

1-1-2008

2008: Public Response Submissions

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Recommended Citation

"2008: Public Response Submissions" (2008). *CACTUS--Citizens' Assembly for Critical Thinking About the United States*. Paper 9.
<http://encompass.eku.edu/cactus/9>

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2008 Public Response Submissions

Is it time to change the way we elect the President?

- Does the electoral college work?
 - Is it democratic?
 - Should there be a direct popular vote for the president?
 - Are "faithless electors" an accident waiting to happen?
-

What people think:

Barbara Griffin, 5/1/2008:

I think all States should vote at the same time not have one or two states vote this month, another one or two states vote next month. I think yes they should the people he/she that is running for President should get out and campaign but it should be that every state vote for whom they want for president maybe there would not be all the confusion, arguing so maybe it should be considered to have everyone vote in the United States at one time.

Lauren McDonald, 4/18/2008:

I agree entirely with the two previous posts that say we should schedule the primaries closer together and shorten the time between the primaries and the actual election. By this point in the current presidential campaign it is all about "he said this" or "she said that" and little word choices instead of real issues. The longer the primaries go on, the more power the media gets to manipulate the way people think about the candidates. And at the same time, more and more money is being poured into campaigning when these billions of dollars could instead be going directly into fixing problems in the world today.

On the subject of the electoral college, I agree with the majority of the posts that say we should change or eliminate it. As I understand it, the electoral college was intended to guard against the "undeducated masses" in the late 18th century, but it seems like this step that keeps the people of the US from directly elected their president it outdated. The highspeed, technology-driven world of today allows far more people the opportunity to read about or watch the different candidates in order to make their choice. On top of that, the electoral college sometimes discourages people from voting because they think their vote will not actually make a difference because the electors are not necessary bound to be consistent with the popular vote results in their state.

So to reform the election process, I think we should shorten the primary season, limit campaign budgets, and eliminate the electoral college.

Brian Powell, 4/17/2008:

I beleive that it is time for a change. Our current presidential electorial process is outdated and

needs amended if not completely abolished and rebuilt as a one person one vote system.

As I have learned in POL 212 the electoral college was created when our country came together. When the different nation states came together as one state. This was a way of ensuring that the bigger states would have greater representation than the smaller ones. This was needed at the time because we did not have a national identity yet at this time. But as time has advanced we no longer consider ourselves different nation states bannng together to form the United States of America. We consider ourselves of the same nation state regardless of what "state", be kentucky or florida or ect, that we live in. Their is no longer the need of the electoral college to ease the mind of single states that are adopting federalism. At one time the need for this system did exist but now it does not. We do not comsider ourselves 50 different nations. As time has advanced we have molded into one nation.

For this reason i beleive their should be a dirrect popular vote. We should be able to vote dirrectly for the president not have to vote for electors that get to cast a vote for us. Yes the previous system does work but it does not work as well as it could. for this reason alone we need a change. A direct popular vote would increase voter turnout and allow roome for third and fourth parties in our electoral process.

If anybody has any questions or comments to make please feel free to contact me (bgpowell@hotmail.com) and thanks for reading my opinion of the electoral process!

James Brown, 4/17/2008:

Though I won't admit to knowing every single aspect of how the election of the president in the United States, including the Electoral college, works out its full course to name one candidate the head of state, I will apply what I have been learning from my Pol 212 Comparative Politics class to argue why I feel that the current method of presidential election is fair and representative and should be maintained.

The US as well as many other countries including, but not limited to Canada and Great Britain, use what is called a single member district plurality (SMDP) in which voters essentially vote for an "elector" whom they want to represent their district in voting for the president. Many argue against this system claiming that a majority vote (in which every individual votes for their choice and the candidate with the most votes wins) would be more fair. For the purposes of this response I don't care to debate fairness as much as I care to debate representation as I make a brief explanation of why the SMDP system is more representative of the nation as a whole.

In SMDP voting, districts cause the influence in elections to be more spread out than a majority vote would. I'll explain this by looking at an example of what happens in the reverse with a majority vote. If you think about population density in the US you'll very quickly realize that the 25 mile radius around New York City could very easily have more people in it than the entire state of Wyoming. (Please note that these figures may not be entirely accurate and are meant solely for illustrative purposes.) What happens here with a majority vote system in place is that the 25 mile radius around NY City would get as much representation as an entire state. For a country that is founded on and embraces the idea of federalism the effects of changing the voting system would be dramatic. It could very easily change the whole structure of federalism as we know it.

I believe that the current means of voting, which includes the SMDP style of the Electoral College, holds the most true to the notion of federalism and other foundational American ideals and should be continued in electing the president of the United States of America.

Emily Taylor, 4/17/2008:

I feel that the electoral college should not determine who holds the office of presidency. American voters should always determine electoral matters by direct popular vote. Also I feel that New Hampshire should not necessarily have the first primary, not that it really matters to me where the first one is held, but why not another state, why New Hampshire? \"Faithless electors\" I believe are an accident waiting to happen. They may say one thing to get into office and do the opposite after they are elected. Regardless of whether office holders honor their promises or not, the matter of determining who holds our public offices belongs to American voters.

