

# Re: The Electoral "College" and combinatorics

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Nora Baron wrote:

>> *But my point was that "not favored by a plurality of the voters"*  
>> *is not a problem.*  
>  
> *Sorry, we disagree on this. If you think in general it is a*  
> *good idea to go against the will of the majority, you are*  
> *abandoning the idea of a democracy in favor of some form of*  
> *elitism or oligarchy.*

You're still confusing two things. I've said nothing like "it's a good principle to go against the will of the majority." It's a huge (and unfounded) leap of logic to go from support for EC to "we should always oppose the will of the majority." The issue has two sides, but the two sides are not "for/against the will the majority." The sides are "how will we solve the problems inherent in a popular voting system?" One solution: don't solve them because the solutions are worse than the problem. Another solution: write the Constitution so as to avoid some of the serious problems without infringing too much on people's will.

>> *(As Microsoft says "It's not a bug, it's a feature."*  
>  
> *That is not a compelling analogy and not a compelling source*  
> *to cite!*

If you want a very good and clear explanation of American politics, visit [www.jibjab.com](http://www.jibjab.com).

> *If there were some guarantee that*  
> *Electors are wise, fair, unbiased, smarter than all the rest*  
> *of us put together, etc., it might be easier to swallow. There*  
> *is no such guarantee. It is a possible avenue for corruption.*  
> *We already have enough of those.*

You seem to be able to see potential flaws in one system. Why are you having trouble seeing the potential flaws in

the system you're advocating? Switching to a popular vote just opens the door for a different kind of corruption, and one that is easier to implement. (Cf. Chicago's reputation.)

> *In general the \*weak\* ARE the \*majority\*.*

But not specifically in this case where we're comparing the majority with small minorities.

> *"Still" operating? Do you actually think you have presented  
> any compelling arguments whatsoever? Yes, I'll say it directly:  
> in general, in a democracy, the will of the majority should  
> prevail, and in general it is a bad thing when it does not. Yes,  
> I happen to believe in democracy.*

Yes, I know you say it. I just wonder why you refuse to question it. The bottom line here is that you made the initial assertions about the EC. But you haven't really defended those assertions except for citing an axiom that says "But then the popular vote doesn't decide the election." The EC system approximates the popular vote very closely, AND manages to solve some problems. Why, exactly, is it such a disaster if the approximation is a little bit different, especially when we not only believe in a "majority rule" principle but also a "states' rights" principle?

>> >> *I. Let's get a referendum going to raise minimum wage to  
>> >> \$100/hour. Such a thing would surely pass.*

> *No, YOU put it on the ballot and see what happens. If it is  
> such a popular idea, why hasn't someone already done it?*

Because most places won't let inane referendums go to ballot.

(And there are some localities which do indeed set their own minimum wage above the federal wage. I thought San Francisco might have done this, but I don't recall.)

> *Thanks for stating your position on this directly. Oh, and  
> in your earlier post, where you implied snobbery or elitism on  
> my part:*

No, I was pointing out that when we think of ourselves as more clever than our ancestors, then we're being chronological snobs. You said the EC was "antiquated", which implies that back then it was OK, but now we don't need it. You've presented no argument at all to support this idea of "antiquated".

> *I think "at least half" is a gross exaggeration; perhaps you  
> can cite data on ALL the California taxes – income, luxury, property,  
> sales, license fees, etc. – which prove you are right. Clearly*

> *in any case, they did not 'vote away' all their taxes as you implied.*

However you read "vote away", the point is still made. When CA and (Massachusetts with their Proposition 2 1/2) had the chance, they voted to reduce their taxes drastically. Mass. repealed theirs in just a couple years.

> *And anyway, all you are showing is that government by referendum is inferior to representative government.*

You're confusion the arguments. I'm showing here that your axiom of "it's bad when the majority doesn't get its way" is false. This has little to do with the EC directly, it's just a hole I'm poking in your stance.

> *Again, agreed: government by referendum is dumb on a national scale, perhaps on any scale larger than PTA meetings. So what? This has nothing to do with the Electoral College.*

But it does have something to do with your stance on the EC. By limiting the way referendums are used, someone could argue that "the will of the majority is being restricted." But here you agree that such limitations are good. Hmmmm...

> *Absolutely not. The only minorities that might be protected by the Electoral College are those defined by geography.*

Not just minorities, but interests, which are generally geographical. People do business with the people around them, expect the roads close to them to be repaired and to want to keep the taxes they pay re-invested locally. If you look around, you'll find that all the motel maids live in the same neighborhood.

> *Perhaps you can cite examples where the Electoral College actually solved a problem,*

(It kept Al Gore from getting elected.) The EC is continually solving the problem of the candidates not wanting to pay attention to smaller groups. In every election, the candidates attention has been draw to smaller speciall interests because of the EC.

