Title:
Heal Our Republic: Change Our Electoral System

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Summary:
I believe a new presidential electoral system is in order. We need something
that rewards candidates who have bold ideas, while drawing more voters into the
process as well.

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Article Body:
Consider the presidential election system we have today: Every state has a
number of electors, equal to their amount of representatives and senators, who
vote for the President of the United States. In most states, every elector goes
to the candidate who achieves the most popular votes, regardless of his margin
of victory. This means:

1. Presidential candidates have little reason to campaign to the whole
country. If partisan or personal loyalty makes victory certain in a state, a
candidate can safely ignore it in favor of other states. Conversely, if a
candidate will definitely lose in a state, then he won't waste his time there.
Only competitive "battleground states" see much activity.
2. We have less national turnout. If a state will assuredly support one
candidate, why bother voting? Also, lack of vigorous campaigning in a state
might contribute to voter apathy during an election.
3. With the winner-take-all plurality system, candidates try to attract
moderate voters, so to avoid turning people off, they emphasize their
personalities more than their policies. This results in bland, visionless
candidates who take those traits into the White House.

I believe a new presidential electoral system is in order. We need something
that rewards candidates who have bold ideas, while drawing more voters into the
process as well.

Therefore, I recommend we emulate the French.

Hear me out! The French have an excellent method by which to elect their

president. It is a two-stage electoral process. In the first part, candidates from all the country's parties can run. Candidates who mobilize partisans with daring policy agendas will perform best here. Afterwards, during the second stage runoff, the first and second place finishers of the first round compete. Whoever achieves a majority vote wins. This requires the candidates to make themselves as palatable toward the center as possible.

Eliminating the Electoral College and implementing two-round direct popular vote elections here would deliver many benefits. It would reward courageous candidates with striking ideas in the first stage, but it would weed out dangerous fanatics in the second stage. It would allow smaller parties to achieve greater prominence than they could achieve in a winner-take-all elector paradigm. It would give candidates reason to campaign to every American. And it would give each voter a larger role in determining the outcome of the election.

As a German friend also pointed out to me, "I don't quite get it that in the US, votes for the Greens i.e. are all lost, even help a candidate from the right to get into office (see 2000) -- a second turn of the elections would allow Green supporters to vote for the Democrat." This is an important point. The major parties would have to give adherents of smaller parties reasons to vote for them. This would force the Democrats and Republicans to take other parties, such as Greens and Libertarians, seriously, and perhaps heed some of their political desires. This would make more Americans feel as if they play an important role in the republican process.

To complete the reform, we also need to make going out to vote easier. Right now, we seemingly make voting as hard as we can. Elections take place on weekdays, so if Americans want to vote, they must take off work or rush to the polls before or after work. When they get there, they must wait a long time to finish the process, because the volunteer polling coordinators are old, retired people. (Young people have to work, after all.) All this makes voting seem not worth the hassle to millions of Americans.

To change that and increase turnout, Election Day should become a federal holiday. That would allow Americans to vote without worrying about missing work and forfeiting pay, or hurrying through throngs of people in the morning or evening. Younger Americans would also be able to volunteer to oversee the polls, thereby making voting a smoother and faster experience.

While we're on the subject of changing our electoral system, let's consider this: At the time the Constitution was drafted, one of the Anti-Federalist objections to the document was to the pluralistic election of representatives. The Anti-Federalists argued this could allow the election of representatives

whom most of the community despised, but who still managed to get more votes than anyone else. Instead, according to the Anti-Federalists, districts should select their representatives by majority vote.

I believe that Anti-Federalist objection has merit. How can a representative represent a district if most of the people there hate him? Changing congressional elections to two-stage elections, similar to what I outlined above for presidential elections, would be a good idea. That way, we could ensure the majority of citizens in a district would have voted for their congressman. All the benefits of switching the national presidential election to a two-stage majority vote model would apply here.

Many conservatives would object to the national scope of my reform plan. They'd correctly point out it would erode federalism. Because population centers—cities—would yield greater power, our executive branch might also shift to the left. Given the power of the presidency, this might produce a government similarly inclined to governments in Europe. Anathema to conservatives, that would be.

To counteract the leftward effect and to placate conservatives, I suggest we repeal the 17th Amendment. Let the state legislatures elect senators again. Senators who don't rely upon the people as an electoral base would be a lot more willing to challenge the president. Not only might the Senate be more conservative than the President, but they'd feel safer defying him since the people who put him in office wouldn't be the same ones who put them in office. They wouldn't have to worry as much about the President's popularity.

In addition, with the people electing both the House of Representatives and the President under my plan, we'd need more checks against the tyranny of the majority. Election of federal senators by state legislatures would constitute such a check.

No electoral procedures could solve all problems. But this extensive reform plan would eliminate many of them:

* Campaigns focusing only on battleground states.
* Nullification of millions of votes.
* Candidates whose only goal is to win a plurality of the ballots.
* Victories by candidates whom most of the community doesn't support.
* Apathy of the electorate toward politics.

We especially should not underestimate the importance of the last element. Only an interested and engaged citizenry can serve as the foundation of a republic.

Without it, a republic cannot stand.