Katie Kirkland, 4/16/2008:

I feel like the electoral college is not necessarily the best route to go, in reference to the popular vote, but I also feel like it could be worse.

We could always have our new President practically named for us, in the case of Putin and Medvedev in Russia. These officials were named Prime Minister before they were backed by the Kremlin as a Presidential Candidate. For other candidates, it was very difficult to have their name added to the ballot. Which is very different from our system. Could you imagine giving the current president that power?

I do however, like the system of Germany, where they have a proportional representation as well as single member district plurality. By doing so, this creates equal seats in relation to the percentage of the popular vote. For example, if the Green Party wins 20% of the vote, they will win 20% of the seats.

I'm not sure what the best way to run an election might be, but I am glad that the popular vote does influence the electoral colleges vote. At least we don't live in a dictatorship, this proves that it could always be worse.

Jody Schaedel, 4/15/2008:

I think the Electoral College system is not doing as well as it may have in the past. The last president won by electoral votes over the popular vote. How is it that the president wins big states and loses a few smaller ones while the other candidate wins the majority of the votes and loses the election. I also disprove of the fact that the voters can vote on many candidates in the early primaries whereas the later primaries only have a smaller selection.

I don't really know how the primaries should change to create a better system. Maybe if they were spread out over a shorter period of time. Maybe if the primaries were spread out over a few weeks (3 or so) instead of a couple months. They could possibly have the candidates give a general address as to their stand on the issues to the nation to help the voters decide which candidate is the best. Instead of which candidate can fork out the most money to win the media coverage and public/delegate opinion. The Electoral College system needs to ensure that the majority rules. That's why we vote. Not so that the winning candidate can plot his win by states. He has to impress the majority of people. A better primary system might also improve the chances of having better candidates to choose from in the end.

Laura Melius, 4/14/2008:

As a concerned citizen who votes in every election, I feel that the current election process takes away my right to vote for and/or influence the choice of candidates for the presidential election.

The current primary election process allows only the early voting states the full range of

candidate selection. The long, drawn out primary process does give the candidates more of a chance to visit multiple states and voters, and it seems their platforms change and evolve as they are able to get out and hear from the people. However, it seems a vast waste of financial resources to sustain such a long campaign and we seem to limit the candidate pool to only the stanch and sturdy individuals who can survive the long and arduous process.

As to the electoral college – from what I can understand of the process, it does not give the citizens the full impact of influence on the election decision with super delegates having too much personal influence that may or may not represent their constituents.

I think we should shorten the primary and election process, allowing all state to vote in close proximity. And, instead of having to rely on old fashion hand-shaking, baby kissing and foot stomping campaigns, why not use technology to help voters make this important decision on key issues. Set up the voting mechanisms (online or other) to allow voters to vote on each issue or characteristic they want in a candidate. The candidate with the most matches to the voters' needs/wants wins the election.

Leslie Curtis, 4/13/2008:

I think the electoral college might have been a good idea at its creation. But times change and things must evolve. The way we elect our president needs to evolve as well. My problem with the electoral college is that it does leave too much room for the faithless elector, as it is written in the constitution; states have created laws to eliminate this problem by requiring the electors to vote as pledged.

I think that part of the reason the framers may have decided upon an electoral college was that it gave the states more power. They were very concerned that the federal government would have too much power and that the states needed power.

But... the power to elect the president should not reside with the states... it should reside with the people! I agree that there are people out there that I would NOT want to vote! I have a friend who voted based upon the cutest candidate. That could potentially be a huge problem. But I don't think that by bypassing the people's right to vote we are fixing all of the problems. There will always be problems so why not give the people the right to vote without an electoral college?

Rob Morrin, 4/11/2008:

The electoral college is undemocratic, but that in itself is not the only problem. We currently have a system that has so many "safe-guards" against the wrong person getting into office when the fact of the matter is that these "safe-guards" (such as the electoral college) do not prohibit much. If anything, middle elements that separate the citizens from the direct election of the candidates poses a couple of problems.

First, it creates a pseudo accountability of the candidates to the people and secondly, it breeds opportunity for corruption.

I do, however, understand the concerns that conjured the electoral college. Concerns that echo in my mind that the American population are typically under-educated regarding politics. Furthermore, many Americans do not care about politics and this apathy calls for some kind of decision-making filter. I, personally, do not want someone voting who knows nothing more than a name and a t.v. ad, but it is their "right" to vote.

The electoral college is not the proper solution to filter out such voters, however, it can not be discarded until we have some kind of requirement that ensures voters know and understand the positions of the possible candidates before they vote.

