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The Color Purple: Can Alternative Election Systems Better Represent American Political Behavior?

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Statement of the Problem

"Can government really be active and, at the same time, limited? History suggests otherwise" (Andrews 1993). In offering this observation, Lew Rockwell was referring to the practice of governing. However, his thoughts also relate well to the practice of electing those who govern. In particular, our current method of electing the President through the Electoral College, offers an active but limited system. Active in the sense that any citizen so desiring and of legal age can cast a ballot. Limited in the sense that each ballot cast is not directly electing a given candidate but rather is selecting a slate of electors swearing to vote for the chosen candidate.

Debate over the appropriateness of the Electoral College is as old as the union. In fact, scholars have called the Electoral College "the second choice of many delegates though it was the first choice of few" (Longley and Pierce 1999). The Constitutional Convention delegates were under considerable pressure to create a government with wisdom and expediency. In addition, the method of electing a president was granted a level of abstraction in light of the forgone conclusion that George Washington would serve as the first.

Additionally, the English heritage of limited popular participation in the election process left the Founding Fathers wary of trusting the electorate at large with choosing the nation's leader. These realities, along with the quickly disproved assumption that support for any single candidate would be greatly dispersed nationally, allowed for delegates to settle on the Electoral College as an agreeable compromise (Longley & Pierce 1999). The Electoral College provided for a degree of popular participation while also providing a buffer between the presidency and the public.

Yet, more than two centuries later, the political climate is one the Founding Fathers could never have imagined and "what really moved the delegates to accept the electoral system, . . .the social realities of the time" no longer exist (Longley & Pierce 1999). The age of mass media and the levels of education achieved by most Americans are variables our founders likely never could have imagined. As was previously mentioned the ability for candidates to achieve national appeal has long since been proved, a reality doubted by the Founding Fathers. Further, universal suffrage is afforded a level of importance today that was not entertained in the 18th century.

A system, therefore, developed for popular election in 1781 may not be suited to today's political realities. Indeed, as the country has become increasingly polarized and the number of competitive states has dwindled, presidential campaigns have focused attention and resources on fewer states. In a nation of fifty states, scarcely as many states are competitive now than comprised the original colonies. The Founding Fathers may have feared direct elections and preferred a more limited approach. Yet, today, it can be argued that as few as one quarter of the states play an active role in electing the president. Is this the degree of limitation the Founding Fathers envisioned? In light of all the advances and changes the founders could never have imagined, the question then is, whether a limited electoral system remains the best choice.

Those opposed to the Electoral College system that currently exists have argued that citizen participation in the electoral process is limited in that every ballot cast does not carry equal weight. For example, ballots cast in decidedly Democratic or Republican states for the "minority" candidate carry little to no weight under the current system.

Electoral College delegates in 48 of the 50 states are assigned in a winner take all fashion, and those casting ballots for the losing candidate are casting a pointless vote.

In the wake of the 2000 Presidential election, long time arguments supporting the abolition of the Electoral College have gained renewed momentum. In fact, following the 2000 election controversy, 21 states entertained adopting alternative Electoral College systems (Turner 2005). Electoral College opponents contend that direct democracy will better represent the public's wishes, while supporters contend that without the Electoral College the role of small states will be all but completely marginalized. What then is the answer? Both sides of the argument have valid claims and a compromise system might better acknowledge these strengths. Descriptive and comparative analyses of past presidential elections provide an opportunity to determine whether alternative Electoral College allocation methods might create a more nationally competitive landscape while more accurately reflecting voting behavior.

At present, Maine and Nebraska offer the only active alternative to the winner take all system of Electoral College vote allocation. Under their systems, electoral votes are assigned based on which candidate wins a given congressional district. Another alternative, proposed to Coloradans last November, is a proportional allocation based on the percentage of popular votes garnered. Would nation-wide adoption of either of these systems more accurately represent public sentiment, while making more states competitive? If either system is adopted what changes to the campaign process might be anticipated?