>> *The idea that the King is not above the law came hard.*  
>> *The opposite of constitutional rule is that some entity is above the law. Constitutional rule is "good in itself" in the sense that the alternative sucks.*  
>>  
>  
> *No matter what the Constitution says??? Suppose it decrees that the only people eligible to vote must be millionaires?*

Would you rather have that constitution or just have the the one richest guy calling the shots with impunity?

- > *Your comments here are just not consistent with your belief*
- > *that the electorate is a pack of idiots. Don't be afraid to carry*
- > *your thoughts to their logical extreme. You are an elitist*
- > *who does not trust the democratic process. What you want is*
- > *a Constitution that simply ignores the will of the idiocy, i.e.,*
- > *the majority. You need to replace what we have with a Constitution*
- > *that describes a benign dictatorship.*

Note that what you call "logical" here is nothing like logical. Just because I don't buy \_your\_ seriously flawed version of how you want the democratic process to work, doesn't mean I'm against the democratic process. And as I said, I'd rather have the idiots rule than the criminals.

It's completely assinine to try to twist my support for the EC into the statement that I want "to ignore the will" of the people. The EC does not ignore the will of the people, and as I've said several times now, it is so that MORE people get their will paid attention to that we have the EC. This is nothing like a dictatorship. It is you who wants the media to run the country which is hardly going to be benign.

In your blind support for "majority rules", you actually rob the people of their power. Your heart may be in the right place, but your head sure isn't in the game.

- >> *This was to the point of whether certain votes have*
- >> *"value". Even if one votes for the loser. As it touches*
- >> *the Electoral Colleges, the current system give more votes*
- >> *more value.*
- >>
- > *That requires quantitative proof. It's a zero-sum game, isn't*
- > *it? If some votes get more value, others must get less.*

It depends on how you measure the value of a vote. As I said, one way is to measure its weight in the tally. But under such a measurement, then anyone who voted for the loser can say "my vote didn't count". Otherwise our current president would be 40% Bush and 40% Gore.

Rather, measure the value of a vote by how hard the candidates try to win it. I've already given qualitative proof that the EC system makes the candidates try to win votes that they would otherwise ignore. Therefore, again, "More votes get more value."

- >> *Of course having Electoral Colleges*
- >> *for PTA meetings is dumb, because there are only 20 people*
- >> *present.*
- >
- > *At what critical level does it become not dumb? Precinct? County?*
- > *State? Why only at the national level? Why don't we have an*
- > *electoral college for governors, senators, and representatives?*
- > *After all, if the people are idiots, why should we let them*
- > *vote directly for ANYONE ? If we cannot trust their judgment*
- > *regarding the president, why should we trust it for anything else?*

You're not paying attention to the arguments. I said I \_prefer\_ the idiots voting. As to the critical level, that's pretty much a moot point. We have a principle of "states' rights" and that is one reason to use EC. Do we have a principle of "precinct rights"? We're weighting the votes by state because states have specific interests. We fought a civil war in this country (or as they call it where I live "The War of Northern Aggression".) There are plenty of non-Federalists running about the country.

- >> *It's no good exporting the Electoral College system*
- >> *to a different election with different problems and then saying*
- >> *"see it's stupid here, therefore it's stupid there." Here and*
- >> *there are different situations.*
- >>
- >
- > *Explain why the difference changes the conclusion.*

If you change hypotheses then how can you think that the same conclusion will follow? You change "voting to empower an elector" into "voting for all representative blindly" and you expect the conclusion to stay the same?

You're the one attacking our system, YOU supply a sensible argument. Don't ask me to fix your broken logic.

- > *This recurring theme of yours that agricultural minorities are*
- > *somehow*
- > *more important than other minorities is getting annoying.*

I have made no assertion that says agricultural minorities are more important than others. I'm just using them as an example (that's what "e.g." means.) And I use them because I grew up in the Nebraska sandhills so I know about those issues. Roxbury, Massachusetts would work just as well.

If I were one to get annoyed at newsgroup nonsense, then I'd sure be annoyed now, since you haven't bothered to pay the slightest attention to my arguments, but have only repeated your mantras.

- > *The Electoral College is an extremely feeble, ineffective*
- > *and unreliable way to accomplish that,*

If you have any support for that statement, then by all means let's hear it.

- > *Just curious ... how might you have voted for the various*
- > *amendments to the Constitution? Women's suffrage, abolition,*
- > *that sort of thing? Try to answer this without the benefit of*
- > *hindsight. Isn't status quo always best? Or are you in favor*
- > *of scrapping the whole thing and installing a government by*
- > *the elite, where you and your friends get to decide who is elite?*

Since I said specifically that I was against government by the elite, this just shows your close-mindedness. You won't even listen to someone else's arguments so why bother?

(I would have voted against Prohibition and for the repeal of Prohibition.)

<plonk>