

November 30, 2004
POL 151 - Think Piece #5

Electoral Systems of the U.S. and Mongolia

It takes little consideration of human nature, which is imperfect at best and often entirely corrupted, to realize that a perfect election system does and will not exist. Despite such a pessimistic, albeit obvious statement, ^{Amc} (there is a great deal of improvements) which are realistically possible in many election systems, whether or not such changes are realistic in their respective governments. The United States' Electoral College is one of the best examples of a system which is in need of improvements, although such changes will be hard to come by because the history of the Electoral College has made the system almost traditional. In comparison, Mongolia's Parliamentary-like system, which has only been in existence since July of 1990, has proven to be quite successful despite some corruption. While small changes can be made to improve Mongolia's election system, any major discrepancies are insignificant at the moment, as it is more important for Mongolia to improve other areas (for example, to regain economic strength), than to fumble with a system which is newly established and so far flourishing.

The American Electoral College, however, needs to be re-evaluated for change. In its origination, the Electoral College – in which a group of electors is chosen to elect the President and Vice President – was preferred over direct popular vote of all citizens “not because the Framers of the Constitution doubted popular intelligence but rather because they feared that without sufficient information about the candidates from outside their State, people would naturally vote for the ‘favorite son’ from their own State or region” (Kimberling). In consideration of recent technological advances, however, the lack of “sufficient information” is less of a problem. While candidates do frequently win the electoral votes of their home states,

this is generally because the state is predominately of the same party as the candidate. In states which are predominately of an opposing party to the candidate's party, the opposing party will most likely win. For example, the electoral votes of Bill Clinton's home state of Arkansas went to George Bush in the 2000 election, simply because Arkansas is generally a Republican state. Thus, as a candidate's origin is of little or no importance in current elections, it should no longer be considered an influential factor in elections.

Since the establishment of the Electoral College, numerous technological and societal changes have led the current election system to work unlike it was originally intended to. Most prominently, the Electoral College encourages the two-party system in a manner that causes votes to be made more because of bias than of personal opinion, and thus leads to inequitable elections. Such influence can be seen through a simple analysis of a potential voter's thoughts prior to an election. When considering a presidential candidate, a potential voter should make his or her decision by first analyzing the policies and opinions of each candidate and then forming opinions about them. These opinions might consist of thoughts such as "I am really pleased with candidate A because of his or her domestic and foreign policy agendas," "I am really not sure about candidate B but his or her attack ads seem overzealous," and "candidate C seems to have a lot of experience with government, but I am not sure I agree with his domestic agenda." In recent history, however, opinions about presidential candidates have become highly prejudiced. Potential voters, instead of researching the candidates to form personal opinions, are instead exposed to a vicious societal war in which one of two sides must be picked, because only two sides have any chance of winning. Thoughts about candidates then become, "I have to vote for candidate A because I hate candidate B, and candidate C, who I know nothing about, will probably not win."

This thought process undermines the idea of individualism within a democracy, as well as fair representation and, consequently, elections. Thus, instead of creating a battle in which individuals feel as though they must side with a majority, the American electoral system should be one in which citizens are encouraged to analyze the policies and ideas of each candidate before making decision. In this way, we encourage individualism, political intelligence, and true democracy.

Perhaps the best election system is the Majority Runoff system, which is essentially like the direct popular vote in that several candidates are considered, and every vote goes towards the desired candidate. The difference between the Majority Runoff and the direct popular vote, however, is that the Majority Runoff consists of two elections whereas the direct popular vote consists of only one. The Majority Runoff system also better encourages an analytical approach towards politics. In such a system, multiple elections require individuals who desire to vote to choose from several candidates prior to the deciding election. This allows individuals to vote as they truly desire without feeling as though they should vote for a candidate with more probability of winning, despite the fact that they like the candidate less. If many individuals vote for an "underdog" candidate who actually makes it to the final round of the Majority Runoff (in which there are then two candidates), then these individuals can once again vote for the candidate they truly desire. If the candidate does not make it to the final round, however, their second, more likely choice probably did; thus the individuals only vote for their second choice if it is necessary in the final round.

Because a Majority Runoff system would be more difficult to establish in the U.S. simply because it is a considerably foreign idea, the Proportional College Electoral is probably a more reasonable alteration of the current system. Under this system, each presidential candidate

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would be provided with a proportional amount of electoral votes instead of the total number. So, for example, if a state had a total of ten electoral votes and candidate A, B and C received 20%, 30%, and 50% of the votes, respectively, than the votes – instead of all being given to candidate C – would be divided out to each candidate proportionally (so, two votes would go to candidate A, three to candidate B, and so on). This system would allow all votes to be counted for the desired candidate, and would consequently encourage voting among individuals who feel as though their vote does not count because they live in a state which is predominately of an opposing party. The system would also probably be more favorable than the Majority Runoff because there would only be one election.

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While the U.S. has had an extensive history with the Electoral College and has consequently seen changes sufficient enough to make alterations in the election system necessary, the Parliamentary system which was only very recently established in Mongolia has proven to be successful enough as of yet to prevent the need for drastic alteration. There have been, however, some instances of corruption within Mongolian elections. For example, it has been discovered in prior Mongolian elections that individuals who were counting ballots wore rings with graphite pieces in them, so that they could discreetly double-mark and therefore invalidate ballots which they did not like. Although this type of corruption is oftentimes difficult to catch, it is possible to discourage such behavior through the gradual elimination of paper ballots, which would at least help in preventing such simple human marring of the ballots.

Although unfortunate, it is true however that corruption will always exist on some level in many or all democratic nations, especially those in which governments and policies are newly formed. So while corruption does exist in Mongolia, the Mongolian Parliamentary system has still managed to earn a relatively high ranking by Freedom House, who has considered the nation

“free” for quite some time now. In the past two years, Mongolia has received a rating of two in both categories of Political Rights and Civil Liberties, which is only one ranking away from that of the United States. Mongolia does, however, continue to struggle with economic issues, including “acute poverty, high unemployment, and rising violent crime” as the nation continues “its rocky transition to a market economy” (Freedom). In consideration of this fact, it seems more reasonable to suggest that Mongolia foregoes any drastic change of its election system and instead continues to work on improving the nation’s economy.

While both the American and Mongolian election systems are far from perfect, they are both reasonably successful; both nations are widely considered to be free and fair. Mongolia’s system, as it is relatively new, still requires some “getting used to,” and should remain for now the way it is today. Because the United States has had more experience with its election system, however, it should be stressed that the society in which the Founding Fathers conceptualized the Electoral College is quite different from today’s. Consequently, the Electoral College needs to be altered in order to better fit today’s American society.

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