

The Lenfest Citizenship Challenge

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Class Size: 30 students

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Team 3: Michelle Coyomatei-Rodriquez, Shenjing He, Bryan Hernandez-Luna, Jonathan Ngadiman, Stephanie Ramirez, Kyle Tum. **Lead Writers:** Stephanie and Kyle

Team 4: Joselin Fernandez Morales, Benson Zhang, Angel Ruiz Lopez, Ismael Cardenas, Feny Parmar, Anaisa Ramos. **Lead Writers:** Joselin and Benson.

Team 5: Rosa Mam, Wenxin Liu, Lamir Young, Jaretiz Tellez-Perez, Dell Lin, Jayden Soun. **Lead Writers:** Wenxin and Dell

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Fair or Not Fair: 270 to Win
Our Class Research, Debate and Essay about the Electoral College

Our Response to the Challenge Question: Should the Constitution be amended to eliminate the Electoral College system for selecting the President and replace it with the national popular votes?

At first, all of us (except one student) didn't think it was necessary to amend the Constitution to eliminate the Electoral College. Initially, we thought it was a good system, so why bother to get rid of it? Amending the Constitution takes a long time and it's difficult. We don't want to replace our current system with the national popular votes. According to the Regis University's website, we examined a two-column chart listing some pros and cons of the Electoral College. Each team chose a main reason why we should leave the Electoral College alone.

We selected the following pros for the Electoral College:

Team 1: The Electoral College keeps small states as valuable participants. The seven (7) small states (Wyoming, Vermont, , North Dakota, Alaska, South Dakota, Delaware, Montana) and the District of Columbia each gets three (3) electoral votes, even though they have a small population of residents.

Team 2: The Electoral College discourages multiple parties of candidates that may split the overall votes. If there were ten (10) candidates on the ballot, it would be difficult for one candidate to get the majority of votes. For example, in 2000, there were three (3) main presidential candidates. It was believed that the Green Party candidate Ralph Nader split votes away from Democratic candidate Al Gore, and this caused Republican candidate George W. Bush to win the election.

Team 3: The Electoral College keeps states as an integral part of the presidential selection process. This means every state has a voice in the process.

Team 4: The Electoral College provides the chosen candidate with a majority of 270 votes to win the election. The winner must have a majority in order to win. [We find out later that winners may still lose.]

Team 5: The Electoral College prevents the possibility of a national recount of votes. If there were a dispute, a national recount of every single vote would be difficult due to time, money and manpower. Also how can anyone make sure the counting process make no mistakes?

After reading additional research online and watching two videos that explain how complicated the Electoral College works, we decided that the Electoral College is a flawed system. We set up 5 teams of researchers and writers to debate the pros and cons. Here are some ideas from our discussion:

Pros: What is popular may not be good for the whole country? We came up with the scenario of our classmates Wendy and Dell running for class president. Wendy's platform is to have an ice cream party every Friday, while Dell wants to clean up the schoolyard. We all cheered when we heard "ice cream", but we came to an agreement that cleaning up the schoolyard is more important than eating ice cream every Friday. We agreed that what is popular does not necessarily equal to doing the right thing. If there is a tie, the Electoral College makes sure the winner has a majority of votes. Unlike using the national popular votes system, the election would never have to depend on the possibility of one vote being the tiebreaker.

In contrast, we also can make an argument against the Electoral College. We came up with this list of reasons.

Cons: Team 1 argues that small states are guaranteed more electoral votes than the larger states. As a result, sometimes the candidate who received the most popular votes may not win the election. This happened because the minimum number of electoral votes is three regardless of the population of that state. This policy is not fair and some people think that this is not democratic because it favors small states.

Team 2: A popular vote is a simple majority, but the Electoral College consists of rearranging votes every 10 years because of population changes. There are many more steps involved, which may give citizens the feeling that their vote does not matter. This may also discourage them to go to voting booth. If people feel like their votes do not matter, they may decide to stay home and not vote at all.

Team 3: One person does not equal one electoral vote. For example, California has 55 electoral votes that equals to 705,454 people per electoral vote. In contrast, Wyoming has 3 electoral votes that equals to only 194,717 people per vote. This means each electoral vote from California is worth three and a half times more than Wyoming. We did the math and estimate the comparison. This is the equation: $700 \text{ thousands} = 3 \frac{1}{2} \times 200 \text{ thousands}$.

Team 4: The Electoral College allows for "faithless electors" to change their minds and vote the candidate that their states did not vote for. It is really unfair and confusing because the people voted for their candidate but these faithless electors have power to vote for a different candidate. One extreme example was the 1836 election. Martin Van Buren won the presidency, but his running mate vice-president Richard Mentor Johnson almost lost the nomination due to Virginia's entire 23 faithless electors refusing to vote for him. The unjust and racist reason was because Johnson had a relationship with his octoroon slave, Julia.

Team 5: The nine swing states or purple states get all the attention because these states (Virginia, Ohio, Florida, Colorado, Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin) don't always support a single party to secure the state's electoral votes. On the other hand, Utah had voted for a Republican candidate since 1964 and Minnesota had voted for a Democrat candidate since 1972. Presidential candidates tend to ignore these states and they don't campaign there as much.

Final Thoughts: After these discussions, most of us are beginning to form the opinion that the Electoral College is out of date and archaic. The Electoral College was created by our Founding Fathers when the United States depended on the Pony Express to gather all the electoral votes. Now we have the Internet to help us get the voting results quickly and more accurately in 0.06 seconds compared to 7 days riding dangerously on a horse. We were also shocked to find out that the electors can choose the next president regardless if a state majority voted for that person or not. When we found out that not all United States citizens get to vote, we were shocked. For example, citizens living in U.S. Territories such as Puerto Rico, Guam and Virgin Islands cannot vote. Citizens who live in another country can cast their votes, but only in some states.

In addition, we find out three cases where the winners had lost. In 1824, Andrew Jackson won the popular votes as well as the electoral votes, but not enough electoral votes to represent a majority. Based on the rules of the Constitution, the House of Representatives elected Quincy Adams to be president. In 1876, another crazier case was how Rutherford B. Hayes became president. Samuel J. Tilden fell short of one elector vote. Congress picked a group of people to form a commission and decided Hayes was the winner. In 1888, Grover S. Cleveland had 188 electoral votes and Benjamin Harrison had 233 electoral votes. Even though Cleveland had more popular votes, Harrison still became president.

Now we believe the Constitution must be amended to eliminate the Electoral College and replace it with the national popular votes. For the next presidential election in November 8, 2016, a lot of people are afraid of the possibility that Donald Trump may win the election because he only needs 270 votes from the swing states. If we have a national popular vote system instead of the Electoral College, Donald Trump definitely has no chance of winning. But now there is a risk of him winning.

Do you need more reasons than what we had provided here? The next question would be how would we amend this part of the Constitution? And how long would it take? Would this happen in our lifetime?

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