

opinions

column LEFT

How Do We Elect Our President?

BY ALON BARLEVY, VICE PRESIDENT,
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In his acceptance speech last week, President Bush promised that he will work to earn the support of "every person who voted for my opponent." As one such voter, I'd like to give him advice on what actions he can take to earn my support.

For years, conservatives have wanted to amend the Constitution to forbid something or other. Some of their proposed amendments include forbidding flag burning, forbidding gay marriages and forbidding abortions. Those proposed amendments should be put on the back burner for now, until a mandate from the American people is given (51% does not constitute a mandate). There is something in our Constitution that does need to be amended, and that is how we elect our president.

The current method of the Electoral College is arcane, and needs to be updated. The Electoral College does have some advantages, so it is not clear that the current system should be entirely scrapped. There are, however, certain aspects that need to be reformed and updated.

1) Having the number of electors for each state set as the number of representatives plus two (for the senators) is not in the spirit of one person one vote. In the current system, California's 55 electors correspond to one elector for every 615,000 people, while Wyoming, with its three electors, corresponds to one elector for every 165,000 people. If the numbers of electors was set at the number of representatives only, then the ratios would be one elector for every 640,000 people in California, and one elector for all of Wyoming's 494,000 people.

2) There is no uniformity in how states award electors. In most states, the winner takes all, but Nebraska and Maine subdivide the race into congressional districts, where each candidate must win the district in order to win an elector, and whoever wins the statewide popular vote gets the additional two electors. The system must be uniform across the country.

3) In case no one candidate wins a majority of the electors, the contest goes to the Congress, where the Senate votes for a vice president (one senator, one vote), and the House votes for a president (with each state delegation getting one vote). This is way out of line with the spirit of one person, one vote, and can lead to a situation whereby the president and vice president are from different parties. The vote in the House for president may also lead to a deadlock, because some state delegations might be split 50/50, so they could not cast a vote. If this happens to enough state delegations, no candidate would win a majority, throwing us into deep turmoil.

4) There is an arcane provision that the president and vice president must be from different states. In 2000, Dick Cheney had to re-register to vote in Wyoming, after not living there for decades, in order for the Bush-Cheney ticket not to forfeit the electors from Texas (yes, the same year that Republicans accused Hillary Clinton of being a carpetbagger).

Then there is the question of qualification for the office, but we will leave that for another time.

Text of Article

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Alon Barlevy, PhD.

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