

Brandon Stotts-Nay

Instructor Jeffrey Ferlo

POLS 1100

11 April 2013

The Electoral College: Constitutionally Flawed

It is one night that changes the history of our nation forever. While some choose to ignore it, others feed off its drama and excitement. All of the major news networks cancel their normal nightly programming just to cover it, large parties are thrown in honor of it, and the nation's map is colored in one by one with red or blue. All of this is done for the sake of this one evening—Presidential Election Night.

Presidential elections receive quite a bit of buzz from the general public and the news media as they debate with one another about who should be the next president. A great deal of work, money, and traveling is put into these campaigns, but is it all really necessary? The reason for this question is because the election of a president is quite a bit different from other elections. The President of the United States is not elected by the people but rather an Electoral College. The Electoral College is mostly a winner takes all election process (except for Maine and Nebraska) that was originally established in the U. S. Constitution by our founding fathers. It consists of electors chosen by each state where they meet and vote for the next President and Vice President. The number of electors each state is given is determined by how many Congress and Senate members the state is delegated. These Electors are chosen by the state depending on how their laws are set up. The entire Electoral College consists of 538 electors. To win the election a candidate must have a majority of 270 votes. This number is represented by

half of the electoral votes plus one. (Government Archives) Originally the Electoral College may have been put in place for good measure but now is a system that seems quite archaic to this day and age and causes too many problems; therefore it should be abolished from the United States Constitution.

There are of course pros and cons to every situation but the Electoral College has some pretty major flaws. In the Article written by PBS, George Edwards and Alexander Keyssar are both interviewed about why the Electoral College is bad for America. Keyssar is the author of the book *Why the Electoral College is Bad for America*, and teaches political science at Texas A&M. The first topic of choice is about its democratic principles. Keyssar says that it violates the principle that all votes are counted equally. So much has changed within the last 200 years. For example, African Americans and women couldn't vote back then but can now. It's the American thought that democracy is "one person, one vote, [and] all votes count equally". Agreeing with Keyssar, Edwards, a history and social science professor at Harvard, says that there were original motives for establishing the Electoral College. It was because the founders thought that there would never be a majority party elected without it and the House of Representatives would have to regularly select the president.

With democratic principles being violated, and each vote not being treated equally, some do not want to waste their time and decide not to vote. In fact with the Electoral College, voting is actually discouraged because people know their vote won't do anything. This is true especially if they are in the minority or a state that highly favors their opposite candidate of choice and as it seems their vote would not be helpful in this situation. Although, voter turnout

is higher in battleground states but the majority of the nation will see relatively small voter participation.

What interests does the Electoral College serve to its country? Trent England, writer for usnews.com, believes that the Electoral College should be preserved because it makes American politics more inclusive, moderate, and stable than if the popular vote elected the president. To him it is a two-step process; the people vote how their state will cast its electoral votes and the candidate with the majority of the electoral votes wins the election. He says that, “Over time, this has made American political parties less extreme and more inclusive than they would have been without the Electoral College”. His reason for saying this is because he thinks the Electoral College forces candidates to go to the most evenly divided parts of the country in order to persuade voters.

Keyssar believes that the Electoral College does not make American politics more inclusive. He thinks that this process makes it nearly impossible for a third party candidate to win a presidential election. He pointed out one exception where George Wallace won 46 electoral votes, but only because he was a ‘regionally-based candidate’. Wallace was from Alabama and the five states that voted for him were in the states surrounding his.

Mike Edwards of the Huffington Post claims that the Electoral College is one of the most dangerous institutions in the American politics today. “It makes a mockery of the principal ‘one man, one vote’; it doesn’t matter if we get one vote when some votes are worth more than others.” This is referring to some states having more influence over others. The only states that have any pull are the “battle ground states” which leaves out over 70% of the population’s

vote. For example, in the 2012 election a person's vote in Nevada, a highly sought after "battleground state", is "one million times more likely to have an impact on [the] election than a vote in New Jersey (a large blue state)".

The Electoral College provides stability and security according to England. This way the outcome of the Electoral College is more decisive and makes it clear who is voted the 'legitimate president'. He uses the metaphor of the Electoral College being like a water-tight compartment on an ocean liner when it comes to security and possible election problems. "A dispute in one state doesn't sink the whole ship, and nation-wide recounts are never necessary." Unfortunately, England didn't talk about the major problem in the system when four presidential candidates in United States history won the popular vote but not the electoral vote.

For Edwards, the Electoral College destroys the belief in a fair election process and causes one to question whether the system really works when a candidate wins the popular vote but then is not elected president. "The Electoral College is a cancerous tumor on American democracy, as it slowly eats away at the basic notions of fairness and equality in our political system."

Although it would be difficult to do there are a few different things that can be done to fix the Electoral College. Originally posted as a joke on an NPR blog, Neil Freeman draws out a way to reform the Electoral College. How he does this is by redrawing America into 50 new "units" of equal population. He took the 2010 census and drew new states to have a population around 6 million people. This may seem like a ridiculous idea, but there is logic to his plan. So

then can't the Electoral College be reformed to have a system similar to this? Of course redrawing states is out of the question and will never pass but what about creating national voting districts with this plan in mind? Just as the states have their own voting districts, the nation would also have the same carefully mapped out based on equal population. If this was implemented it would give more power to each vote and eliminate "battleground states".

The other alternative would be to completely abolish the Electoral College and go off the popular vote. This option would give the power to the people because the states would no longer throw out the minority's votes. For example the democratic votes in a right wing state would still be counted with a popular vote system in place, unlike the Electoral Colleges' winner takes all approach. According to a Gallup poll the sixty-two percent of Americans, including both republicans and democrats, favor abolishing the Electoral College and switching to a popular vote system. This would restore confidence in the American people and raise voter turnout.

Unfortunately, at least for a while, the country is stuck with this flawed system since an amendment to the constitutional would be required. This process is anything but an easy task since the amendment would need to be proposed by congress and ratified by each state's legislature.

The Electoral College is bad for the country's democratic principles because much has changed since the creation of the constitution and the Electoral College has become outdated and needs to be fixed. It suppresses voter turnout by not treating each vote equally ultimately

discouraging people to vote. The country's voice is waiting to be heard. It is time for the Electoral College system to be abolished from the United States Constitution.

Works Cited

- Archives. *U.S. Electoral College, Official - What is the Electoral College?* n.d. 07 04 2013. <<http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/about.html>>.
- Edwards, Mike and Danny Oppenheimer. *Mike Edwards: Eliminate the Electoral College*. Ed. Huffington Post. 27 9 2012. 07 4 2013. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mike-edwards/electoral-college-votes_b_1917826.html>.
- England, Trent. *The Electoral College Serves the Interests of All People*. 02 11 2012. US News. 07 04 2013.
- Krulwich, Robert. *A Crazy But Rational Solution To Our Electoral College Problem*. 15 02 2013. 2013 05 04. <<http://www.npr.org/blogs/krulwich/2013/02/14/172029048/a-crazy-but-rational-solution-to-our-electoral-college-problem>>.
- Nivola, Pietro S. "Thinking About Political Polarization." 2005. Research Paper. 08 04 2013. <2013>.
- PBS - Educational Broadcasting Group. *The Journal Editorial Report. The Electoral College - Pros and Cons*. 29 10 2004. 07 04 2013. <<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/journaleditorialreport/102904/proscons1.html>>.
- Saad, Lydia. *Americans Would Swap Electoral College for Popular Vote*. 24 10 2011. 2013 04 04. <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/150245/americans-swap-electoral-college-popular-vote.aspx>>.