

# The Electoral College System: A Political Ideology Gone Wild

by Joseph Oriko

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To my two nephews who love to read

Every Presidential election year there is always that question circulating around every person from the common voter to the law maker in Washington. This question that has become evident over the years is now more of a debate than anything. It has not however divided the conservatives from the liberals or vice versa, but rather it exempts the states and the federal law makers from floating in one boat, so to say, politically. The question of keeping the Electoral College has spurred alternative systems of electing the president, yet state legislators and federal law makers have not taken the full initiative to amend the constitution by forming a solid system for future elections.

When the Founders of the Nation sat down to make a legit way of conduct in the matter of what was good for all the states, they did not however agree on how to elect the president. Some argued that the President should be elected in Congress while others proposed direct election by the people. These options were also limited by themselves; there were the qualifications to vote where land owners and the educated had a better representation than the lesser people. In the end, the Electoral College system of voting became the compromise. Through the Electoral College system there are presently five hundred and thirty eight electoral votes by the similar number of members that are generated by all states (Cooper, 2). Each state's number of electors is the same as the number of its Representatives and its two Senators in Washington, except for District of Columbia that has three electors. The Constitution grants that "no Senator or Representative, or person holding an Office of Trust or profit under the United States, shall be appointed an Elector" (U.S. Const. art. II, § 1, cl. 2) and so these electors are often chosen by the parties they represent at the party conventions, party primaries, or organizational meetings depending on the legislations set forth by the states they represent.

The electors meet in the state capitol on the first Monday after the second Wednesday in December and vote usual in accordance with the popular vote. It is rare that they vote according to their personal wills which when they do, they do not face any criminal charges apart from fines that do not exceed at least \$ 1, 000. It is known that throughout the history of Electoral College, only nine electors out of about 18, 000 have violated their pledges (Cooper, 3). Upon casting their votes, they then submit the sealed votes to the president of the Senate who reads the results before a joint session of

Congress. If at all no President is determined, the election goes to the new House that takes office, the House chooses from the top three electoral votes cast by the electors with each state having one vote, the winner needs 26 state delegation votes to win. If no progress is made then it moves to the new Senate that votes by each individual, unlike by one vote by state done in the House.

The Electoral College system can only go as far as it was designed to go. When push comes to shove and no President is elected through the Electoral College system by January 20<sup>th</sup> after the election year, the whole ordeal takes a whole other ball game. As stated in the constitution, the acting President leaves office for the Speaker of the House. If at all the Speaker of the House can not serve as President, then the President Pro Tempore of the Senate becomes the President of United States. The formation of the Electoral College as we have seen from the above characteristics of its implementations did whatever it took to put into effect a solid system of Government function. Although however the system in the end does run into lack of continues of the selection of the President, chances are that the probability of reaching extremes to determine a leader in this system can not be of great challenge or exhaustion beyond the given. In the words of Alexander Hamilton, the Electoral College system makes sure that "the office of President will seldom fall to the lot of any man who is not in eminent degree endowed with the requisite qualifications."

Even though the Electoral College system does provide for a flow of events when it comes to Presidential appointments, it however does not seem to be the common objective in a complete democratic choice. Perhaps democracy is not winner takes all when the loser might have won the election by getting "more votes". Democracy should

be winning by getting “more votes” both popularly and electoral-ly and that is something that the Electoral College system has not provided when it comes to electing Presidents in the United States. One can look at the past Presidential elections and clearly determine that the system of appointment does not provide for a pure set of choice for the individual voter; if most people vote for the one candidate it does not seem to be realistic that winning is counted by the state vote rather than the popular national vote.

So what can “it” do to elections? Electoral College system influences all Presidential elections, not for the obvious appointment choice it presents when electing the leader but also it does confuse what is popular from what is presented from state to state. In any given crucial election when any Presidential candidate dreams of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue chances are that unless he or she wins and takes all the votes through “the winner takes all” policy stated in the Electoral College theory, he or she might as well forget about it and quit running. Quitting however here is not a good choice after all since any candidate can lose the popular vote, win the electoral, and be President. Just like that.

