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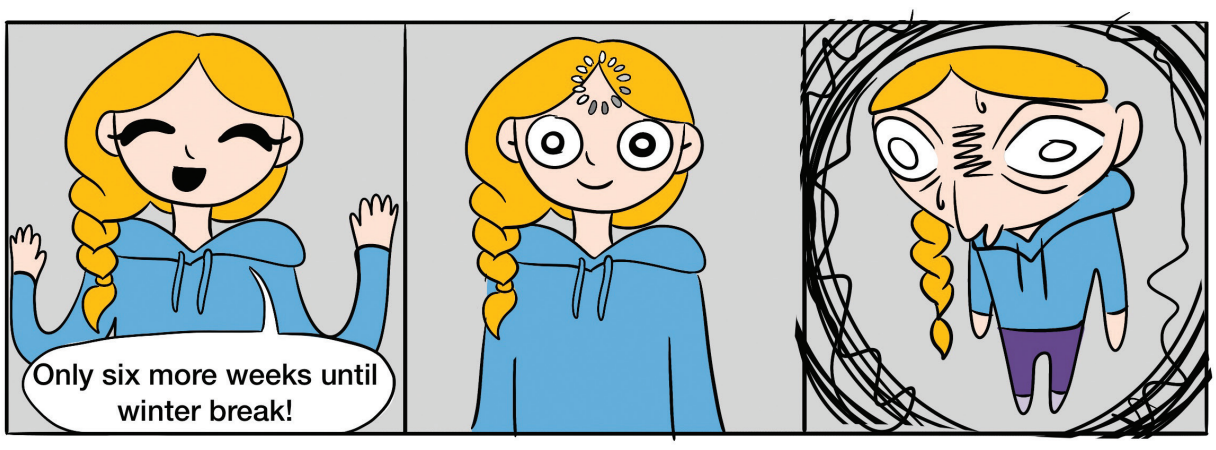
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Daily OPINION

PATRICK'S POLITICS:

WE SHOULD ABOLISH THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE



FILE LOGO/THE DAILY CAMPUS

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When the blue tsunami hit America this November, there was a side effect you might have missed. Democrats gained control of several state legislatures that had previously been Republican. This is important because it may give enough votes for a plan to sidestep the Electoral College.

This plan, called the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact (NPVIC), is an agreement between states that would give their Electoral College votes in the presidential contest to whichever candidate wins the national popular vote (as the name suggests). Currently, the compact has only been signed by 18 states, which account for 222 Electoral College votes. But the influx of Democratic control in new states could push this total over the needed threshold of 270, meaning the presidential election would effectively be decided by popular vote.

The NPVIC has gained popularity (see what I did there?) because for as long as this country has existed, people have had problems with the Electoral College. To counter the issue that the Electoral College is extremely hard to get rid of and would require an amendment to the Constitution, the NPVIC might provide an easier solution and achieve the same result.

This compact, though, has its own problems. The Constitution doesn't allow states to make compacts with each other without the consent of Congress, meaning that the NPVIC would need approval at the federal level. And the federal government isn't supposed to be in charge of electoral processes. It doesn't help that the Supreme Court has a 6-3 conservative bent and would likely be very unfriendly to the constitutionality of the NPVIC.

Therefore, we are finally reaching my point: Despite the admittedly massive difficulties involved, the goal should be to abolish the Electoral College altogether.

The U.S. is unique in its application of the Electoral College system. We are the only nation with a democratic system to elect our presidents this way. There is a reason for this; it's an outdated and ultimately illogical way to choose the most powerful figure in the nation.

To start, the Electoral College allows for the candidate that wins more votes to lose anyway. This has happened twice in the 21st century and five times overall; George W. Bush won the electoral college but lost the popular vote in the controversial 2000 election, while Donald Trump did the same thing in 2016 (therefore cursing us with still discussing him ten long years later). If democratically elected officials are supposed to be chosen by the people, how do we account for the fact that our nation's foremost official has been chosen by a minority of voters five separate times?

Beyond the unfairness of that possibility, the Electoral College system makes individual votes matter more or less depending on your state. Because less populous states automatically get at least three electoral votes, they can have an outsized influence on the outcome of the election. States like Wyoming and Vermont have twice as much impact on the outcome relative to their population. This naturally disenfranchises voters in larger states such as California or Texas, where your vote literally doesn't count as much towards the final result as in others.

The process also minimizes voters in a different way. Under the current system, a candidate who wins a state's popular vote gets all of its Electoral College votes in most cases (Nebraska and Maine allow for splitting the vote based on which candidate each of their districts pick). This creates a lot of attention around so-called "purple" or "swing" states where Electoral College votes are up for grabs, such as Ohio, Michigan or Pennsylvania. Presidential candidates usually campaign heavily in these states; elections are often decided by whether a candidate can win enough swing states and therefore their Electoral College votes.

For those states, the Electoral College system is all well and good; potential voters get outsized attention from both candidates and the national media. If you think about states such as Connecticut, however, the picture becomes much less rosy. Connecticut has been reliably Democratic for years, and thus presidential candidates don't really care about it. If you live here, you might have noticed that there are very few major rallies by presidential candidates. This is true of many states that have a distinct partisan bent to their electorate. If the U.S. moved to a popular vote system, our votes would matter far more to the process.

The Electoral College has also found its underpinnings in historical disenfranchisement. Historian Alexander Keyssar, who published the book "Why Do We Still Have the Electoral College?" argues that the Electoral College initially benefited Southern slaveholding states, because enslaved people counted towards the apportionment of electors without having any rights. This continued into the Jim Crow era, as Black Americans were considered part of the population but still faced systemic violence and discrimination at the polls. Even in 1970, after an amendment to abolish the Electoral College passed the House, senators from Southern states were the ones to block it.

Our current system of electing the president is based on the devaluation of certain voters, both in the past and the present. It is an unequal exercise of democracy, and it is a poor way to determine the country's future. Not even the Founders, who set up the core of the Electoral College as we know it, were satisfied with the arrangement; James Madison said it was born out of "fatigue and impatience." We need to revisit the Electoral College process and replace it with the simpler, more equal and more effective process of a national popular vote.



Photo of electoral college in Maryland's capital. On Nov. 3, The Democrats took control of several state legislatures that were previously Republican.

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