



Is the Electoral College a Good Thing?

By Jean Ann Gray, CSG student

As someone who had never really thought much about our political system in the U.S, I was drawn to the 2016 Presidential election as never before. I knew what the Electoral College was, but in the 2000 election between George W. Bush and Albert Gore Jr., when Gore won the popular vote but not the electoral votes, I remember thinking it was unfair to Gore for Bush to win the Presidency.

In the 2016 election, I was more involved, opinionated and became more informed about the candidates and the process. When it came to the actual election, I watched as electoral votes stacked up for Donald Trump and popular votes increased for Hillary Clinton. Because of the way the election played out with Trump receiving an overwhelming number of electoral votes, and Clinton receiving a somewhat hefty majority of popular votes, I decided it was time to understand the Electoral College process better.

How does the Electoral College makes sense when it seems reasonable that the person with the most popular votes should win the election?

What really piqued my interest were the maps of election results, published by various media. These maps led me to think the Electoral College may be a good thing because it was not right for the concentration of people living in the cities to decide what's best for people living in rural areas.

Data posted at brilliantmaps.com states that *“Donald Trump won approximately 2,600 counties (about 84% of the nation) to Clinton’s 500. Clinton did win 88 of the 100 largest counties. If you take the 100 largest counties out of the equation, Clinton would have lost by 11.5 million votes.”* Brilliantmaps.com also noted that Clinton’s *“votes were concentrated in only a few states whereas Trump’s votes came from a*

wide enough geographic to capture the Electoral College.” Then I began researching ‘why the Electoral College?’

A [commentary](#) in Investor’s Business Daily by John Merline published 12/16/2016 lays out how Clinton’s overall popular vote margin is entirely due to the state of California where Clinton received 4.3 million more votes than Trump. Clinton’s nationwide popular vote exceeded Trumps by almost 2.9 million. Even with these numbers, about half of the counties in California voted Republican. The majority of the Democratic votes were around the Los Angeles & San Francisco areas. Merline continues, *“California is the exception that proves the true genius of the Electoral College – which was designed to prevent regional candidates from dominating national elections.”*

The U.S. is a large country and I believe the Electoral College serves it well by inserting a measure of fairness, not only in considering what the populace is in favor of, but also considering where they live. The differences between rural and large city votes for the two candidates in the last Presidential election clearly reflect the different ways that Americans live and the values they live by.

As a young person I lived in a rural area. My adult life was spent in a large metropolitan area. By having lived in both areas, I understand that lifestyle and day-to-day issues can be very different, depending on your address and the makeup of the general population in the area. What is important to someone living and working in a rural farming area is probably not an issue to a person living in a metropolitan area. The same was true during the founding era as it has been in every civilization throughout history. I believe our Electoral College was created with great forethought and common sense to even out the disparity between city and rural issues and opinions.

George F. Will is quoted in [Tara Ross’s](#) book, [“Enlightened Democracy: The Case for the Electoral College”](#): *“Political scientist Judith Best notes that the electoral-vote system, combined with winner-take-all allocation, creates a “distribution condition”. Candidates cannot just pile up popular votes in the most populous states. The federal principle, Judith Best argues, prevents factions—racial, religious, economic—from uniting their votes across state lines. It confines them within little republics and forces them to compromise early and often with their fellow state citizens.”*

Will continues, *“America has direct popular election of Presidents, but has it within the states. As Judith Best says, the states are not mere administrative agencies for a*

unitary government; they are components of a compound—a federal-republic...The constitution provides for the election of Presidents by states' electoral votes, rather than individual popular votes, for an important reason: It enables citizens of a heterogeneous, free society to live peacefully alongside each other...The electoral vote system shapes the character of presidential majorities, making it unlikely they will be geographically or ideologically narrow."

I agree the Electoral College system is a good solution for a nation as large and diverse as the U.S. Because of the genius of this system, urban and rural areas, as well as large and small states are all represented in the office of the President. I agree with Tara Ross when she states *"The Electoral College ensures that a presidential candidate develop a national base. They can't win if they are relying too heavily on specific regions or special interest groups."* Ross continues, *"The Electoral College made it nearly impossible for a presidential candidate to rely upon unreasonable or regional majorities at the expense of minorities or the small states. Instead, a candidate would need to generate national support before he could be elected."*

The proper function of the Electoral College, the way our Framers so wisely designed it, is exactly what happened in the 2016 presidential election.

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