature outlawing their nomination process that resulted in [*Glenn Youngkin*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/glenn-youngkin?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) winning the GOP nomination for governor and ultimately winning the governor's race. The next year Nevadans voted for a ranked ballot [*limited to five candidates*](https://www.takebackaction.org/post/nevada-approves-final-5-rejects-democratic-governor-who-opposed-it)on the same day that they defeated the Democratic governor who opposed them.

Ironically, liberal advocates of unlimited RCV made the same mistake that many pro-life groups made after the Supreme Court *Dobbs* decision.

The failed red wave of 2022 was blamed by Trump and others primarily because of the extreme pro-life positions conservatives ran on that election when refusing to make exceptions for rape and incest with abortion laws. One example was Kansas, where the [*first measure*](https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/02/politics/kansas-constitutional-amendment-abortion/index.html) [*lost 41-59*](https://ballotpedia.org/Kansas_No_State_Constitutional_Right_to_Abortion_and_Legislative_Power_to_Regulate_Abortion_Amendment_(August_2022)#:~:text=The%20Kansas%20No%20State%20Constitutional,The%20ballot%20measure%20was%20defeated) and rape and incest remained the focus of every ballot measure throughout the country. Most of those [*Republicans*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republicans?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) lost to their pro-choice competitor. Trump himself [*admitted,*](https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/3798996-trumps-abortion-remarks-underscore-political-peril-for-gop/)"It was the 'abortion issue,' poorly handled by many Republicans, especially those that firmly insisted on No Exceptions, even in the case of Rape, Incest, or Life of the Mother, that lost large numbers of Voters."

Similar to the abortion debate, the extreme position of allowing unlimited candidates on ranked ballots blew the chance for many wins by not limiting the number of candidates to five as outlined in the book [*The* ***Politics*** *Industry*](https://www.amazon.com/Politics-Industry-Political-Innovation-Democracy/dp/1633699234). The Virginia GOP nominating process, military overseas voting, or never asking a voter to rank more than five candidates on a ballot present an acceptable option for many conservatives.

Instead, the push for the specter of a ranked ballot with 34 candidates brought a quick response with votes for complete bans on any ranked [*ballots*](https://thefga.org/blog/these-states-are-banning-ranked-choice-voting-yours-should-too/) being used whatsoever in Florida, Tennessee, Idaho, Montana, and South Dakota. In Georgia, just three years after the Republican legislature approved their first ranked ballot, every GOP senator united in voting to [*ban*](https://legiscan.com/GA/rollcall/SB355/id/1370027) all RCV in reaction to a February 2023 proposal to allow Georgia localities to model the San Francisco and New York systems, asking their voters to rank unlimited candidates on their ballots.

The extreme ranked choice voting position included attacking a Final 5 proposal in Wisconsin and even attacking the ranked ballots in Georgia by using the argument that those fighting for our freedom overseas should not be allowed to use a ranked ballot unless [*every*](https://saportareport.com/ranked-choice-voting-suffers-setback-in-georgia-legislative-session/columnists/mark-lannaman/mark-lannaman/) Georgian [*can do the same*](https://saportareport.com/ranked-choice-voting-suffers-setback-in-georgia-legislative-session/columnists/mark-lannaman/mark-lannaman/).

By going left at the fork with unlimited candidates on a ranked ballot, advocates may relegate themselves to left wing communities. Appealing to the center-right by compromising and agreeing to limit a ballot to no more than five candidates through a final five system will lead to a lively debate in more centrist places around the nation.

*John Pudner is president of* [*TakeBackAction.org*](https://www.takebackaction.org/) *and a former Bush 2000 campaign aide.*

*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2359686/election-workers-process-ballots.jpg)

**Graphic**

Election workers process ballots

GEORGE FREY/AFP via Getty Images

Election workers process ballots at Utah County Election Headquarters during the presidential primary in Provo, Utah, on Super Tuesday, March 5, 2024.

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