Electoral College Essay, Research Paper

Electoral College

The Electoral College, friend or foe? The answer behind this question is in the minds of those that understand it. Whether it be a “friend” or a “foe” there will always be opposing sides and a controversial verse. Since the political circumstance of today, the Electoral College seems to be the topic in every conversation and the thesis to every essay. The uncontrollable desire to know the truth behind the mystery is stirring in the minds of the people in the United States of America. With the 2000 Elections underway sides are beginning to be taken among the people. Many oppose the Electoral College because of the fact that unknowing electors choose their leader and many support it because it was created by the founding fathers. Both sides are arguable and not one side is right. The question is: Can a system be created to satisfy both sides of the American public? The founding fathers created the Electoral College for many reasons. One of the reasons was to give the people the right to have a say on who becomes president and another reason was to give congress the right to choose as well. At the time of the 1787 Constitutional Convention this was a topic that aroused many opposing ideas and opinions. They had three choices, to allow the public direct elections, grant congress the right to elect the president or give electors the privilege of selecting the countries leader. What they were trying to do was to prevent absolute power. Since they had their taste of King George’s way of ruling they were afraid that if they let one group of people choose the president then that group would gain too much power or the president elected would feel too powerful. After many disputes and disagreements the delegates finally reached a decision. Consequently, they created a complex “filtering” process known as the Electoral College. This way both the people and congress could elect the president, or at least that was what was intended. The structure of the Electoral College was similar to that of the Centurial Assembly system of the Roman Republic. “Under that system, the adult male citizens of Rome were divided, according to their wealth, into groups of 100 (called Centuries). Each group of 100 was entitled to cast only one vote either in favor of against proposals submitted to them by the Roman Senate.” – as stated by William C. Kimberling, Deputy Director FEC Office of Election Administration. The Founding Fathers obviously knew if the Centurial Assembly worked for the Roman Republic because they were well schooled in ancient history, but were they sure if this ancient system of elections worked for their present-forever changing day? In order to answer that question they had to put it to the test. The Electoral College is made up of 538 members. Each member represents a state. The electors are equal to the number of representatives and senators a state has. For example if a state has 20 representatives and senators (always 2) than it has 22 electors. But in order to maintain balance between the legislative and executive branches no member of Congress and employees of the Federal Government can become electors. On the Tuesday following the first Monday of November the people in each state cast their votes or in other words cast their ballots for the party slate of Electors representing their choice for president. The party slate with the most votes wins that state’s Electors, meaning that the presidential ticket with the majority votes in a state wins all the Electors of that state. On the Monday following the second Wednesday of December the Electors meet in their state capitals and cast their votes, one for president and one for vice president. The completed votes are then sealed and sent to the President of the Senate, which is the Vice President of the U.S, who then opens and reads the result of the votes on the following January 6 to both houses of Congress. The candidate for president with the most votes (270 or higher) wins the election and is declared president. The vice-presidential candidate with the absolute majority of votes is declared vice-president. In a case where there is no absolute majority of electoral votes for president. The U.S House of Representatives selects the president by only one vote being casted from each state. The majority then wins. A similar method is used when there is a tie or there is no absolute majority between the vice-presidential candidates; it is sent to the Senate instead of the House of Representatives. Then when every thing is finalized at noon on January 20 the elected president and vice-president are sworn into office. The process of electing a President is a long and troublesome method. The Electoral College has had its time in the spot light not just now with the 2000 elections but in other times, such as the Elections of 1800 and 1888. In the Elections of 1800, Democratic-Republican Thomas Jefferson ran for president with Federalist Aaron Burr as his running mate. Running against them was Federalist John Adams and Federalist Charles C. Pinckney. This election was considered the “Revolution of 1800″ because of its unusual occurrence. Electors had to place two votes, one for president the other for vice-president. On their ballot the Electors had to indicate the vote was for president or vice-president. The one with the absolute majority of the time would become president, the runner up would be