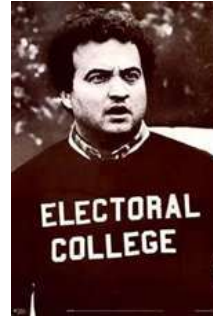


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ELECTORAL COLLEGE, POPULAR VOTE and CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES



By Stephen L. Bakke  December 4, 2016

Electoral College, Popular Vote and Campaign Strategies

The Electoral College is being discussed from all angles. Every time we address this topic lets be sure to plant our pivot foot by recalling these concepts: 1) constitutional representative republic; 2) separation of powers; 3) checks and balances; and 4) perhaps most important, federation of states. Back to that later.

Our electoral process is a hot topic right now with some (mostly Clinton supporters) suggesting it's time to trash this archaic process. The main complaint is that the result in both 2000 (a "W" Bush victory) and Trump's 2016 win would have been reversed if the popular vote had chosen the winner. NOT SO FAST, say I!

First, let's take a look at another "success measurement" that helps put this in context. Trump won approximately 2,600 counties compared with about 500 for Hillary. Translating this to proportionate "land mass," 90%+ of the land mass of the U.S. was home to voters who gave Trump the win. That doesn't count for much except: 1) it's interesting; 2) the U.S. can't be called a solidly "red" country; 3) it says a lot about the "background" of Clinton vs. Trump voters; and 4) with a few exceptions, areas the Democrats dominated were mostly high population centers. Make of that what you will.

Clinton won the popular vote by approximately 2 million, but Trump had a solid electoral victory. To put that victory in context, while Clinton did win the national popular vote, if California were thrown out, Trump is the winner. And if Illinois and New York were also thrown out, Trump would have won by over 2.5 million votes. Looking at it that way shows how thin the victory was. Despite that, there are democrats insisting on abolishing the Electoral College.

Faced with our Electoral College system as it is, in 2016 a strategy was chosen by each side to best achieve victory. They campaigned in states with the highest expected payback. As a result, there was a lot of "flyover" territory left relatively untouched by the campaign. If the popular vote were the deciding factor, there would be different strategies, and voting patterns could have been vastly different. Votes in states dominated by one candidate would actually "count" in the national popular tally. Who knows what the result would have been? The assumption by Hillary fans that she would automatically win a "popular vote" contest foolishly assumes that all other factors would remain the same.

What changes should be made to the Electoral College? I continue to favor the advantage gained by the lower population states when electors are allocated based on Representatives and Senators. Without that advantage, I feel the population centers would have undesirable political power, and campaigns would overlook the less populated states with by far the most land mass – so I wouldn't change that. But I would favor eliminating the "winner take all" concept which applies to all states except Maine and Nebraska. Electors could then be allocated to candidates in proportion to the state's overall popular vote, or based on winners in congressional districts.

It's all about Federalism, isn't it? The United States is a federation of states, each holding a separate election and then their electors come together to create a final result. I like that process. And the concept of indirect election through the Electoral College also fits neatly into our Founders' concept of checks and balances, and I support that. Yet, I have no objection to the allocation of those electors, within each state, based on voting by district or simple popular vote.

There will never be a perfect system, but this change would move us a little closer to it, and it might even eliminate some of the objections.