The issue of how best to maintain the spirit of democracy in a rapidly developing modern society is an important one. The nature of American democracy has undergone a number of changes since the 18th century. As we embark on the 21st century, it increasingly appears that the time has come for additional changes to our electoral system in order to reaffirm our democratic heritage.

Literature Review

The Electoral College was created with the 12th Amendment to the Constitution and is therefore as old as the republic. As such, there is a sizeable body of literature dealing with the subject. Historical and overview accounts of the institution include *The Electoral College Primer*, an extensive look at how the framers decided on the system and what fears led to the decision (Longley & Pierce, 1999). For instance, an understanding that the Founding Fathers chose this system in part as a result of the fear, or belief, that support for any one candidate would be so disparate nationally as to preclude a popular vote majority, is valuable in judging whether the Electoral College remains relevant. In this case, clearly, the ability for a candidate to gain national popularity and appeal has long since been demonstrated. Longley and Pierce also offer a comprehensive discussion of what alternatives were entertained at the Convention, and what alternatives have been entertained in the ensuing two centuries.

Another fairly comprehensive look at the Electoral College, its origins and history, and arguments for and against its retention can be found in *The Importance of the Electoral College* by George Grant (2004). Grant offers a brief synopsis of the arguments pro and con for the Electoral College, but also ends on the side of retaining the current electoral system using a historical justification. Grant posits that the Founding Fathers were reluctant revolutionaries that adopted radical change only after being forced to do so. As such, Grant argues, we should not adopt radical change unless or until the system's irrelevance forces such action (71-77, 2004).

Thus Grant's historical justification for retention of the Electoral College helps span the bridge between historical literature and a large population of analysis attempting to measure the Electoral College's relevance today. This body of literature points out that the American system actually strays from modern norms as the rest of the world trends toward direct democracy and/or election runoffs that guard against third party "spoilers" (Hardaway 1994). Another notable commentary of the Electoral College in modern politics foreshadowed the 2000 presidential election scenario, pointing out the increasing likelihood that the popular vote winner and the Electoral College winner will be two different candidates (Abbott 1991).

Not surprisingly, the primary body of literature surrounding the Electoral College is comprised of two schools of thought, one opposing and one favoring the institution. Arguments favoring the Electoral College argue that it protects the interests of smaller states and minorities by equalizing the weight of votes cast (Gregg 2001; Turner 2005). Those opposing the Electoral College counter this argument forwarding that the Electoral College does not account for interests of minorities but rather "actually discourages attention to minority interests." Since appealing to the majority will suffice for election, the Electoral College negates minority voting pockets within states (Edwards 2004).

In addition to surveying literature regarding the Electoral College, discussions of voting behavior and the impact of media coverage and advertisements is also useful in evaluating how potential changes to the electoral system may impact the electorate and campaigns. The adoption of alternative systems of Electoral College allocation may alter campaign tactics. For example, it is reasonable to assume that a previously uncompetitive state or Congressional District that becomes competitive due to the adoption of a new system would, as a result experience increased levels of campaign attention. Understanding how campaign and media attention affect voting behavior in states that are currently competitive is useful in analyzing potential effects of either alternative allocation method.

Campaign advertisements and media reports of candidate stump speeches have grown so customary, that popular perception may expect that these mediums do not have much impact on voter behavior and fail to provide useful information to the voter. However, academic studies find such a belief contrary to reality. Samuel Popkin, in analyzing the reasoning process behind voter behavior has found that media coverage and campaign spots do provide the voter with information that is then used in the decision process (1994). Such findings seem to make sense when combined with the position that increased exposure to campaign advertisements and media coverage lead to increased popular interest in the political process (Coleman 2003).

Finally, there is a smaller body of literature relating to whether various electoral systems stimulate or depress voter participation. Unfortunately, little study has been done on the effect of congressional district models. At present of the only two states using such a system, Maine and Nebraska, neither has split delegates in an election. Given this fact, neither state would have allocated delegates any differently under a winner-take-all system. As such, they have not provided strong case studies for the effects of such a system on the population at large. While the effects of a district system on voter turnout have proven hard to study, analysis has posited that such an alternative system would change campaigns and candidate behavior. In his critique of the district system, Robert Turner suggests that much as attention is now focused on battleground states, under a district system, attention would focus on battleground districts (2005).

