

## In Opposition of the Electoral College

“Democracy is not freedom. Democracy is two wolves and a lamb voting on what to eat for lunch.” The original speaker of this quote is unknown, though is often ascribed to Ben Franklin or Thomas Jefferson, in defense of the U.S.’s electoral college. It colorfully illustrates the dangers of direct democracy, or a popular vote, that throughout history has devolved into tyranny: a tyranny of the majority. This argument for the electoral college’s existence is perhaps one of the few that has weight amongst the college’s innumerable faults: its inherent undemocratic nature, its history of systemic racism, and the obvious power imbalance of the elector’s votes. But tyranny comes in many different forms.

The operations of the electoral college today cannot be understood without considering its origins. This idea of “protecting from the tyranny of the majority” was a backdrop for the most significant reason for the electoral college’s existence: race. In the article “The Electoral College’s Racist Origins” by Wilfred Codrington III of the *Atlantic*, he notes “Commentators today tend to downplay the extent to which race and slavery contributed to the Framers’ creation of the Electoral College, in effect whitewashing history: Of the considerations that factored into the Framers’ calculus, race and slavery were perhaps the foremost.” The populations of the north and the south during this time were roughly equal, but the problem was this: “roughly one-third of those living in the South were held in bondage,” (Codrington III, Paragraph 7.) The three-fifths compromise counted those enslaved in the population, but of course they could not vote. If the popular vote were to be the deciding factor in elections, the south would constantly be at a disadvantage, because of the lesser amount of land-owning white men. For instance, “after the 1790 census, Virginia got 21 electoral votes and Pennsylvania got 15, though both were home to just over 110,000 free white male adults, who were then the only Americans allowed to vote.

That's because Virginia had 292,627 enslaved residents, to Pennsylvania's 3,737, the country's very first census shows,” states William Blake of the *Salon* in his article “Electoral College Benefits Whiter States, Study Shows.” The electoral college put the southern states at an advantage, which diminished their fear of being under the perceived future tyrannical rule of the north.

Why would the Electoral College be unfair today if slavery has been abolished and the citizens of the U.S. of A. are on equal playing fields? To begin with, one must stop asserting that everyone in America is on an equal playing field; to stop pretending racism and bias is a thing of the past. If they are of rational mind, anyone should be able to understand that the playing field is heavily tilted. Second, the electoral college purposefully continues to let some votes be much more powerful than others. For example, “An adult in Wyoming has four times the influence on the Electoral College of an adult in Florida,” (Blake, Line 10.) This is because of the tiny population of Wyoming compared with the disproportionate amount of electoral votes it has: Around 6.74 electoral votes per million adult residents(1), compared to Florida which has 1.68 electoral votes per million adult residents(2). With votes in red states like Wyoming, Nebraska, the Dakotas, and Montana already being worth much more because of the disproportionate electoral votes to population, the odds already begin to stack up against blue states. But it goes much deeper. According to Codrington, “Because the concentration of black people is highest in the South, their preferred presidential candidate is virtually assured to lose their home states’ electoral votes. Despite black voting patterns to the contrary, five of the six states whose populations are 25 percent or more black have been reliably red in recent presidential elections. Three of those states have not voted for a Democrat in more than four decades. **Under the Electoral College, black votes are submerged,**”(Codrington, Paragraph 12.) Through this one

begins to understand how the power of democrats is systematically diluted under the Electoral College.

To illustrate this imbalanced distribution of power, it helps to visualize the building blocks of the voters not as states but as localities. When looking at the political map under the Electoral College, we see three things: the red states, the blue states, and the swing states. But under the popular vote we would be looking on a smaller scale, focusing on the places with the higher population density (which are almost all democrat.) As there becomes increasingly fewer swing states, the power of the red states becomes higher, because of the high concentration of democrats in urban areas. It's not state versus state, it locality versus locality, because states are groups of localities. Each state most likely has at least one democrat majority locality (its capital, or largest city, and other areas with racial minorities) but because of how it is usually grouped with the other localities and how they are represented in the Electoral college, the power of that large city is diluted by the less populous, red localities surrounding it. For instance, Hillary Clinton won 34.72% of the popular vote in Tennessee in 2016, with her number of votes being 870,695 to Trump's 1,522,925(3). These democrat votes came largely from Memphis and Nashville, the two most blue cities in the state. Despite this, all eleven of Tennessee's electoral votes were given to Trump(4). 34.72% is not an insignificant percentage, but under the electoral college, it means nothing. Not only is this blatantly unfair, its completely undemocratic, which is supposedly valued in American politics.

