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POLS- 1100

Persuasive Essay-

Electoral College

What should be done with the Electoral College—keep it, reform it, or replace it with something different?

When dealing with issues concerning the Electoral College, many people get confused; it has often been called the "least understood aspect of American government" (Hubert, 2008). Much of the confusion surrounding the Electoral College stems from the ongoing arguments between those who wish to abolish, reform, and keep the system of voting. Because of the confusion, many people do not try and understand the system; which only adds to the problem of the unresolved conflict. While many want to abolish the system of the Electoral College, there is not a functional option to replace it yet. Abolishing the system at a time in the US like this, where we have many ongoing problems and issues (the economy, international relations, ect…) would not be smart. The Electoral College should continue to be the system of voting used in the US until the country has reached a more secure period and has a well developed plan that would be proven more efficient than the system already in place.

Although the system's origins come straight from our founding fathers and have been around as long as the Constitution, the American people largely still do not have

sufficient knowledge on how the Electoral College works.   Without that knowledge it is extremely difficult to make a decision on whether or not the system is working effectively and how it was intended when first proposed when writing the Constitution. The Electoral College was originally designed in order to narrow the choices of candidates down to a couple in order to make the voting process better. The writers expected more than a couple large political parties; they did not foresee the bipartisan system we have in the US now. They also thought that the House of Representatives would ultimately make the decision of the election. (Hubert, 2008)

A question often brought up is why the writers of the constitution did not just elect to have a strictly popular vote. But times were much different back then, now we have TV's and radio where the media blasts candidates at us right and left. It could be logically said that everyone in the country knows the top candidates names and partisan affiliation.   But the writers worried that with how slowly news and information moved at the time that the voters would not get enough info about the candidates from distant territories and regions, and that they would just vote for the closest candidate who they most likely heard about the most. It would have been extremely difficult and probably impossible to have a candidate receive an obvious majority of votes. Even if by some chance a winner was obvious, that candidate would have a very difficult time reaching the population, since most of the country would have never heard of them before. Not to mention that the states with the highest population would always have an advantage considering their close candidates would always receive the most votes. (Dell, 2004)

The Electoral College works slightly different than originally designed. Each state is designated the same number of electors as Representatives and Senators (based on population). Each party chooses a nominee for president and then selects a salt of electors that promise their vote to the specific nominee. Each party chooses the designated number of electors for each state (if the state is allotted 9 electors, than each party chooses a slate of 9 electors).   When the public votes we are actually choosing a slate of electors in our state, instead of a candidate. After the public vote, the winning slate has the opportunity to vote for the president and vice president; those votes are the official presidential vote. To win the election, the candidate needs 270 of the 538 elector votes. (Hubert, 2008) The functional Electoral College works slightly different than originally intended; however, many see it as the best way to elect the presidency.

One of the biggest oppositions to the Electoral College system is the possibility of electing a president without the majority of popular votes. One way this could happen is if there were 3 or more candidates that split the electoral votes thinly so that there was not a candidate who received the required majority. (Kimberling, 2008) However, it is possible for one candidate to give his electoral votes to another before the electors meet to cast final votes. The House of Representatives could also select the president within the guidelines of the 12th Amendment. (Kimberling, 2008)   This situation concerns a lot of people informed on the Electoral College, however, this has only happened once in US history (1824) and is not an occurrence that can be the norm.

Another concern that those opposed to the Electoral College have is the risk of a "faithless Elector";   an elector who pledges to vote for his party's candidate but ultimately votes for another candidate. There have been 7 cases of this happening since the beginning of the use of the Electoral College.

By far the most concerning issue dealing with the Electoral College is the failure it has to reflect the true national popular vote. The "Winner take all" idea is reflected in the system, and regardless of a third party's ability to win a large percentage of votes nationally, the candidate can still end up with no electoral votes. This issue is what causes voter to feel like their vote does not count, and that only bipartisan thinking will succeed in the US elections. (Kimberling, 2008)

All of these concerns are legitimate and should be considered when reflecting on the voting system used in the country. However, none of these concerns are high enough to require an abolishment of the system. The issue of 3 or more candidates splitting the electoral votes is so rare, that one really cannot base any real concern off of that issue alone. Every piece of government and legislation has some kind of kink or possibility of a problem, even the most developed and trusted. Without a perfect world there will always be a possibility of a failure situation. There is always an exception to any rule. This is also true when speaking of the issue of the "faithless elector". With only 7 occurrences in the history of the US, this is no grounds for abolishment; especially when a "faithless elector" has never yet made a change in the outcome of any election. In most cases it has been proposed that when a "faithless elector" arises it is because the

individual is likely making a statement rather than a decision changer, often when the vote is going to a certain side almost unanimously. (Kimberling, 2008)

The only common argument against the Electoral College that is worth changing the system for really is the "Winner-Take- All" outcome. And although disconcerting to anyone who believes in the true democracy of every vote counting, it is not possible at this time in our history to change much of anything especially not quickly. It would be incredible and idealistic to have a system where every vote counts and have everything run smoothly, but unfortunately there will always be a reformation needed and always be a "better way". Although, we can always improve and always become better; which is the nature of the US and has been since the beginning, now is not the time to abolish the Electoral College or reform it. There are other, more important issues at hand, and the only way to continue to move forward is to prioritize. The "Winner-Takes-All" outcome of the current electoral college does make it difficult for a third party to win the election which creates a hopeless feeling in some voters minds, but instead of abolishing or reforming the system, the US as a whole should be focused on making the voters feel empowered and encouraging those who do not vote to register. If every citizen of voting age would actually participate in the election and not only participate but educate themselves on the candidates presented before them, a third party would have a greater chance at being recognized. The last thing that the US needs is for citizens to stop trying because of the hopelessness caused by the Electoral College, but abolishing it will not be a panacea for that reaction. Many defenders of the Electoral College focus on the unification that the use of the system brings to the country. The

writers of the constitution also considered this; that if we held a truly popular vote the country would split into so many small parties and groups that there would not be a unified winner. (Kimberling, 2008) The Electoral College favors a very small group of parties in order to create a unified front of the US, in a way creating a common hope for the voters. Too many groups would make it difficult to educate the voters, as well as encourage policy makers to shy away from compromise. The system encourages candidates to combine interests and focus on finding smaller sets of solutions to decide on, thus creating the stability our nation needs. With a large number of candidates and parties our legislature would change rapidly and often, with each new elected office most likely belonging to different party each time.

In conclusion, the Electoral College should continue to be the system of voting used in the US until the country has reached a more secure period and has a well developed plan that would be proven more efficient than the system already in place. Although much confusion surrounds the Electoral College, it was formed with the best interests of the country in mind. And if there were a larger focus on urging and helping all citizens of voting age to participate, it would be easier to understand the system as well as represent the country as a whole much better.

Dell, K. (2004, 11 8). *The Electoral College Explained*. Retrieved 4 2, 2012, from Time: http://www.time.com/time/election2004/article/0,18471,749496,00.html

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Kimberling, W. C. (2008). *The Electoral College*. Retrieved 04 2, 2012, from US Election Atlas: uselectionatlas.org/INFORMATION/INFORMATION/electcollege_procon.php