Proportional representation models, on the other hand have been studied directly, as similar systems are used other countries, as well. Studies have shown that proportional systems stimulate voter participation (Blais 1990). Proportional systems go a long way to eliminating the issue of lost votes – or votes cast for the losing candidate in a single winner district. Under proportional systems, all votes cast for candidates garnering significant support, are weighed in the vote allocation, making such a system more attractive to voters and candidates alike (Lijphart 1997).

Methodology

Research Questions

In light of recent presidential elections, debate concerning the effectiveness of the winner-take-all Electoral College system has drawn steady attention. This study will seek to determine if alternate forms of delegate allocation may better serve the function of electing presidents. The primary questions to be answered during this study include:

- Would alternative Electoral College allocation methods increase the level of competition in more states, thereby making presidential campaigns/elections more national in character?
- Would alternative Electoral College allocation methods more accurately reflect voting behavior on a local level?
- If the answer to either of the previous questions is positive, what effects might these changes have on the nature of presidential campaigning, voter turnout and state political landscapes?

Sample

Election results on the congressional district and county level in all 50 states for the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections will provide the sample for this project. The sample will be obtained from the voting records as posted by various Secretaries of State Websites and/or CNN.com. Sample data will consist of voting records and turnout statistics for all 50 states at the county and congressional district levels.

The median sample size for the two elections is approximately 100 million voters. The voting population is roughly equivalent to national averages in terms of gender and race demographics.

Instruments

The majority of this study was conducted using descriptive and comparative analysis. These instruments are the most useful because the data is historic and the information needed is behavioral and comparative in nature. The data used in this analysis will be obtained from official election results as posted by individual Secretary of State Websites and CNN.com.

The descriptive analysis consists of identifying what congressional districts consistently vote for the losing candidate. For example, the Jefferson County congressional district in Kentucky consistently votes Democratic while the state generally votes Republican. The analysis determines which states offer the "best" cases for Electoral College allocation reform. In other words, a state where 50 percent of its congressional districts may vote for the other party, offers a better case for reform than a state with only 25 percent of its districts as possible swing delegates.

The comparative analysis discusses how states' Electoral College votes may have differed in the past two elections under alternative Electoral College methods. The analysis includes a national level examination of how the overall Electoral College vote count may have differed under the two alternative allocation models. The comparative analysis takes the descriptive analysis of congressional district voting patterns and seeks to determine if a larger number of areas are more accurately represented under alternative allocation systems. Finally, the comparative analysis attempts to project what changes in voter and campaign behavior may be expected were either of the alternative allocation scenarios adopted.

Design

The first stage of this project determines what local level (congressional district) voting behaviors were present in the last two presidential elections. Once this information is gathered observations can be made concerning what states are currently competitive, and which states appear competitive on a more local or regional level. Those states offering competitive potential at the local level will become the focus of future analysis.

For example, states like North and South Dakota, and Montana consist of only one congressional district and are therefore, by default, poor laboratories for analyzing the impact of the congressional district allocation method. Further, states like Utah that are overwhelmingly partisan down to the county level are equally poor candidates for analysis. However, states like Mississippi that appear at first glance to be predominantly Republican but upon closer examination reveal large swaths of Democratic loyalty provide excellent case studies.

The second phase of this study looks at the possible adoption of two forms of alternative Electoral College vote delegation. The two systems to be analyzed for feasibility are the Congressional district model used by Maine and Nebraska, and the proportional allocation model that is based on popular vote percentage. The congressional district model currently used allocates each of the electors awarded for House representation according to how each congressional district votes. The remaining two electors, awarded for Senate representation, are allocated to the popular vote winner statewide. The proportional model, as it was recently proposed in Colorado, would assign electors to each candidate based on their share of the popular vote. For example, in a state awarding a total of 10 delegates, a candidate receiving 60 percent of the popular vote would receive 6 electors. In many respects, the proportional model adapts the concept of direct election to the state level.