vice president. When the presidential Electors went to cast their vote they did not distinguish between presidential candidate and vice-presidential candidate. Therefore, Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr both received the same number of electoral votes, 73, defeating their opponents. Some of the Electors thought they were making a vice-presidential vote but no one did. This unusual tie was sent to the House of Representatives to make the decision. Weeks passed and no one received the absolute majority (9 states). After 35 ballots and the convincing nature of Federalist Alexander Hamilton, on the 36th ballot Thomas Jefferson was finally declared President. Aaron Burr as runner up became Vice-President. Because of this election the 12 Amendment was passed. This amendment made Electors cast separate ballots for President and Vice- President in order to avoid confusion such as the one above. It also states that the votes would be counted separately in front of Congress by the president of the Senate. In order to win there must be a majority vote. The election of 1800 definitely made a lasting impact on the United States. Because of that election the 12th Amendment was added to the Constitution. Many other elections after that one brought up a lot of confusing and new obstacles. The Election of 1888 is the only obvious instance where the Electoral College went against the popular vote. Republican Benjamin Harrison and Democratic Grover Cleveland ran against each other in this tight race. The popular vote was for Grover Cleveland with 100,000 votes over Benjamin Harrison. When it came time for the Electors to cast their vote Benjamin Harrison, the original loser, won the election with 65 more Electoral votes than Grover Cleveland, 233 to 168. He was inaugurated the 23rd president of the United States. The controversial issue of the Electoral College began with the first elections it held. Due to the present day election problem, it is evident to see that the people want something done about the “Constitutional” Electoral College. Those who are for the Electoral College have their reasons such as it balances the power between the people and the government, it was started by the Founding Fathers of the Constitution and it gives equal say to the small states so the large states don’t control the entire election. Though they have reasonable views, every reason there is equally arguable. For instance their argument stating that the Electoral College balances the power between the people and the government is false. How could it balance out the power between the people and government if a popular vote from the people is not even considered the end of an election, while the Electors basically control the election? It is obvious to see that the people’s vote is not counted because if it was then all it would take to elect a president would be a popular vote. As I see it there are many problems in the current electoral college system. First a president can be elected even if it is not what the people want. For instance the current elections (2000) can precisely prove my point. Democrat Al Gore won the popular vote with a slim difference of Republican George W. Bush’s votes. Even though it was a slim difference, he won the popular vote nonetheless. Instead of granting Gore the presidency it seems that the lucky Bush will be crowned “king”. How important is the peoples vote? Another problem is that the electors that go against their designated vote are not punished. They are holding a duty and a responsibility for the people and yet when they disappoint and backstab them they are not punished or even fined. The destiny of The United States of America is in the palms of those electors. “There’s no justification for the Electoral College–none”, says George C. Edwards III, director of the Center for Presidential Studies at Texas A&M University. “ We have invested so much in this nation in the principle of `one person, one vote’. We’ve expanded the franchise to make sure that everyone votes– And for someone– no matter who wins the popular vote– to quite legally take the presidency, entirely contrary to democratic principles, is very hard to justify.” Many people now a days feel the abolishment of the Electoral College should be done. Senator- elect Hillary Rodham Clinton called for eliminating the Electoral College, and polls show that many Americans share her view. Not only have the polls shown but so has a government official, a person filled with knowledge on this constitutional and governmental subject, that an Electoral College can only do us harm. Many times in U.S history has the Electoral College let the American public down, 15 times to be exact has the electoral college voted someone in to the presidency that was against the popular vote. Unfortunately there may be a 16th time. Without the Electoral College there wouldn’t be a 16th time or any more “times” at all. In conclusion I feel the Electoral College should be abolished. Not only would it guarantee a popular vote election but it would end all the major confusion and ruckus a “normal” election usually has. “The American `democracy’ has existed for over 200 years, and citizens are ready, as they have been for decades, if not centuries, to finally control their own country. ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!” (Ben Wildavsky author of “School of Hard Knocks”)

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