This dilution of power has resulted in the contradictory results that have reinvigorated the arguments against the electoral college once again: the popular vote loser winning the electoral vote. This is perhaps not the most sinister, but the most obvious fault in the electoral college. If the electors were really meant to represent the people, this would not happen, but no; this is on

purpose. Jacob Wiending of Paste Magazine explains the Bombshell Report in his article, “10 Reasons Why We Should Abolish the Electoral College.” The bombshell report is a study from the “National Bureau of Economic Research (a nonprofit economic research organization with [29](#) Nobel Prize winners in economics)” (Wiending, Paragraph 1.) This study found that on average, **“the popular vote winner should lose the electoral college 40% of the time in elections decided by two million votes or less.** To put that figure in some context, **only four American cities...have more than two million residents,**” (Wiending, Paragraph 2.) This means that the 3 million votes that Hillary won by is **not** some negligible amount. This quote also shows that the argument that cries, “New York and California will dominate every election!” is dubious in the current system. The advantage the Electoral College gives to Republicans is huge. Wiending goes on to say: “The study is absolutely stunning—stating that Republicans are expected to win 65% of presidential races in which they narrowly lose the popular vote, thanks to the concentration of Democrats in solid blue states,” (Wiending, Paragraph 4.) It seems that the electoral college could allow America to fall into a very different type of tyranny, when one group seems to hold all the power.

As stated earlier, the tyranny of the majority is generally one of the only arguments presented with any value for a system like the electoral college. A country in which the millions have no regards for the thousands is one to be feared, but the other defenses tend to be easily refuted. Another popular defense includes the “Smaller states get an equal voice” argument. This has two components; of course, arguing for the voting power of less populous states that has already proven itself corrupt, and the complaint that is “If the popular vote alone decided elections, the presidential candidates would rarely visit those[less populous] states or consider the needs of rural residents in their policy platforms,” (Robert Longley, “Reasons to Keep the

Electoral College”, Paragraph 13.) This argument(though appearing valid at first glance) is nonsensical because of the increasingly slim number of swing states(now only around 12.(5)) Because every other state is fixed(meaning it is always red/blue respectively in every election) candidates are not required to campaign there anyways. In fact, “Three-quarters of Americans live in states where most of the major parties’ presidential candidates do not campaign,” (Codrington, Paragraph 13.) Another pro-Electoral College Argument is the preservation of federalism. Robert Longley states in the same article, “The Founding Fathers also felt the Electoral College system would enforce the concept of federalism—the division and sharing of powers between the state and national governments. Under the Constitution, the people are empowered to choose, through a direct popular election, the men and women who represent them in their state legislatures and in the United States Congress. The states, through the Electoral College, are empowered to choose the president and vice president.” This is true to the extent that the states do indeed choose the president through their electors, but as has already been established, these electors do not truly or accurately represent the people. If the electors do not represent the people, they do not have any basis for electing the president in the first place. If the electoral college was taken away, it would not strip the states of their powers, it would merely provide a fairer way of electing the president.

The reason the tyranny of the majority is so dangerous is highlighted in the article “America Is Not A Democracy, And We Don’t Want It To Be.” By David Weinberger of the *Federalist*. He says, “To be sure, majority rule is a key principle of the U.S. government. It was never intended, however, to be the *only* principle,” (Weinberger, Paragraph 6.) He explains that human nature is irrational, referencing Plato’s criticism of “radical democracy...Unrestrained freedom, he argued, leads people to overindulge their appetites and act on foolish

impulses,”(Weinberger, Paragraph 9.) By itself, this assertion is vague enough to be true in many circumstances. After this, his argument begins to conflict with itself. Weinberger uses the French Revolution as an example of pure democracy going horribly wrong, which happened around the time of America’s formation, therefore influencing the founding fathers’ decisions when creating the electoral system. He says, “As we’ve learned from the outcome of the French Revolution, what began as a democratic Enlightenment project to fulfill the ‘rights of man’ and achieve total equality and freedom culminated in the ‘common folk’ beheading King Louis XVI and vicious mob rule...Thankfully, our framers were wiser than their French counterparts were. Drawing upon history from ancient Greece and Rome, John Adams warned posterity to “Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself,” (Weinberger, Paragraph 10-12.) This argument is dishonest(and kind of hilarious) for two reasons. The first is that it’s implying the cause of the French Revolution is its “democracy” and not the massive socio-economic inequity that was cause by the estate system and the rise of the bourgeoisie. The second, and somewhat comical reason is that by defending the system that benefits mainly the privileged class, he is seems to be the one of those that would be getting guillotined in the circumstance he proposes.

If the electoral college is not abolished, it should be severely reformed. If one claims to care about democracy and fairness, that can easily be seen. If democracy is two wolves and a lamb voting on what to eat for lunch, America under the electoral college has divided the pack of wolves among a flock of sheep and has forced them to starve. If “We the People” are truly afraid of tyranny, shouldn’t the tyranny of the minority be just as terrifying?

***Word Count(not including the works cited page): 1964***

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