Electoral College: The Powers And Prerogatives Behind The US Election

The powers and prerogatives behind the US election have continuously captivated global audiences, with the 2016 election becoming of quintessence to not only the interests of America, but rather the world. In the last US election, it was through the electoral college that Donald Trump was able to claim the presidency against Hillary Clinton, despite her gaining the majority in popular votes. The consequence has cultivated extensive discussions surrounding the electoral college and its significance in shaping the current political atmosphere. Coined an antiquated mechanism that does not adequately reflect the supposed democratic nature of the US, the electoral college has since been blasted by individuals from all walks of life, with the media reflecting the candid emotions of the American people through channels that have inherently become political avenues such as television and social media. Hence, when assessing such issues, one must distinguish between the theoretical frameworks which reinforce the concept behind why the electoral college must be replaced with a different mechanism. It is through the populist media, feminism as well as liberalism that both scholars and the general public have developed their academic and social scrutiny against the electoral college and its 'institutionalised inequality'. To demonstrate why the electoral college should be replaced with an alternative voting mechanism, this essay will initially compare both the pros and cons before analysing the response of the media and general public to the 2016 election. Thus, by determining the reasonings from both spectrums, it will become clear why the electoral college must be abolished and replaced.

Historically, it can be argued that the electoral college has greatly benefited the Republican party, as studies show, the GOP have lost the popular vote in six of the last seven presidential elections (Ayres, 2016). Trump winning the presidency reflects the cultivation of a conservative coalition that continues to benefit from the status quo of marginalisation (Kabaservice, 2019). Everyday individuals took to the streets with young adults and Hollywood alike becoming progressively more focused on politics. Television shows like 'American Horror Story' focused on what they believed was the 'nightmare of election year', whilst reality TV like the Golden Globes became a stage for those with a platform to publicly 'call out' the now President of the United States. Evidentially, in the last three to four years, much of America and the world are left to ponder how a man like Trump became the leader of the modern world's largest superpower, and many blame the electoral college.

To truly understand the process of the electoral college, one must understand why, when and how it came to be. The electoral college was established in the American constitution as a compromise between the election of the President by a vote in Congress or by a democratic popular vote (NARA, 2019). The compromise emerged as the college being a unit of electors that are constituted every four years, who then elect the President and Vice President. Overall, there are 538 electors and 270 electoral votes are required to ensure the presidency (Neale, 2017). Hence, when the American public are voting, they are voting for the electors in their state who are pledged to their chosen presidential candidate. The supporters of the electoral college state that it is pivotal for American federalism, allowing candidates to look beyond large states as it increases the influence of smaller minority states whilst preserving the two-party system (Heale, 2017). In defense of the electoral college, Allen Guelzo believes it is imperative in

‘counteracting the worst human impulses whilst protecting the nation from the dangers of democracy’ (Guelzo, 2018). The exact ‘dangers’ he did not specify, yet perhaps he was referring to the notion that the electoral college ‘creates an incentive for political parties and candidates to seek supermajorities as opposed to simply aiming for the 50.1%’ (Ross Douthat, 2019). Further, dismantling federalism evident in the electoral college, would render both Senate and states as futile, transforming them to mere administrative departments. Enforcing a check and balance system that the electorate supposedly creates, shields from what many supporters believe as ‘democratic politics’ that are prone to passion, prejudice and populist demagogues (Brennan, 2016).

