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Should the president be chosen by national popular vote rather than the electoral college?

Democratic candidate Al Gore won the popular vote in 2000, but lost the Electoral College tally to Republican George W. Bush.

John Laidler

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YES

Jeanne Kempthorne

Salem resident, attorney, former member of the State Ethics Commission

The Electoral College is an anachronism originating in a time of fragile unity among the states, a time when illiteracy and slow communication made direct democracy a fearsome prospect to the framers of our Constitution. In the centuries since, many more of us are granted the right to vote, and we vote directly for more of our representatives.

The Electoral College, which elects the president based on winner-take-all state contests, is the last relic of the old era. It no longer serves any legitimate function. It reduces the election of the nation's highest office to contests in a handful of swing states, while the rest of us — those in the remaining states — are ignored because our votes hardly matter. It can easily result in an outcome that conflicts with the will of the people, whereby a candidate who loses the popular election nonetheless becomes president, as occurred in 2000 and almost occurred in 2004. This is a serious, recurring problem that afflicts both parties.

A system whereby the presidential election turns on the outcome in a dozen states should not be maintained. A vote in Ohio shouldn't count more than a vote in Massachusetts or California.

National Popular Vote is an interstate compact designed to supplant the winner-take-all scheme underlying the Electoral College with the national popular vote. The electoral votes of each participating state in the compact would go to the candidate that prevails nationwide instead of to the top vote-getter in that particular state. This approach is equivalent to abolishing the Electoral College, without the necessity of passing a Constitutional amendment.

In 2010, the Massachusetts Legislature voted to have our state enter the compact. We are now one of 10 states — along with the District of Columbia — to join the initiative, which would

become effective once the total number of Electoral College votes assigned to member states reached 270. We are 61 percent of the way there.

This important initiative will ensure that we elect as president the candidate the majority of us chooses to lead us. The Massachusetts Legislature was right to join the compact and right to reject bids to reverse course. We deserve to have our votes count.

NO

Bradley H. Jones Jr.

North Reading Republican, Massachusetts House minority leader

Altering something as important as the way we elect a president should rightfully be done through a Constitutional amendment. The Electoral College has served the country well since its inception. If we are to make any changes to it — and jettisoning it ought not be one of those — we should do so only after careful consideration.

National popular vote advocates have been trying to circumvent this process by getting states to join a multi-state compact. Since 2007, 10 states and the District of Columbia have joined, pledging to award their electoral votes to the presidential candidate who carries the national popular vote. Together, they account for 165 electoral votes, 105 short of the 270 needed for the compact to be implemented.

When Massachusetts joined the movement in 2010, proponents claimed it would make the state more relevant during presidential elections. Choosing the president by national popular vote would not necessarily increase Massachusetts's clout during a presidential campaign. In fact, an argument could be made that it would actually disenfranchise many voters.

In his 2008 Cato Institute analysis, [“A Critique of the National Popular Vote Plan for Electing the President.”](#) author John Samples warned of such a scenario, noting that “[National popular vote] will encourage presidential campaigns to focus their efforts in dense media markets where costs per vote are lowest; many states now ignored by candidates will continue to be ignored under NPV.”

There could be other unintended consequences for Massachusetts. Let's say Hillary Clinton wins the Democratic nomination and Donald Trump is the Republican nominee. On Election Night 2016, Clinton could carry Massachusetts by a wide margin, but if Trump wins the national vote he would receive all of Massachusetts' 11 electoral votes.

The United States is a geographically diverse country, and the Electoral College reflects that by allocating two electoral votes to each state, and the remaining electoral votes based on population. This helps to ensure that all states – large and small – have a role in the process.

As an alternative to the national popular vote compact, we should do what Nebraska and Maine do and award two electoral votes to the popular vote winner, and our remaining electoral votes to the winner in each of the state's Congressional districts. Such a change could encourage more

competitive races without undermining the Electoral College and while respecting our Constitutional process.