The rules of each model were applied to the election results of the past two elections to see if significant reallocation of Electoral College votes occurs under either system, thus answering the first project question (Would alternative Electoral College allocation methods increase the level of competition in more states, thereby making presidential campaigns/elections more national in character?). While the presence of Electoral College realignment is a good sign of potential competitiveness, as realignment offers a new opportunity for a given party to collect Electoral College delegates, realignment alone is not sufficient to judge competitiveness. Those congressional districts realigning but that consistently vote with the same party by significant margins are not likely to draw increased campaign attention from either party, as the Electoral College outcome is no less in doubt.

A more effective evaluation of a district's level of competition can be judged through analyzing voting margin. Therefore, significance was judged by assigning three levels of competitiveness. Highly competitive states are those in which realignment occurred and which contain at least one district decided by a voting margin of less than five percent. Moderately competitive states will be those witnessing realignment, with at least one district decided by a margin of less than 10 percent. Any states with realignment but that did not contain districts decided by narrow margins will be considered as slightly competitive. A designation of slightly competitive was chosen because realignment did occur, as such further change in partisan loyalty could be expected over longer periods of time, depending on whether increased campaign or candidate attention is garnered from the realignment. However, in the short term, districts decided by more than 10 percent are less likely to change loyalties.

The third phase of this study analyzes the alternative Electoral College allocations on a local level to determine whether more county and Congressional District political preferences are reflected under either system. For example, Jefferson County, Kentucky routinely votes Democratic in presidential elections, however, under the current system, with the state of Kentucky designating all of its Electoral College delegates to the Republican candidate, Jefferson County's political preference is not reflected. Under the congressional district model, Jefferson County – a single congressional district – would send its Electoral College delegate in favor of the Democratic candidate. This realignment more accurately reflects the county's political character. An analysis of how often such changes occur across the country will answer the question "Would alternative

Electoral College allocation methods more accurately reflect political character on a local level?"

The final stage of analysis took the results of the first three phases into consideration while projecting what effects might be expected on political campaigning and voter turnout. For example, a state with 10 Electoral College votes that will only change delegation of one vote would likely see little or no added campaign attention unless an extraordinarily close election were expected. However, if the same state changed four or five or more delegates under an alternate system, or was located next to an already competitive state, then added campaign attention becomes more likely, especially in competitive districts.

Consideration of anticipated economic and social benefits or deficits resulting from the adoption of alternative Electoral College systems were also included in the study analysis. As the author determined in *Deficit Spending* (2004), states receiving more campaign attention reap economic benefits from advertising and candidate visits. The increased media buys and campaign advertisement revenue in competitive areas spreads economic benefit throughout the community by way of a multiplier effect. In addition, these states often see social rewards in the form of increased voter participation, for as studies have shown increased media attention leads to increased voter attention and participation (Rinehart, 2005).

Based on the results of the feasibility study for each alternative Electoral College allocation model, recommendations were made as to whether adoption of either system should be considered. Electoral College alternatives could be adopted as a federal change to the current election system as delineated in the Twelfth Amendment, or individual state legislatures could adopt an alternative method. As such, the results of this analysis may prove useful to political parties on the state and national level as well as to national non-profit organizations dedicated to increasing civic participation. Recommendations as to future courses of action will be made to each of these groups based on analysis conclusions. Before recommending what, if either, system should be considered, this analysis will include a discussion of each system's perceived strengths and weaknesses.

While the author is confident the data being analyzed will result in recommendations that could be of use to national and state officials, there are weaknesses associated with the subject matter. As was mentioned in the instruments section, the data are historical in nature. Unfortunately there is no way to analyze Electoral College allocation models in the present case because the changes being projected require legal code and policy modifications. However, because the sample sizes are so large the historical data should generate an accurate picture of voter behavior in individual states and protect against any localized voter irregularities or biases.