However, passion, prejudice and populist demagogues are three factors that are not confined to the democrats but rather a common feature in republican politics as well. When analysing the statistics behind the 2016 election, inequality becomes heavily apparent, allowing for a glimpse into the present day ‘Trumps America’. In 2016, Trump had the majority votes in the Southern and Midwest states, earning him 304 electoral votes, compared to Clintons 227(NARA, 2016). The allocation of electoral college votes gives individuals in states like Wyoming four times the voting power in comparison to states like California, making these ‘swing states’ without a clear winning candidate, of primary importance. Whilst supporters say this reflects the minority and the electoral vote allows for the smaller states to be of influence, Trump directly targeted his campaign at larger swing states. Under the Electoral College, swing states garner greater attention and significantly influence the election results revealing that the notion that the electoral college creates an inclusive national campaign that considers rural areas is very much false. 53% of Trump and Clintons campaigns in the two months before the election were primarily focused in four states; Pennsylvania, Florida, Ohio and North Carolina (Speel, 2016). Within these states, the campaign was centred on the urban areas as opposed to the rural areas contrary to what the electoral college states it achieves, this has been linked to the fact that the bulk of voters live in urban areas. Ultimately, representation is only achieved if the voter’s ideals align with that of the majority of their state, if they disagree then their vote will hardly sway the votes nor make a difference towards the electoral college, creating a feeling of repression. Voter repression emerges as a consequence of the lack of civic participation as the majority of the public believe their engagement with the election is worthless (Tropp, 2017). If the presidency was decided by a popular vote, candidates would equally look towards all of America and ensure they are listening and meeting the needs of all. Individuals would also have greater incentive to vote, as each vote is directly linked to the presidential election as opposed to the electoral college (Nivolo, 2005). Those in support of the electoral college may concur with ‘voting is not compulsory, therefore voter turnout is not guaranteed’, yet by making the change to compulsory voting, the ‘one man, one vote’ principle can be enforced and allow for accurate election results.

The principle of ‘one man, one vote’ becomes significant as political equality seems to be overlooked with the electoral college, which seemingly treats states as ‘single-minded organisms, unanimously voting in their own best interests’ (Tropp, 2017). The collective mindset that the electoral college creates is one that does not reflect the political freedoms that the US and its constitution seemingly stand for. Trump won the presidency due to 100,000 popular votes spread across three key swing states, this number is a mere 0.8% of all votes cast. Clinton won nearly 3 million more votes, yet this influence is discarded as the electoral college places power in the hands of states that clearly show a preference for either candidate whilst those that do not agree with the marginalisation are greatly discounted. One man, One vote is imperative as the government is not a ‘one size fits all’ mechanism and the

demographic of the 2016 election voters' references this. The narrative behind the 2016 election was that Trumps voters encapsulated white angry men with beliefs that Trump would 'Make America Great Again'. Overall, the details suggested that 53% of men voted for Trump whilst only 41% voted for Clinton. Among the white population (who made up 70% of the voters), Trump won 58% as opposed to Clintons 37%. Clinton had gained 88% of black voters as well as 52% of voters with lower incomes. Voters without high-school or university credentials were more likely to vote for Trump, with the clear majority being 45 and over as opposed to Clintons young, college demographic (Pew Research Centre, 2018). These numbers validate those that call for the abolishment of the electoral college as the disparity between demographics reflect a clear mismatch between what the people want and what the country needs. If America switched to a compulsory popular vote, the votes will no longer be made up of 70% white individuals from southern states but rather reflect the ideals of the changing demographics and generations, free of realist and authoritarian governments.

During the campaign, those that supported Trump manifested the underlying racism and sexism that existed within America. The authoritarians wanted a forceful leader, someone who would oppose the changing norms and demographics of America. They believed Trump would stand against everything that oppressed their white privilege, 'building the wall' and 'keeping refugees out' being some of the controversial views they backed.

"They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. It's coming from more than Mexico. It's coming from all over South and Latin America, and it's coming – probably – from the Middle East" (Donald Trump, Presidential Announcement Speech, June 16, 2015 extracted from Konrad, 2018)

By linking marginalised groups as the reason for social and economic unrest, Trump creates a volatile dynamic within his country (Norton et al., 2006 extracted from Konrad, 2018). As such, racism and intolerance defined Trumps campaign, acting as the foundation. Consequently, with comments such as these going unpunished, Trump created a standard of political unrest and inequality among his people. The bottom line is when racists and sexist statements by powerful leaders go unpunished, those that support the leader will likely mimic the same behaviour. Marginalisation within governments is not a newfound concept, but rather one utilised against the electoral college process by legal academics Akhil and Vikram Amar. The constitution declares that each state chooses electors up to the combined number of senators and representatives. Representatives are determined by the population and originally, the constitution allowed states where slavery was legal to include a part of their slave populations to increase their representative number, which increases the number of electors . Hence, States began artificially inflating their influence in Congress at the expense of slaves who had no political influence or rights (Brown, 2016). By upholding the electoral college system, the US upholds a system that is built upon illegitimacy and racism for political leverage.

