

The Electoral College

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Stunning title, isn't it? I'll do my best to make this dry topic a little easier on you. If I fail, please bear with me and suffer through to the end. It's actually sort of important.

So, there has been a lot of chatter recently about this non-collegiate thing called the Electoral College. The current rant, as it has been every 4 years, is that we need to get rid of it. I mean, really, they don't even offer classes!

Unfortunately, we really do need it ... wait, don't go yet. Let me tell you why. Then you can disagree if you want.

The people who want to get rid of the electoral college often cite the Great American Democracy and the need to elect a President by the *Voice of the People* instead of leaving it to people we've never met. That observation shines light on the first part of the misunderstanding. Specifically, we don't have a Great American Democracy, and furthermore, we don't want one.

Democracy, or the rule by the majority opinion, is unsustainable. You see, people are generally selfish in nature. Not all the people and not all the time, but there is a tendency to think of ourselves before others and before the well-being of the nation at large. It's natural. It's biological (survival depends on it). It's also manageable.

For example: If the majority ruled all the time, gay marriage would still be illegal in most states and certainly in Florida. The Constitution recognizes this little problem and gives us a hybrid government known as a democratic republic. What that means is that representatives of the people (in whatever office) are selected by popular vote but then they get to do what they feel is right once they are in office. If the office is part of a larger body, say the legislature, instead of a singular office, such as the Attorney General, then the workings of that larger body also are conducted by majority vote.

Many readers may, at this point, think that I just made the case for presidential election by popular vote, but I didn't. You see, the other part of the misunderstanding is that the President is in a "representative" office. He (or she) is not. He (or she) is in a management position and if he (or she) were to represent anyone, it would be Congress, not the people.

Okay, hang in there. We're getting close to the end. The President's job is to do (implement) the bidding (as given to him in laws) of the body that *does* represent the people: the Congress.

Let's take a business or corporate structure as an analogy to Congress and the Presidency. In fact, the structures are almost exactly the same. In corporate America, the Board of Directors makes the big decisions and expects the Chairman and his staff to carry them out. In the Constitution, Congressmen

are like the board of directors. They make the laws and expect the President and his administration to implement them.

In corporate America, the Chairman (CEO, President of the Board, etc.) is elected by the other directors. In America, the President is elected by the states, each state having a voice on the board of directors of the nation through their members of Congress. The states elect the President through the votes of the electors of the Electoral College. The electors make their decision on who shall be President based on the wishes of the people of each state, the shareholders, if you will.

The number of electors in a given state varies depending on the number of people in the state. The state legislature determines whether or not the electors must all vote for the winner of the state's popular vote or whether the electors can be split to reflect the ratio of votes cast within the state.

The reason this is important is because without the buffer of electors, the election of a president becomes a popularity contest. Candidates will make promises that might be absurd, but which resonate with the self-interest of the voter. If the voter cannot put the well-being of the state or the nation above his (or her) own, then we have a democracy anyway. If we want to change something, we should change the fact that we really don't know who these electors are. We might want to know if we can trust them.