Beverly Arvin, 4/10/2008:

The process of electing the president in the United States is different than that of most countries basically because of the use of the electoral college. The electoral college is designed to give a presidential nominee a certain number of electors when states are won. According to the state's population, a specific number of electors are assigned to each of the states. At least 270 electors must be won by one candidate in order for them to actually win the election legitimately, but this is where I begin seeing problems in this system. In the 2000 election, George W. Bush won the election through the electoral college but if it were based on simply a majority vote; for instance, in a single member district plurality, he would have lost to his opposition, Al Gore. In this sense it seems as though the electoral college was not democratic because it did not represent what the majority of people in the United States wanted. In Russia a majority vote is used to elect the president. This makes sense to me the most. If there is no majority vote, or 50% + 1, a run off election between the top 2 candidates occurs almost guaranteeing a majority vote of one candidate over the other. By the use of a direct popular vote there is less confusion when electing the president, and people do not end up studying politics to be able to determine who may win the election because it is simply one set of numbers that tell you yes or no, not a variety of votes for each state that equate to another number that must add up to another number, etc., etc. The design of the U.S. method of electing the president is defective because does not promote a democratic outcome, along with the fact that it is extremely confusing. By altering the current system to something more similar to other countries that work effectively I believe the United States will be more legitimate and more democratic than the present form of electing the president.

Carl Root, 4/10/2008:

Despite the major network push to convince the majority of Americans that Presidential elections are "hip," "cool," and "exciting," the smart money is on American Idol to pull in better ratings (and a higher participation rate) in 2008.

Therefore, I propose that we make a modern-day primetime freakshow of national politics. The thrill is gone, folks, and without elevating this time-honored popularity contest to the level of supreme spectacle, the foundation of our democracy could be lost forever. Damn the Diebold machines, let Americans text in their votes!

Despite the dramatic lighting, makeup and softball questioning, the debate process has become as interesting as watching paint dry. Imagine the American fascination and participation if candidates competed for votes in an interactive TV/Internet extravaganza combining elements of American Idol, American Gladiators, The Moment of Truth, Bad Girls Club, Survivor, The Apprentice.....the possibilities are ENDLESS!

Critics of this proposal would argue that it could water-down, trivialize or otherwise cheapen the sacred institution of electoral politics. I would argue that the integrity of the process could only be greatly expanded by the increased participation by the American people.

Even in the unlikely event that this change caused a significant decline in the faith of the American people regarding the legitimacy of our election process this would easily be counterbalanced by the entertainment value of the spectacle itself.

John McCain locked in a no-holds-barred cage match with Jesse Ventura. Hillary Clinton grilled by Mark Wahlberg on her polygraph results. Or maybe everyone remaining should be forced to inhabit the White House for the last couple hundred days of the Bush Presidency, to see what happens when candidates stop being polite, and start getting real?

However it goes, this sideshow has the potential to be "The Greatest Show on Earth," we just need to get creative and weird enough to give these puppets a show the likes of which Frank Oz and Jim Henson could be proud!

Res ipsa loquitur!

Brad Parke, 4/10/2008:

I find the current system of electing the President to be fundamentally flawed and undemocratic, and there are several reasons I feel this way. First, an un-proportional part of the population of under-represented in deciding who the candidates will be in the primaries, then into the general election. Presidential elections have evolved into more of a battle for who has the most money, rather than about the real issues. The general population simply doesn't really care about the issues, but rather vote for who they see the most of on television. As a result, candidates race to see who can raise the most money and create the greatest amount of television exposure becomes the main focus. Often times, due to a lack of media exposure because of insufficient funds viable candidates have to drop out of the race. The reasons candidates often run out of money is because they didn't have much success on some of the early states and their donors simply gave up on them and quit donating money. Now, do these indications on the early states clearly represent the voting base of America, or simply a certain type of voting demographic? Did these candidates perform poorly in the early states because of their weak message, or was it simply based on demographics of the state? Furthermore, ask yourself this, supposed you are a registered Democrat in Kentucky, would you have voted for John Edwards if you had the chance in the primary? Is it fair for the voters of New Hampshire and Iowa to decide for Kentuckians that John Edwards was not the best candidate for the Democratic Party? In addition, was Hillary and Obama better candidates or they just have better luck in the early states resulting in more money donations (which keeps your campaign going). Resulting in the drives to raise money often times put candidates in the pockets of money major political players such as the wealthy, PAC's and interest groups. Do the obligations to these political players play a role of some of the policies if they are to reach the White House? You bet it does. As a country I believe it is important we find a system that focuses more on the issues rather than which candidate can raise the most money and obtain the necessary media exposure to win an election.

Paige Young, 4/6/2008:

The Presidential Election system I believe is extremely complicated. I personally feel that the Electoral College should be eliminated and that majority vote should win and take all. The preliminary elections should still take place so that we can narrow down the candidates to one democrat, one republican, and one candidate for other parties. For example, when it is time for Kentucky democrats to vote for Obama or Clinton, Obama should add the votes he receives and Clinton should add the votes she receives to a running total of votes that they have both acquired from other states. The person with the most votes at the end of preliminaries would be the candidate for their party.

During Primary (Presidential) Elections I feel that we should do something similar to Russia's system. In Russia, the winning candidate requires an absolute majority of the total vote. If X, Y, and Z are running against one another and X gets the majority vote then they would automatically win and become President. If none of the candidates secure the majority vote in the first round then a second run off election must take place three weeks later in which the only contestants are the two-front-running candidates in the first round. So if X, Y, or Z did not secure

the majority vote in the first round but X and Y secured the most votes then they would run against one another in a second election, which would take place three weeks later. All that it would come down to is the United States determining what percentage the majority vote should be worth.