Additionally this study is limited somewhat by the format of the data available. At present few states report election results according to congressional district for statewide elections. Further, precinct level data was sometimes not available. As such, in areas where congressional district boundaries run across county lines, determining what percentage of the vote should be awarded to each congressional district is difficult. In many instances, evaluating voting results on a precinct level does not provide any further detail as some precincts are also split between congressional districts. In every instance all methods of determining accurate vote totals for congressional districts were exhausted, including requested reports from Secretaries of State and comparing precinct level data with the precinct data for U.S. Representative races in an effort to determine what precincts should be applied to a give congressional district.

When congressional district data could not be found, county vote totals were divided fractionally based on what percentage of the county vote appeared to be included in each congressional district. For example, when precinct level data was not available, votes from each county were allotted according to the percentage of US Representative votes awarded to represented congressional districts. (An example of this calculation process if available in Appendix A.)

A more in depth analysis would be possible by examining a larger range of elections in order to catalogue voter tendency changes over longer periods of time to determine if any states in particular are too volatile (or too stable) to analyze. Unfortunately, given the time constraints under which the study was conducted such an extensive historical analysis was not manageable. Using only the 2000 and 2004 elections should not shadow the findings with illegitimacy, however. Voting behavior changes gradually and any changes in behavior that would affect my analysis would occur over an extremely long period of time. As a result of the relatively slow changing character of mass voting behavior, a two election cycle analysis should prove sufficient to determine the effects of adopting alternative Electoral College systems.

Conclusions

And the winner is . . .

The last two presidential elections have been close. In fact, the 2000 outcome was so tight that the three percent margin of victory in 2004 seemed wide. Given the competitive nature of these two elections, it is somewhat surprising that the Electoral

College leader changed in none of the four scenarios applied in this analysis. (A full account of all hypothetical election results is presented in Appendices B and C.) When applying the congressional district model, George Bush won in 2000 with 282 Electoral College votes to Al Gore's 233. Bush's victory in the 2004 race was even more overwhelming, at 314-193. The results of the 2004 election were not as lop-sided when applying the proportional allocation model, though Bush still won with 280 Electoral College votes.

Table 1 – Actual and Projected Election Results

	2000	**2004**
Actual Results	Bush: 271 Gore: 266	Bush: 286 Kerry: 252
Congressional District Model Projection	Bush: 282 Gore: 233	Bush: 314 Kerry: 193
Proportional Model Projection	Bush: 265 Gore: 264 Nader: 7	Bush: 280 Kerry: 252

One outcome that was of interest, if not surprising, was the result for the 2000 race after proportional allocation was applied. Under this system, George Bush would have received 265 delegates compared to Al Gore's 264. It is the clear "spoiler" factor of Ralph Nader that makes this scenario interesting, as he garnered enough votes in six states to earn seven Electoral College delegates, thus preventing either Bush or Gore from securing the 270 majority votes necessary to win election.

While the overall outcome of the presidential races was not altered under either of these systems, the same cannot be said for the individual states. In one instance, the popular vote winner in a state was not the same as the state's Electoral College winner.

In 2004, Michigan's delegates would have split 9-8 in favor of George Bush despite John Kerry winning the state's popular vote. Kerry won only six of the congressional districts.

Just answer the question

The election outcome was not altered under any of the four hypothetical scenarios presented in this analysis, however, that does not mean that neither formula offers a suitable alternative to the existing Electoral College system. Earlier two key questions were posed for use in evaluating the congressional district and proportional models: Would either model increase the number of competitive states, thereby nationalizing the elections? Would either model more accurately represent American voting behavior? The answers to these questions will provide insight as to whether either allocation alternative is worth consideration.

The Congressional District Model

Judging the competitiveness of a state is a difficult matter to do, especially with regard to the congressional district model. Simply counting the number of states that would allocate delegates to the losing candidate, or split delegates, is not sufficient. Such splitting behavior may be of interest the first election after such a system is instituted, however, dividing Electoral College votes alone will not make a state more competitive in the long run. If the congressional districts expected to reallocate are decidedly partisan, their behavior in subsequent elections is not a mystery and is not likely to generate "new" attention.

