

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

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Reflections on the Election

Well, now! This is a fine kettle of fish we find ourselves in. The presidential election is over and the winner will assume the mantle of President of the United States in about 70 days. The election process, as outlined in the Constitution, still works just fine whether or not your choice of candidate won.

As is the case in all elections, not everyone is happy with the outcome. Expectations run high, hoping your candidate wins. But let's face it: about fifty percent of the folks who vote are going to be disappointed with the outcome, and rightly so. But good for you for engaging in this wonderful process of voting. Remember – four years from now you will have the opportunity to vote again for the highest office in the land. That's what's so beautiful about our American Republic.

And this is where I want to take this article. Far too many Americans are under the mistaken impression that the United States of America is a democracy. It is not. It is a republic. You may be asking, "What's the difference?" Glad you asked!

A nation working in a clear democracy operates on the basis of a simple majority (50.1%) to elect candidates or enact legislation. In the history of the world such a system has never succeeded for long. Our Founding Fathers knew this which is why they set up a different process to protect America from the ravages of majority rule. You see, majority rule is only good if you are the one in the majority.

According to Webster's Dictionary, by definition, a democracy is "*a government by the people; especially: rule of the majority.*"

Now, in contrast, what is a republic form of government? Once again, Webster's Dictionary tells us that a republic is "*a country that is governed by elected representatives and by an elected leader (such as a president) rather than a king or queen.*"

Just as the Continental Congress was wrapping up its efforts at establishing a new form of government for the United States in the late 1780s, Benjamin Franklin was approached by a woman asking what sort of government was decided upon. In his pithy, yet direct manner, Franklin replied, "*A republic, madam, if you can keep it.*"

Therein lies the rub. The success or failure of this new government would not rest on the elected leaders or politicians. Instead, it would reside squarely on the shoulders of the American people. A republic is made up of folks who vote to elect their representatives. Ever notice the words in the Pledge of Allegiance? "*I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands . . .*" Did you see that? To the republic?

Now this is where the Electoral College comes in. What is the Electoral College anyway? Just as many Americans do not know that we are a republic, and not a democracy, a frighteningly greater number seem to have little or no

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knowledge of the purpose and function of the Electoral College. Every election cycle I will hear people call for the elimination of the Electoral College. This would be disastrous to America. It is the sole safe-guard that the Founding Fathers inserted into the Constitution so that every person's vote would count.

The History Channel reported on the Electoral College, describing it this way: *"The Electoral College was created for two reasons. The first purpose was to create a buffer between population and the selection of a President. The second as part of the structure of the government that gave extra power to the smaller states."* *"The Founding Fathers were afraid of direct election to the Presidency. They feared a tyrant could manipulate public opinion and come to power."*

I would postulate that though a tyrant certainly could coerce voters to support them, the second reason for the Electoral College, at least in my way of thinking, is most important. The smaller states have a very definite say and influence despite the huge populace vote from larger and more heavily populated areas.

The Electoral College is a body of elected officials who choose who will be the President and the Vice President. These elected persons, known as electors, are chosen by election by the people in each state. So, the electors in any state are, at a minimum, three. That would be two senators (each state has two regardless of population size), and each state has at least one representative (serving in Congress). Depending on the size of the population, a state that is much smaller in size may have a large population, such as Florida. Whereas a state of significant geographic size, such as Alaska, has a relatively small population. The number of representatives is determined by the number of people in the state. Wyoming has a ridiculously small number of people compared to California with its two enormously populated cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco. Yet, the smaller population of Wyoming has more power in voting in the Electoral College because each representative in Wyoming has more people it is representing compared to the number of citizens a representative in California is responsible for.

And this is why every Electoral College vote is valued by the candidates. One of the hits on Hillary Clinton's campaign was not paying closer attention to the "Rust Belt" where she hardly made any personal appearances. Politicos and pundits are speculating that this is one of the reasons she lost her bid for the White House.

So, in conclusion, I hope you see why the Electoral College looms large in the election process. Otherwise, if we functioned purely on popular vote, the large cities would always dictate the outcome, leaving smaller populated states out in the dark. And candidates would pitch their tents in the large urban areas, and would ignore the rest of America.

Is the Electoral College a perfect system? No. But it was genius on the part of the Founding Fathers, many of who never lived long enough to see it work.

The next time you vote, remember that the Founding Fathers set this election process up so that every American who votes has a say in the outcome.

Is this a great country, or what?!