

WCSLD 2017

Suffice it to say that the results of the 2016 election were... unexpected. For the fifth time in our country's history, and the second time in recent memory, a presidential candidate won the election without securing the popular vote. Understandably, this has created a divide in America around the legitimacy of the electoral college and its ability to consistently reflect the will of the people. It is my opinion that the electoral college is outdated and that its flaws greatly outweigh its benefits. However, it is important to understand the arguments for the electoral system before the criticisms can be validated.

The most pressing need for the electoral system, as advocated by its supporters, is that without it, the voices of smaller states would be overpowered by states with highly-concentrated urban areas like New York and California. This mentality dates back to the Constitutional Founding, when smaller states like Connecticut would refuse to ratify documents because they felt that policies were skewed to benefit larger states like Virginia and New York. Therefore, each state was awarded two senators to represent their population to ensure that each state's interests would be equally considered. When the electoral college was formed, senators counted as electors to ensure that the president would not be representing only one state, a regulation that remains in place today.

Unfortunately, over time this has created a flawed phenomenon known as the "Small-State Bias." The Small-State Bias means that, in regard to population, smaller states are ridiculously over-represented. For example, South Dakota has a population of 850,000, which earns them a single representative; however, South Dakota gets three electors because each of their senators earns South Dakota an electoral vote. So, South Dakota's representation in the

presidential election is actually 200% higher than it should be, whereas a state like California, which has a population of 39 million (53 representatives), is barely affected by the addition of senatorial electoral votes (only about a 4% inflation).

You may be thinking that nothing has changed since the electoral college was created, so there is no reason to alter the system as it stands. That's actually a valid point - South Dakota would seemingly be irrelevant compared to a highly populated state when it comes to the National Popular Vote. However, the tradeoff for this is that many people's votes in highly populated states (and usually Democratic states) don't matter. Given the unpopularity of both presidential candidates in the 2016 race, many people protested by voting third party in states that would unquestionably vote along party lines; for example, some people in California felt no need to vote for Hillary Clinton because they knew their votes wouldn't matter since the state would vote Democratic anyway. This prompts an important question: **why should voters matter less when they live closer together?** It is incredible to think that if the population was spread more evenly throughout the country, Hillary Clinton would be our president.

Another argument made by proponents of the electoral college is that change would be too difficult and there would never be enough collective support to bring about an alternative because it would require a constitutional amendment. The constitution declares that states may choose how to assign their electoral votes, which is why some states like Maine and Nebraska have a complicated system for dividing electoral votes; the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact (NPVIC) is an alternative to the electoral college. The NPVIC is a written document that states can sign onto saying that they will cast their votes for the winner of the National Popular Vote; however, the NPVIC only goes into effect when over 270 electoral votes' worth of

states have signed on to the compact. The NPVIC currently has 165 electoral votes, so it is almost two-thirds of the way to replacing the electoral college. However, the states that have signed on are mostly Democratic ones; Republican states do not want to sign the compact because the electoral college has benefitted them twice in two decades, and battleground states do not want to sign because they like the attention they receive during election season. That being said, legislation is being proposed in Texas, Florida, and a handful of other states to sign onto the compact; if they do this, the electoral college will be all but confirmed useless.

Of course, electoral college advocates would still argue that smaller states would be useless in the grand scheme of things because states like California would greatly outweigh the importance of a state like Wyoming. In reality, most presidential elections come down to a few hundred thousand votes in favor of one candidate or the other, regardless of the electoral vote outcome. In 2000, Gore beat Bush by about 500,000 votes; the least populous state in America is Wyoming, with a population of 580,000. Smaller states would therefore still have the potential to swing an election, and EVERY voter would feel like their vote actually matters in a pure democratic process like the National Popular Vote. Running an election solely on popular vote would likely increase voter turnout for that same reason. In addition, candidates in the future would be forced to run a truly national campaign in order to win, instead of focusing on just a few battleground states each election year. And why shouldn't a campaign be a national effort? After all, we are electing a national representative.

In conclusion, the electoral college has become an increasingly flawed and outdated institution. The NPVIC is a viable alternative to the electoral college and would ensure that every vote is counted equally so that there is no Small-State Bias or unmotivated voters in large states.

While well-intentioned, the electoral college has led to two failures in 16 years which is unacceptable in this day and age. It is time to abolish the electoral college once and for all in favor of a more democratic election system.