

Introduction: Approaching Electoral College Reform

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Despite the voluminous literature on the presidential electoral system, not many works focus on its modification or elimination—that is to say, on its reform. Other than a few books coauthored by Lawrence Longley more than twenty years ago, which in part addressed the history and fate of amendment efforts in Congress, scholarship on Electoral College reform is rare. Moreover, many people writing about the system of electors have an agenda, arguing either for or against its change. For example, some currently promote an interstate compact, in which states would agree to cast their electoral votes for the candidate winning the national popular vote. Even many of the well-known Electoral College texts favor one proposal over others. While a few of the authors in *Electoral College Reform: Challenges and Possibilities* defend specific changes, overall we seek greater understanding of the topic. In so doing, we have produced original and insightful research on Electoral College reform.

In the first part of the book, *Thinking about Electoral College Reform*, the authors contemplate theoretical concerns related to electoral change. My exploration in Chapter 1 of recent congressional deliberations over amending the Electoral College illustrates the importance that both reform supporters and opponents place on the principle of representation. Making use of primary sources, Michael Rogers' research in Chapter 2 of the Federalists' and Anti-Federalists' views at the time of the U.S. founding challenges some conventional assumptions about the initial defense of the proposed system of electors. In a comprehensive review of the Electoral College in Chapter 3, from its adoption at the Constitutional Convention to recent reform proposals, presidential scholar Michael Korzi highlights the importance of democracy and federalism to electoral revision. Overall, the first three chapters indicate that America's vibrant political thought is integral to any meaningful discussion about Electoral College reform.

Without denying that change is possible, the contributors of Part II, *Challenges of Electoral College Reform*, examine hurdles that confront electoral reform. Jeffrey Stonecash's argument in Chapter 4 that the presidential election system already provides diverse representation suggests that calls for democratic reform are futile. One of the surprises from my investigation in Chapter 5 of proposed electoral reform amendments is that members of Congress have introduced few of these plans over the last three decades. In his analysis of mid-twentieth

century congressional chamber votes on proposed amendments, Mark McKenzie in Chapter 6 holds that Congress's representational structure is not conducive to achieving electoral reform and that the public is unlikely to place enough pressure on congressional members to overcome this barrier. In Chapter 7, Brian Gaines reviews recent state actions regarding the "National Popular Vote Interstate Compact," arguing that support for the proposal is far from democratic. James Melcher's evaluation in Chapter 8 of the adoption and preservation of the district plan in both Maine and Nebraska reveals difficulties that reformers in other states should not ignore. Taking a look at different electoral systems in sixty countries and hundreds of elections, Baumgartner and Case in Chapter 9 defend a lesson that may also apply to electoral reform in the United States. The diversity of potential obstacles that these authors address suggests the complexity of challenges facing the pursuit of electoral reform.

In the last part of the book, *Possibilities of Electoral College Reform*, the authors explore unique reasons and proposals for electoral reform, without ignoring that success would be difficult. Robert Alexander in Chapter 10 presents new research on presidential electors and finds that they are fairly susceptible to outside pressure. In his analysis of presidential state visits, Brendan Doherty in Chapter 11 concludes that our ever-campaigning presidents—due in no small part to the Electoral College—have developed intriguing patterns of travel. Robert Bennett in Chapter 12 offers an alternative way of approaching reform in his defense of both the "National Popular Vote Interstate Compact" and nationwide agreement to keep presidential electors faithful. No stranger to Electoral College scholarship, Paul Schumaker in Chapter 13 expands on his earlier work and argues for a specific proposal and a distinctive strategy that may win congressional passage. Burdett Loomis in the last chapter emphasizes that some conditions are better today than forty years ago for facilitating endorsement of an electoral amendment, and he defends a moderate plan that many representatives might find attractive. The scholars of these five chapters raise previously under-studied reasons to change the presidential electoral system and new ideas that could result in electoral reform.

By taking an analytical approach, which includes consideration of political principles and contemporary politics, the book presents key difficulties and prospects of Electoral College reform. The contributors' innovative analyses also convey the enduring interest in the subject. In exploring Electoral College reform, the book challenges the reader to consider if democratization of the process is possible, if not desirable. We also invite the reader to consider further evaluation of the U.S. system of representative democracy.