

To Reform or Not to Reform: The Electoral College  
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The Electoral College has been a divisive institution since its creation. The founders originally made it in order to protect the country from one possible negative outcome, the states with larger populations overtaking the presidency.<sup>1</sup> As Hamilton said in Federalist no. 68,

“Talents for low intrigue, and the little arts of popularity, may alone suffice to elevate a man to the first honors in a single State; but it will require other talents, and a different kind of merit, to establish him in the esteem and confidence of the whole Union.”<sup>2</sup>

However, as time has progressed, it has become clear that there are other possible issues with it, namely, the fact that it means on occasion, the person elected by popular vote does not become the president. Although this was built into the Constitution itself, many citizens see this as unfair, as a reason why they should not vote because, in the end, does their vote really count if someone who did not win the popular vote can still become the president?

Throughout the past century, there has been a consistent majority of citizens who believe the Electoral College is a failed institution,<sup>3</sup> and there have been several votes and efforts in Congress to get rid of it, either through an amendment to the Constitution or through making certain reforms to the system itself.<sup>4</sup> Among others, a 1934 vote to abolish the Electoral College failed in Congress by two votes and then again in 1979, a direct election alternative failed in the Senate 51-48.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, though, the Electoral College serves the purpose it was meant to, giving more power to minority groups ensuring that larger states do not dominate the presidential elections, it could stand to undergo some reform, perhaps reallocating some of the electors from smaller states like Wyoming to larger states like California.

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<sup>1</sup> Kimberling, “Arguments for the Electoral College .”

<sup>2</sup> Hamilton, “Federalist No. 68.”

<sup>3</sup> Kiley, “Majority of Americans Continue to Favor Moving Away from the Electoral College.”

<sup>4</sup> West, “It’s Time to Abolish the Electoral College.”

<sup>5</sup> Blake, “Abolish the Electoral College? Dream on Democrats.”

One proposal that would serve this purpose is the idea of proportional allocation of electoral votes based on the popular vote within each state. This would mean that the electors would be distributed based on the way people voted in each state, like is already true in the states of Maine and Nebraska, rather than on the population in each state during the census,<sup>6</sup> ensuring that there was equal representation for voters rather than the system of today which gives much more of a voice to voters from smaller states than to those from large ones. Although the popular desire is to move to a popular vote system rather than using the Electoral College (65% of adults in the US have agreed this is the future they desire)<sup>7</sup>, the political will to undertake such a significant change would be nearly impossible to attain due to differing opinions among states and within political parties. As political reporter Aaron Blake said in his article following the results of the 2016 Clinton v. Trump election,

“In 1967, 58 percent favored repeal [of the electoral college]. The following year, it was up to 80 percent. But it didn't happen. And if that 80 percent support in a different era wasn't enough to effect the change, you can bet it's going nowhere in this highly partisan age.”<sup>8</sup>

The depth of party disagreement within the US has only grown within recent years, so despite what the desire of the people is, it is unlikely that this will happen, so it makes more sense to reform the system that we have than to upend the Constitution all together.

It is the duty of the nation to ensure that all states are being represented equally, but also to ensure that the individual voices of citizens are being heard. The Electoral College as it stands today is not doing that to the fullest extent. As Harvard University political scientist Gautam Mukunda said,

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<sup>6</sup> Vuckovich, “Proportional, Not Popular: Reforming the Electoral College.”

<sup>7</sup> Kiley, “Majority of Americans Continue to Favor Moving Away from the Electoral College.”

<sup>8</sup> Blake, “Abolish the Electoral College? Dream on Democrats.”

“The fact that in presidential elections people in Wyoming have [nearly four] times the power of people in California is antithetical at the most basic level to what we say we stand for as a democracy.”<sup>9</sup>

There is a not unlikely future in which the next presidential election is chosen by the Electoral College rather than the majority as well and in a more and more divided nation, the chances of this happening on a regular basis only become greater.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it is important that we reform the Electoral College, not through constitutional amendment, but perhaps through the NPVIC, a proposed interstate agreement to commit electors to vote for candidates who won the nationwide popular vote,<sup>11</sup> even if they lose the popular vote within the state, or the system of proportional reallocation within state districts proposed in the paragraph above in order to ensure that the voices of citizens are being heard.

One argument is often that those more in favor of getting rid of the Electoral College are liberals. In the 2000 and 2016 elections, when the President was the one elected by Electoral College majority, rather than popular vote, it was the Republican candidate who won.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, should there be a tie in the 2024 election, the House vote which is the last resort form of deciding who is President, would likely be won by Republicans who currently have a large majority in the House.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, liberals are often more upset about the outcome of Presidential elections due to the Electoral College because it is their candidates, like Al Gore and Hillary Clinton, even like Cleveland in 1888, because their candidates win the popular vote and lose the Electoral College vote.<sup>14</sup> However, though it is apparent that there are more liberals supporting the dissolution or amendment of the Electoral College system, it is extremely likely

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<sup>9</sup> Liasson, “Critics Raise Alarms about the Electoral College.”

<sup>10</sup> Collins, “The Electoral College Is ‘The Exploding Cigar of American Politics.’”

<sup>11</sup> West, “It’s Time to Abolish the Electoral College.”

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Kondik, “Republicans Retain Edge in Electoral College Tie”

<sup>14</sup> Pomper, “The 2000 Presidential Election: Why Gore Lost.”

that conservatives would feel the same fervor were it their candidates who were winning the popular vote and losing the Electoral vote. It is important that Democrats and Republican candidates alike must really strive to win the popular support of their country in order to be President, something that the Republican presidents elected by the Electoral College have not been able to accomplish to the fullest extent.

As important as the Electoral College has been to the functionality of our government, the support and representation of the citizens in the US in that government is far more important and the Electoral College as it stands does not serve that purpose.

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