Georgia serves as a good example. Situated in the heart of the conservative south, Georgia has not been a battleground state in decades. Under the congressional district model Georgia would have awarded the democratic candidate two delegates in both 2000 and 2004. However, the same two districts, four and five, routinely vote democratic. As a result, the outcome of Georgia's Electoral College count would be no more a mystery under the congressional district model than the current system.

What then, would be a good yard stick for measuring the level of competition in a given state? One method is identifying whether a state has any congressional districts that are competitive, where the partisan persuasion of the voting population is too close to call. Under the congressional district model, more than fifty districts were decided by less than five percent of the vote in the past two elections. Nearly two dozen additional districts were decided by less than 10 percent.

Using the previously outlined scaling model, 20 states ranked as highly competitive during the past two elections. An additional 11 states ranked as moderately competitive and seven states qualified as slightly competitive. While 14 states failed to at least witness realignment during the past two election cycles, nine of the states ranking as highly competitive included districts decided by one percent or less.

Table 2: Projected State Levels of Competition

	Highly Competitive	**Moderately Competitive**	**Slightly Competitive**
2000	AR*, CA*, FL, IL, IA*, MD, MO, NM, NY, NC*, OH*, PA, TN, TX, VA, WA, WI	MI, MN, NJ, OR	AL, AZ, CO, GA, KY, LA, NV
2004	CA*, FL, IL*, IA, MO, NJ, NM, NY*, OH, OR*, PA*, SC, TX, VA, WA, WI	AR, CO, GA, KY, MD, MI, MN, NC, TN	LA, NV

** Denotes states with Congressional Districts decided by less than 1%*

Additionally, the hotly contested districts were not solely in already competitive states like Iowa, but rather were spread out across the country in states including

Washington, Oregon, Virginia, North Carolina and Arkansas. It should also be noted that many states categorized as highly competitive, also contained at least one moderately competitive district. Turner notes the effect of these new battleground districts in writing that "the complexity and uncertainty in targeting these districts would force candidates to contest a larger and more geographically diverse percentage of the population than the current system" (2005). Given the geographically diverse and numerically significant number of potentially competitive districts, the congressional district model can be found satisfy the conditions of the first analysis question.

In evaluating whether the congressional model would more accurately represent the voting behavior of a given state's residents, two factors were judged: whether the state allotted any congressional district votes to the candidate who lost the popular vote and how many districts did so. By these standards, the congressional district model does more accurately depict national voting behavior.

In 2000, 34 states would have awarded electoral delegates to the losing candidate. These changes were reflected in a total of 114 congressional districts that would have been more accurately represented, a change in more than one quarter of districts nationally. Similarly, in 2004, 32 states would have awarded votes to the losing candidate in the process of more accurately representing the voting behavior of 118 congressional districts.

The Proportional Allocation Model

While determining whether the congressional district model increased the level of competition nationally required identifying a somewhat subjective criterion, evaluating the proportional model in relation to the first analysis standard is much easier. Assigning

Electoral College delegates for each state based on what percentage of the state's popular vote each candidate receives clearly places more states in play. Theoretically, this model would place all fifty states in play, even the states considered among the least competitive now, would split delegates under this system. In fact, only the District of Columbia's three delegates remain undivided under the proportional system.

States that have long since been forgotten in the months of electoral math figuring and refiguring by politicians, pundits and the media become highly competitive under the proportional system. California for example, the largest electoral prize, has long been considered a democratic stronghold. If delegates had been awarded proportionally in 2004, California's 55 delegates would have divided almost evenly with Bush receiving 25 and Kerry retaining 30 votes. In 2000, California would have been similarly divided with even Ralph Nader collecting two delegates.

Further, states in the Deep South that have been in the republican column for decades split down the middle. For example, in 2000 Alabama would have assigned five delegates to vote for Bush and four to support Gore. In both 2000 and 2004, Louisiana would have awarded five delegates to Bush and four to Gore and Kerry respectively. By placing even those states previously considered among the least competitive in motion, the proportional allocation model vastly improves the level of competitiveness in elections, making them truly national in character.

