ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CONTEST OF 2000

Abstract

The Electoral College is a “compromise between election of the President by a vote in Congress and election of the President by a popular vote of qualified citizens.”[[1]](#footnote-1) This system was created to allow each state to have an equal voice when compared to the amount of citizens within each state. Although, the Electoral College has overall good intentions, many citizens within the United States do not understand how it works and where their votes matter. In the 2000 Presidential Election between Al Gore and former President Bush, was considered a very noteworthy election due to the controversy over the awarding of Florida's 25 electoral votes. There was recount process within the state and the candidate that received fewer popular votes than the runner-up became President. This election was one of the four elections where the electoral vote did not reflect the popular vote.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Al Gore won half a million more votes than his Republican rival, he was forced to endure the sight of George Bush inaugurated as the 43rd president of the United States (Knight 2006). The United States is a federal republic and not a democracy. The system by which the president is chosen – the Electoral College was biased in favor of the Republican Party. Of the states carried by Al Gore in the 2000 presidential election, New York, and Pennsylvania lost two of their Electors Connecticut, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin lost one each. Only California gained an Elector, making a net loss of seven Electors.

Accordingly, if Bush had won the same states on 2000 census figures, he would have beaten Gore by 278 to 260 votes in the Electoral College. The majority of 18 votes, as opposed to the actual wafer-thin margin. If Gore had carried New Hampshire, which slipped away by less than 2% of the vote, in the existing electoral map, he would have won the election. The census figures are the latest indication of the long-term decline in the political position of the Democratic Party. Throughout the 20'th Century, the Heartland Democratic states of the Midwest and Northeast have consistently exported people and voters to the Republican South and West (Bakin 2001). This shifting balance of the population is reflected in the Electoral College. The Democratic Party is faced with the unpleasant choice of continuing to fight for a declining liberal base, or tacking right to be competitive in the growth states and thereby encouraging further ultra-leftist third parties in the Nader mould.

It's impossible for a Republican to get blown out in the Electoral College the way Democratic candidates were kicked out in 1972 and 1984. George Bush senior thrashed Michael Dukakis in 1988 by 7.8% of the popular vote and by a range margin of 426 to 111 votes in the Electoral College. Bill Clinton beat Bob Dole in 1996 by a slightly wider popular vote margin – 8.7% – that later translated into a smaller majority in the Electoral College, 379 to 159. So, while Republicans have won more than three-quarters of the votes in the Electoral College since World War II, Lyndon Johnson is the only one who has achieved that feat for the Democratic Party since Republican Electors are over-represented in the Electoral College. Gore carried California, which had a surplus population of 29,760,021 on 1990 census figures, and 54 Electors in the Electoral College the previous year. The twelve Rocky Mountain and Great Plains states that Bush carried namely Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming – collectively had a population of only 20,680,055, yet when put together they had 60 Electors in the Electoral College last year (Romer 2006).

Therefore, a vote in the Electoral College was much cheaper for Bush than for Gore. An Elector in California represented 551,111 voters in the Electoral College last year, an Elector in North Dakota represented only 212,933 voters while An Elector in New York represented 545,165 voters in the Electoral College last year – an Elector in Wyoming represented only 151,196 voters. And so on.The outcome of 2000 presidential election could have easily been even more perverse. Gore won Oregon by less than 8,000 votes, Wisconsin and Iowa by less than 4,000, and New Mexico by less than 500. Slight shifts would have given them to Bush, padding his margin in the Electoral College to 301 to 237, while still leaving Gore more than 500,000 votes ahead in the popular count (Knight 2006).

Public opinion polls indicated that Americans favored abolishing the Electoral College by majorities of 58% in 1967, 81% in 1968, 75% in 1981, and 61% in 1987. Polls taken immediately after the election showed that large majorities favored an amendment to the Constitution that would allow for popular election of the president. Interestingly, in a CNN/USA Today Gallup poll 77% of Gore voters favored such an amendment, but only 44% of Bush voters did so.

Politicians scramble to seize that mood. Within days of her own election, Hillary Clinton quoted that "I believe strongly that in a democracy, we should respect the will of the people and to me, which means it's time to do away with the Electoral College and move to the popular election of our president." In response to Senator Clinton, the Republican Senator Mitch McConnell argued: "If we do away with the Electoral College, an awful lot of states would never get a visit from a presidential candidate." (Of course, an awful lot of states never get a visit from a presidential candidate now – New York, for exam.

The prospect of reforming the Electoral College goes to the heart of the federal structure of the United States. Under the most common method for amending the Constitution, an amendment must be proposed by a two-thirds majority in both houses of Congress and then ratified by three-quarters of the states. And that's where the partisan fun begins, because the state legislatures are very aware of the fact that the Electoral College provides a partisan advantage for the Republican Party (Bakin 2001). The very states which have the most to lose from the abolition of the Electoral College – Wyoming, North Dakota, Montana, Utah, all the thinly populated states which stretch across the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains – are the very states which provide the Republican Party with its bedrock support.

The thin States are the ones that gave Bush the presidency, and it was that states that the federal system was designed to protect. It was a pervasive fear throughout the thin states that if the president were chosen by direct election, whatever influence they retain through their disproportionate strength in the Electoral College would disappear, swamped beneath the massive populations of the mega-states. And it is the thin states that make it so difficult to get the required three-quarters majority necessary to ratify an amendment to the Constitution (Romer 2006). The thin States killed the Equal Rights Amendment, even though polls consistently showed a popular majority supported that proposal becoming law. Ironically, they could again use their disproportionate weight, compared to population, to kill an amendment intended to better represent the popular will. It will take more than just one rogue election to galvanize any change to the system.

Bibliography

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1. <https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/about.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.270towin.com/2000_Election/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)