In 2000 when Bush faced Gore in Florida the race took to the wire with Electoral College system being the front runner at the finish line to pick up the winner. It quickly became a fact that even though Al Gore had more popular votes than George W, Bush still won the electoral vote to become President. How then can the winner candidate win and lose at the same time in one election? Many people still see the system as just and constitutional. “Because the Constitution requires popular election of the President in each of the states, it is a fact that Gore received more votes than Bush only if one thinks that the Constitution's federal method of counting should be replaced by the national

method of counting...so the alleged fact that Al Gore received more popular votes conceals the preference that "more" should mean "more of the popular vote counted as a national total" (Glenn, 7).” Popularity may apply to that which is common; Electoral College system however does not, it is influenced by the states and run by the few who make the final choice. In other words “it is an idea loosely based on classical structures found in the Roman Republic and ancient Greece. Virtually invented for the occasion, the Electoral College would create a council of wise old men in each state elites who would elect a president by majority vote or, failing to produce a majority, produce a list of five finalists (Young, 9).”

The Gore Bush Electoral College campaign is not the only floating boat in the unknown wonderland, United States government history has it that such Presidential elections such as that of Kennedy and Nixon in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and again George W and John Kerry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century have been biased by Electoral College system. The later having followed the Bush Gore 2000 saga in Florida, came through the wire in Ohio at the 2004 Presidential election; the whole nine yard line-up of fifty states and their voters’ choice had to be determined by one state. Just another reassurance of the good intentions the good old system presents. In 1824 Andrew Jackson won the popular vote and had a plurality in the Electoral College, however, John Quincy Adams did win the Electoral College to become President. Elections of 1800 between Thomas Jefferson and Federalist John Adams, 1888’s Grover Cleveland’s and Benjamin Harrison’s, and Samuel Tilden’s candidacy in 1876 all are known to have been Presidential races influenced by the Electoral College system. The popular candidate wins the popular vote but does not

became President because the Electoral College vote gives the other candidate a right to take all.

This debate, one that has evolved into the so called the voter's "Great Debate", can not be narrated over and over without solutions. Alternatives to the system must be put into implementation let alone be proposed and proposed a million times as it has been. "Electoral college reform is a complex, multifaceted subject, involving judgment concerning political principles as well as decisions about practical measures and the likely effect of any proposed revision. Using the Electoral College to elect the president is a state-related intermediate step between the act of voting by the people and actual election of the president" (Jefferson-Jenkins, 19). If at all worst is worst has it has already become, it should be upon the states to ratify their legislations for the greater cause. Nebraska and Maine already are doing it differently by their form of Electoral College system. Other states are now also just realizing the need; Colorado's proposed Amendment 36 of Selection of Presidential Electors is an example framework that looks up to the popular voter's choice state widely as opposed to electors announcing the winner takes all policy originally used. Section 13.2 of the proposal states that "the total number of electoral voters to which Colorado is entitled shall be divide among the Presidential tickets on the general election ballot, based upon the popular proportional share of the total statewide ballots cast for Bach Presidential ticket." The winner wins by winning most of the votes, period.

If at all the Electoral College system is to be kept, it should only be logical that since the popular vote really is a representation of true values of the general voters' choice, the states should consider using it fully only as a framework for the Electoral College. That is

each state elector votes for the winner of the national popular vote. In this way the President will directly be elected by the populous not by the electors that really are but a representation of a balance of power between them, the select few, and the popular regular citizen.

The question of electing the President is one that should involve the Federal Government, the States, and the individual voter's will. Both the Federal and the States' involvement are to make the elections run smoothly while the voter votes at will. There will be a proper and better way of electing the President only through a precise system that could be by either a direct popular choice, by electors voting for the national popular vote winner, or by any other proper way that demonstrates the voter's will while the Federal and State Governments collaborates in helping count that will.

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