Moreover, researchers Carly Wayne, Nicholas Valentino and Marzia Oceno revealed that sexism and hostility towards women were common factors in Trump male supporters (Valentino et all, 2018). Their research was conducted before the secret recordings of Trump bragging about groping women without their permission came to light, indicating Trump has galvanised sexists into believing that a man with no political experience, is the best leader for their nation. The results of the 2016 election could not have been further from the causes of feminists and liberals. Federally, the republicans have control and in the states, they have consolidated control and enforced restrictions concerning topics like contraceptives and abortion. Trumps

racist comments did not disqualify him. His misogynistic statements did not warrant an anger strong enough to remove him as a candidate. The constant threat of war and destruction due to poorly worded tweets thrust into the fragile global political system did not warrant immediate impeachment. Exhibiting this flawed system, the electoral college almost reflects a realist mindset. The founding fathers did not trust human nature to allow the public to decide on the President, and to this day this process has not changed, reflecting the Hobbesian view that human nature is chaotic, so much so that they cannot directly vote for the highest form of power in their country. However, the electoral college is not a flawless system that ensues peace, but rather one with many faults as evident in the 2016 election. These eventualities include; the election of a President and Vice President who received fewer popular votes than their opponents, which has occurred no fewer than 5 times in American history as well as the seven "faithless electors," who voted for candidates other than those to whom they were pledged, reflecting a major flaw within the electoral system. One may think that the government has laws in place to avoid the 'faithless electors', yet these rules are rarely enforced, and this act showcases just how worthless the voice of the people are to those with the privilege to make a change.

Due to the limiting nature of the electoral college, social media became the political tool that was imperative in reinforcing and popularising opinions. Described as being the 'most important platform for the millennial generation' (Raynauld in Kapko, 2016), with 35% of people between the ages 18 – 29 stating that social media was the most helpful source to access quick information about the election. Despite the 2016 election not being the pioneer of social media becoming a political tool, it does demonstrate the weight and influence it has over processes like the electorate. Clinton and Trump both utilised their social media standings to their advantage, yet the people also utilised it to inform themselves and spread awareness about the inequality of the electorate. The instability that emerged as a consequence of the electorate college created fear that was manifested through television and on the global stages. Examples of the uproar that the media caused are only one search away, with millions of tweets, articles and speeches made in regard to Trump, his electorate college win and the predictions of horror. The general messages of tv shows like 'American Horror Story' centred around fear, and the power fear gave to Trump supporters as Hillary voters expected a more cynical America. Additionally, Trumps policies and public statements about LGBTQ rights, Muslims and immigrants were rejected by much of liberal Hollywood, who blasted the President on many occasions in very global stages. Namely, Meryl Streep, on the night of the Golden Globes proceeded to deliver a speech, without naming Trump, about accountability, power and disrespect. The next day, Trump tweeted and labelled her 'over-rated' and a 'Hillary flunky who lost'.

To conclude, it is evident that the electoral college is an antiquated system that is not suited to the changing mechanisms of the US. The US is the world's largest superpower with influence over many economic, social and political decisions and yet its own people are unable to vote for the individual who represents them on the global front. The electoral college is flawed, the individuals aren't equally weighted, it is complex and disfranchises many minorities as well as increases the risk of having the election thrown to the House in the case that no candidate is chosen. In the current political atmosphere, Trump is seen as a volatile leader with a campaign rooted in racial and class polarisation. Democrats are holding their breath until the next election, yet studies have shown that he may win the electoral college again in 2020. From an outsider's perspective, having a president that lost the winning vote of the people is not what democracy should be. Is the US not the epitome of political and social freedom, so why does the electoral

college not reflect these ideals?