

Newsweek

## Third-Party Candidates: Let Voters Have More Options for President

By Jill Stein and Chase Oliver

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A [strong majority](#) of voters have long expressed a desire for more than just two choices in the presidential race. But the major parties try to shut that down at every turn, from fighting ballot access to wielding the "spoiler" epithet like an axe.

As the Green and Libertarian presidential nominees in 2024, we were in the crossfire of this political combat. Now that the presidential election is behind us, we'd like to suggest an urgently needed solution.

America needs ranked choice voting. It's time to consider this approach, which would end the "spoiler" problem altogether—allowing all Americans to benefit from real choices and vote their conscience, while ensuring that majorities rule.

Having more states adopt ranked choice voting would be a game changer—not only for voters but candidates and parties too. Everyone could vote for the candidate they truly support, freely and with hope. They could speak their minds without worrying they'd "waste their vote" or help elect the person they like least. They could consider the issue-driven platforms of smaller parties—whether that issue is greater freedom for Americans on our home soil, or ending genocide overseas.

Ranked choice voting would end the hand-wringing over third-parties altering results in tight battlegrounds—even if that outcome was averted in the 2024 presidential race. Instead of attacking us with negative ads and [nasty billboards](#), [Republicans](#) and [Democrats](#) would have to attract support from independents and undecided voters with a message other than fear.

One of the lessons of the 2024 campaign was that voters have had it with "politics as usual." [Polls](#) show consistent demand for additional choices. Frustrated voters are increasingly [registering as independent](#), but feel they have few options other than whipsawing between the same two parties.

That's because the politicians who have made our democracy so dysfunctional hide behind a system that suppresses choice, or makes it feel too risky. They manipulate the system and try to weaponize third parties to serve their own agendas. They secretly [support](#) ballot access for us if they think we will pull votes from their major-party opponent. Then they turn around and block us elsewhere, or [vilify](#) us as "spoilers"

and suggest we're betraying democracy if we compete with them in states they expect to win.

None of this would be necessary in a ranked choice election.

Here's how it works: Every voter has the option of ranking the field of candidates in the order they prefer. If any candidate wins over 50 percent of first choices, they win. If no one wins a majority, the bottom candidate is eliminated. If your candidate remains, your vote stays with them. If your favorite falls short, your vote counts for your second choice.

Maine and Alaska smoothly used this system to vote for president last year, and had among the highest voting percentages in the country for candidates outside the major parties. Ranking your vote is commonplace now for [millions of voters](#) in cities nationwide. It's [easy](#) and voters like it. And states have the authority to make it happen, whether through voter-initiated ballot measures or legislation.

In many ways, it resembles a runoff, except that it happens instantly, without the extra cost of bringing everyone back to the polls six weeks later. One of us experienced this process as the Libertarian candidate for U.S. [Senate](#) in Georgia in 2022. Senate runoffs cost Georgia an estimated [\\$75 million](#)—and far fewer voters cast a ballot. With ranked choice voting, everyone is heard, money is saved, and results come much quicker.

The states that use ranked choice voting have better, more serious campaigns. The ones that don't? They get attack ads and billboards calling third-party nominees "spoilers" and "dupes," if not worse. The two parties have been hollering at third-party candidates ever since Ross Perot and Ralph Nader. It hasn't worked. It's an exhausting cycle, but a fixable problem.

Imagine walking into a supermarket and finding only two options on the shelves—we'd be outraged. Yet, when it comes to the most critical decisions shaping our nation, the political duopoly insists that two choices are good enough.

Third parties have a contribution to make. We have a long, honorable tradition of important, issue-focused campaigns. In our history, third parties have helped bring about the [end of slavery](#), [new protections for workers](#), and even the eight-hour workday. That legacy of championing vital causes continues today.

Yet instead of embracing a solution, Democrats and Republicans tell you that voting isn't supposed to be perfect. A social media [meme](#) popular before the election suggested that voting was about choosing the stop that gets you closest to your preferred destination. But what stop do you pick if you believe politics as usual is taking you in the opposite direction of where you want to go? That our tax dollars are funding a genocide in Gaza

the American people strongly oppose? That \$36 trillion in national debt is an existential crisis for our children? Or that neither Democrats nor Republicans have a real plan to address the climbing cost of groceries, and the burden those costs impose on families across the nation?

Our elections don't need to be about picking the "lesser of two evils." We can have real choice, and we can have majority winners. The voters who want to support third parties can do so, and the parties that worry about spoilers can have assurance that the winner will have the broadest and the deepest support.

Let's make 2024 the last election consumed by fear of spoilers. It's time to free Americans to vote for the candidate they truly believe in—not just against the one they fear. By adopting ranked choice voting, state by state, we can transform our politics, empower voters, and ensure truly fair elections.

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