That the proportional system is more representative of voter behavior, is immediately apparent as well. Under the current system, it can be argued that one's vote is only represented if it was cast for the candidate winning the voter's state. However, under a proportional system, votes are represented almost as completely as in a truly popular election format. If 40 percent of Kentuckians vote for the democratic candidate, then 40 percent of Kentucky's votes are represented by awarding 40 percent of the Electoral College delegates to the Democratic candidate.

Additionally, proportional systems have been found to increase participation, and elections with higher levels of popular participation are regarded as being more representative (Lijphart 1997). As Arend Lijphart explains:

> Proportional representation tends to stimulate voter participation by giving the voters more choices and by eliminating the problem of wasted votes . . . this makes it more attractive for individuals to cast their votes and for parties to mobilize voters even in areas of the country in which they are weak (1997).

Following from these conclusions, it can be expected that a switch to a proportional allocation of Electoral College delegates would increase participation while allowing mobilization efforts in an increased number of areas, thus also aiding in increasing the level of national competition. In fact, Blais and Carty have forwarded that proportional representation methods could increase voter turnout between 9 and 12 percent (1990).

It's all Political

While both the congressional district and proportional models increase the level of competition while more accurately representing the electorate's behavior, each has shortcomings worthy of consideration. With all the media strategy, fundraising, and endorsements, electing a president has become a business. Additionally, no aspect of an election is free of politics. As such, consideration of either of these alternative models cannot end with answering just the first two questions posed, but must analyze what effects each system may potentially have on the politics of elections.

The primary concern surrounding the proportional model was alluded to when the hypothetical election results were discussed. As would have been the case in 2000, under the proportional system highly competitive races have the potential for ending with electoral delegates awarded such that no candidate receives an Electoral College majority. When no clear winner immediately presented itself during the extended 2000 election, discussion turned to the possibility of a partisan Congress choosing the next President. Under the proportional system, some would argue that the chances of Congress electing a future president are increased.

The likelihood of such a scenario is heightened by the presence of a strong third party candidate as was seen in 2000 with Ralph Nader. Under the proportional system the potential viability and impact of third party politics is given new life. While winning election outright still seems a remote possibility at best given the nation's entrenched political landscape, a strong third party candidate can have a significant impact on an election while collecting a few Electoral College delegates. In the hypothetical 2000 election, Nader played just such a role, earning just enough delegates to inhibit either major candidate's ability to gain a majority. One potential solution to the spoiler factor, though likely not a popular one among those opposing a two-party system, would be for states to split delegates between only the top two vote getters.

While the proportional system brings potential political uncertainty, the congressional district model's greatest shortcoming is the potential for gerrymandering. When an electoral system is based on district boundaries that can be manipulated, the potential exists for the majority party to abuse power in an attempt to retain it indefinitely. The danger, impact and political and popular implications of gerrymandering have been all too evident in Texas over the past few years.

Were a congressional district allocation model adopted, strong guidelines protecting presidential district boundaries from partisan manipulation would be a must. One possible guard to gerrymandering can be found in the recent recommendation of California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to create a bipartisan, commission appointed every ten years to redraw district boundaries after each census. Such an independent panel would take the decision out of the hands of those elected officials that stand to gain from manipulating boundaries.

While each system presents potential logistical problems, each also brings the possibility of great civic benefit. As was mentioned during the literature review, a significant body of evidence exists supporting a positive connection between campaign advertisements, spending and attention and popular interest in the electoral process. Indeed, swing states like Ohio experience significantly higher voter turnout rates than most non-battleground states. Given these findings, one can realistically expect that the increased competition either of these systems will garner in dozens of states will ultimately bring increased popular participation. Further, the sense that one's vote does not matter is a commonly cited reason for not participating. Both the congressional and proportionally allocation models could significantly increase the perception that voting will make a difference, again diminishing voter apathy and leading to increased participation.

