

Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty: Ranked-choice voting proposals likely to overpromise, underdeliver

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System could lead to chaotic and lengthy ballot counting, odd results

The News: A new policy brief from the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty (WILL) examines the promise, peril, and real-world record of ranked-choice voting, a proposal that selects winners not necessarily based on majority or plurality, but with a system of voter-ordered preference. [Rank the Vote: The Implications and Record of Ranked-Choice Voting](#), by Senior Research Analyst, Noah Diekemper, finds that the states and municipalities that have employed ranked-choice voting haven't provided much evidence that the system would serve to address some of the structural issues in American politics, and could make things worse with lengthy and chaotic election aftermaths with bizarre results that don't reflect a majority or plurality.

The Quote: WILL Senior Research Analyst, Noah Diekemper, said, "Ranked-choice voting isn't necessarily better or worse than the current system — it's just different. But it does present the danger of even lengthier ballot counting and odd results, without necessarily fulfilling the promises to improve our politics. It's no silver-bullet solution and we ought to be clear-eyed about the downsides."

Diving Deeper: Proponents of ranked-choice voting, from across the political spectrum, believe the changes to how voters select candidates could de-polarize American politics and incentivize moderation and consensus. But these promises are largely unproven. In [Rank the Vote: The Implications and Record of Ranked-Choice Voting](#), Noah Diekemper finds that ranked-choice voting has a hard time living up to its promise while delivering some dangerous downsides.

- Ranked-choice is supposed to give voters more options and make politics less acrimonious, but a two-party system already maximizes coalition building. Republican and Democratic caucuses both include voters with different priorities and necessitate compromise; widening the number of viable parties discourages compromise.
- The "majority" winner in a ranked-choice election need not have anything like majority preference. Americans have deep underlying disagreements about politics that generally rule out true majority rule. But the majorities established by ranked-choice elections hardly deserve the name; in one scenario, a candidate could win a ranked-choice election despite being ranked last or second-to-last out of five choices by a majority of voters.
- Overhauling elections systems invites chaos and mistakes. New York City's experience implementing a new system of voting, where they published thousands of dummy results in the middle of high national skepticism of elections, is the sort of thing that civic leaders should be at pains to avoid.
- Ranked-choice elections delay results. At a time when Americans already dislike being made to wait longer for results, ranked-choice voting requires the presence of all ballots before counting can begin. In an age of mailed-in ballots, this means significant delays.
- Ranked-choice elections in America have mostly looked like typical ones: plurality candidates winning and lots of mudslinging. Roughly 97% of American ranked-choice elections have been won by the candidate who won a plurality of first-place ballots (in the manner of usual American elections) anyway, while the tone and hostility of those elections has not noticeably differed from usual ones.