

Changing Up the Electoral College?

Four presidents have been elected without winning the majority of popular votes. That's because 48 states give all their Electoral College votes to the candidate who wins in their state. The 2000 election of President George W. Bush was the most recent example, and has sparked a renewed interest in changing the system.

Recently, in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, legislators have suggested replacing the winner-take-all system with the model used in Nebraska and Maine. These two states allot two electoral votes to the statewide winner and the rest according to the winner in each congressional district.

California and Vermont this year joined Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Washington and Washington, D.C., in supporting a different idea known as the "Agreement Among the States to Elect the President by National Popular Vote," or the NPV compact. It would require electors to vote for the candidate who wins the most votes nationwide.

Both concepts preserve the Electoral College and do not require a constitutional amendment since the U.S. Constitution gives states exclusive control over how to award their electoral votes.

Proponents of the National Popular Vote point out that the state winner-take-all rule is not in the Constitution.

They argue that it would give candidates a reason to campaign nationwide and not just in "battleground" states. The current system allows candidates to pay little attention to the concerns of voters in states where they are comfortably ahead or hopelessly behind.

They dispute that the change would broaden campaigns, suggesting instead that it would just alter their targets; candidates may focus on only their "base" voters (such as city dwellers) instead of on voters from a wide geographic cross-section. They dispute the change would broaden campaigns, suggesting instead that it would just alter their targets; candidates may focus on only their "base" voters (such as city dwellers) instead of on voters from a wide geographic cross-section. And a recount, opponents argue, could be a national nightmare because each state has its own set of procedures.

"The Electoral College is an important part in the system of constitutional checks and balances in our country," says Allison Hayward, vice president of policy at the Center for Competitive Politics. "Modifying the way we elect the president to a system that increases the chances of electoral chaos and voter anger is not in the best interest of our country."

The National Popular Vote compact would go into effect after states representing 270 electoral votes join. The tally is currently at 132 electors.

—Wendy Underhill



By the Numbers

With thousands of troops heading home, veterans' issues are high on state lawmakers' agendas. Here are some recent figures from the 2010 census.



21.8 million

Veterans in 2010.

9 million

Veterans 65 and older.

1.7 million

Veterans younger than 35.

3

States with more than 1 million veterans.

12%

Unemployment rate among veterans, October 2011.

26%

Veterans 25 and older with a bachelor's degree.

\$35,367

Annual median income of veterans, compared with \$25,605 for the population as a whole.

3.4 million

Veterans with a service-connected disability.

Source: 2010 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

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For more details, on the National Popular Vote go to www.ncsl.org/magazine.