Recommendations

There are two potential groups to which this analysis might prove interesting or useful – political parties and citizen groups in the form foundations and non-profit organizations dedicated to increasing civic participation and strengthening democracy. The interest of political parties in any information regarding a system that might provide an advantage or remove a perceived disadvantage is evident. The interest of many citizen groups in enacting electoral reform has long been an undercurrent in American politics and reached a zenith following the 2000 election.

From the Republican Party perspective, adoption of the congressional district model offers the most opportunity for political gain. Following the hypothetical conclusions of the last two elections, the Republican Party stands to gain the most from such a system. While each party gains at least a few delegates in all but 16-18 states, the Republican gains appear to far outweigh Democratic gains.

With the exception of Texas, and possibly Florida, Democrats control the most heavily populated and delegate rich states. As such, the Republicans stand to gain more delegates in a single state than the Democrats. For example, in 2004 Bush could have collected 23 of California's delegates. On the other hand, Democrats could make statistically significant inroads in historically Republican states but because these states award far fewer delegates, they generally gain only a few votes per state. Additionally, of the 16-18 states that do not split delegates under the congressional district model, as many as a dozen are heavily Republican states like Utah, Oklahoma and Kansas.

It should be noted that switching to a congressional district model will likely meet heated Democratic opposition. As such, any attempts at adopting such a system would likely be more successful on a state by state case. Whole scale adoption of the congressional district model on the national level would require a constitutional amendment, a measure that is unlikely to garner the needed two-thirds majority in Congress.

Recommendations directed at the Democratic Party, should advise opposition to either alternative allocation model. The congressional district model appears to heavily advantage Republicans, and is thus clearly not of use to the Democratic Party. While the proportional system is certainly the lesser of two evils in this case, it still opens up delegate rich Democratic states to Republican gain without offering states of equal opportunity to the Democrats.

However, if public sentiment for Electoral College change ever grows to levels elected officials can no longer ignore, Democrats would be wise to introduce a call for adopting a proportional model of allocation. Unlike the congressional model, that provides a clear advantage to one party, the proportional model leaves a great deal in the hands of each party's campaigns and get out the vote efforts. Therefore, the proportional method would likely stand a better chance at national adoption, both in Congress and among the general public, than would the congressional district model. Again, however, federal level changes are unlikely at the present time. If another presidential election results in mass confusion as was witnessed in 2000, then the climate for change might improve.

It should be noted, that the direct election option would be another viable alternative for the Democratic Party. Popular opinion polls show that two-thirds of Americans favor direct election (Turner 2005). However, a complete abolition of the

Electoral College would likely meet with considerable opposition from small state representatives as a direct election system is perceived to leave such states at a disadvantage. If the political climate were ripe for abolition, Democrats might be wise to choose direct election over a proportional system, as popular support for direct elections may create political pressure favorable to the Democratic position.

Finally, in offering a recommendation to a citizen group dedicated to increasing civic participation and strengthening democratic representation, the proportional system again represents the lesser of two evils. The danger of gerrymandering, no matter what regulatory safeguards are taken, will always be present with the congressional district model. The proportional system's downfalls are more easily minimized or eliminated with carefully considered allocation rules.

Any recommendation of a purely proportional system would have to include the caveat that the potential for electing a president that did not receive the popular vote is not eliminated. While he did not garner a majority, in the hypothetical 2000 election, Bush was still awarded more Electoral College delegates than Gore despite losing the popular vote. Introduction of a model by which Electoral College delegates are divided proportionally between only the top two vote getters is a possibility, though it would likely meet with a significant level of opposition from those supporting the rights of third party candidates.

In the end, the proportional system offers an appealing alternative to groups advocating increased levels of democracy, as it closely reflects the concept of direct elections. Given popular support for direct election, advocacy groups could likely garner significant support for a call to adopt a proportional Electoral College system.

Additionally, a proportional system is also less likely to meet with unwavering political opposition, especially from Democrats who are not likely to entertain a district model under any circumstances.