In the following viewpoint, Randy Dotinga asserts that the electoral college undermines federalism since it forces candidates to spend most of their time in a few key states, thereby ignoring most of the rest of the country. The author also argues that the system leaves open the possibility that someone could become president without a majority of the vote, and it only allows for those presidential hopefuls that can appeal to broad groups of voters. Dotinga is a reporter for the Christian Science Monitor.

Using the Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center, find sources that explore the strengths and weaknesses of the American presidential election process. Then write a brief editorial giving your opinion about the process. Explain how the system should be changed or why it should remain the same. Give at least two reasons for your point of view.

As you read, consider the following questions:

1. What would the National Popular Vote plan require states to do with their electoral votes, according to Dotinga?
2. According to the author, what has to happen before the National Popular Vote plan would take effect?
3. How, according to Dotinga, does the current system force presidential candidates to appeal to the majority of Americans?

Picture it: On election day in some future year, a presidential candidate ends up with the most popular votes but not enough electoral votes to win.

It's a repeat of the 2000 election in which one contender, Democrat Al Gore, took the majority of the national popular vote, while the other, Republican George W. Bush, clinched the most electoral college votes and, hence, the presidency.

But this time there's a twist: A bunch of states team up and give all their electoral college votes to the nationwide popular-vote winner, regardless of who won the most votes in their state. Then, the candidate who garners the most citizen votes in the country moves into the White House.

Legislative houses in Colorado and California have approved this plan, known as the National Popular Vote proposal, taking it partway to passage. Other states, too, are exploring the idea of a binding compact among states that would oblige each of them to throw its electoral votes behind the national popular-vote winner.

At issue is the nation's presidential election system governed by the electoral college. Established by the US Constitution in 1787, the system has occasionally awarded the presidency to candidates who couldn't muster the most votes nationwide, as happened in 1824, 1876, 1888, and 2000.

While an amendment to the Constitution could change or eliminate the electoral college, battleground
states and small states would probably oppose any change that would leave them with less influence. Indeed, since the system's inception, numerous efforts to amend it have been defeated.

Instead, reformers have turned to the interstate compact, saying it would be constitutional because agreements between states already exist.

**Advantages of Reform**

The compact is designed to take effect only if states representing 270 electoral votes approve the compact legislation, giving those states majority control of the electoral college. The result: The "compact" group of states would be able to determine a presidential election.

The plan is supported by electoral reform activists and a bipartisan advisory group including former GOP [Republican] Rep. John Anderson (a presidential candidate in 1980) and former Sen. Birch Bayh (D).

They say the compact would allow long-ignored states to get attention again in presidential campaigns. The current system has "just taken a lot of states off of the presidential map," complains Rob Richie, executive director of FairVote, a nonpartisan organization based in Maryland, which supports the compact.

The compact proposal passed the California Assembly on May 30 [2006] with all but one Republican opposing. It awaits a vote in the state Senate and, if it passes, approval or rejection by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R), who hasn't publicly expressed an opinion about it.

Colorado's Senate approved the plan in April [2006] with bipartisan support, but it has not [yet] advanced....

Five GOP Assembly members are pushing a popular-vote bill in New York, and legislators in Missouri, Louisiana, and Illinois have introduced bills. Advocates hope to put the legislation before every state by 2007, says Mr. Ritchie.

Meanwhile, several newspapers have come out in favor of the plan, including *The New York Times*, which calls it an "ingenious solution."

**Criticisms of Reform Plans**

But in California, GOP Assemblyman Chuck DeVore derisively refers to the proposal as a way to "amend the Constitution without amending the Constitution."

"It's like cheating," says Mr. DeVore, who predicts that the plan would force candidates to campaign primarily in urban areas with large populations to win the popular vote.

Under the current system "we discourage regional candidacies and basically force people who are running
DeVore supports a system that would allocate some of a state’s electoral votes based on the popular vote in congressional districts, an approach that exists in Nebraska and Maine. All other states and the District of Columbia award all their electoral votes to the presidential candidate who gets the most votes in their state.

It takes 270 electoral votes out of 538 total votes in the college to win the presidency. That total equals the number of members each state has in both houses of Congress, with the District of Columbia getting three of its own.

The electoral college system is "distinctly American," says Shaun Bowler, a political scientist at the University of California, Riverside.

A Controversial System

In US history, there have been about 700 failed proposals in Congress to change the electoral college system, according to the Office of the Federal Register.

"It's safe to say that there has been no aspect of what the founders worked up in Philadelphia that has received more criticism than the electoral college," says historian Rick Shenkman of George Mason University.

If any state approves this new proposal, legal challenges are inevitable, Bowler says.

But he figures there might be a way to dampen enthusiasm. "You could say the French elect their president directly," he says. "I'm thinking that will get people running away from any support: If the French do it, is it really right for the US?"

Further Readings

Books


Periodicals


• Thomas Mann "Redistricting Reform," National Voter, June 2005.


Source Citation
Raskin, Jamin. "The Electoral College System Should Be Reformed by Adopting the

Document URL
http://ic.galegroup.com:80/ic/ovic/PageFinderPortletPage/PageFinderPortletWindow?javax.portlet.action=doSearch&action=1&avoidSearchHistory=true&query=RN+EJ3010508227&prodId=OVIC&p=OVIC&source=Bookmark&u=scr uzpl&jsid=bd0e789d0c7762a8b4a6c3143387f585

**Gale Document Number:** GALE|EJ3010508227