

Why Our President Should Be Elected by a National Popular Vote

It has been a long time since Massachusetts decided a presidential election. Presidential candidates spend the vast majority of their time and campaign funds on swing states like Ohio and Florida, and the votes of certain Americans are more sought after than others. It is time to change our presidential electoral system.

The National Popular Vote (NPV) Compact is an agreement between participating states that aims to replace the electoral college system. There are 538 electoral votes available from the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The NPV would only take effect when the combined electoral votes of the states participating in the compact reaches 270, which is the number of electoral votes needed to elect the president. The participating states would then cast all their electoral votes for the presidential candidate who won the national popular vote.

Five state legislatures have already enacted the NPV compact. They are Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, and Washington. Together, they account for 61 electoral votes. If Massachusetts were to enact the NPV compact, that would add another 12 electoral votes, bringing the total to 27% of the 270 votes needed to activate the compact and elect the president by a national popular vote.

Electing our president by a national popular vote would have a number of important benefits:

- *Ensure that the winner of the popular vote becomes President.* There have been four elections in our history, most recently in 2000, when the candidate who won the presidency received fewer votes than his opponent. In an era of close elections, our electoral system risks misrepresenting the will of the people.
- *End the unfair focus on a few swing states.* Presidential elections will no longer come down to a few battleground states. In 2008, candidates spent over 2/3 of their campaign advertising money in six states, and 98% in just fifteen states. In our current electoral system, candidates are willing to spend vast sums of money on a fraction of the population.
- *Revive the principle of one person, one vote.* A popular vote would weigh the votes of all Americans equally. A vote in Massachusetts would be as important as a vote in Florida or Ohio. Even if it is clear that one candidate would win Massachusetts, it would matter by how much, as each individual vote would matter in the national count. This would increase voter participation.

Presidential candidates would seek to win votes in red states and blue states alike. Local and regional issues would become more important to candidates campaigning in states that currently receive very little attention. States that are taken for granted, like Massachusetts for Democrats and Texas for Republicans, would no longer be ignored. Smaller states would also receive more attention.

The NPV compact is consistent with the United States Constitution. Article 2, Section 1 of the Constitution states: "Each State shall appoint, in such Manner as the Legislature thereof may direct, a Number of Electors, equal to the whole Number of Senators and Representatives to which the State may be entitled in the Congress." The Supreme Court has upheld that state legislatures have the right to determine how their state's electors are awarded.

Common Cause Massachusetts recently released a poll showing that 72% of Massachusetts residents support the NPV. This is consistent with other polls around the country. The NPV has strong support across all regions, all parties, and all demographics.

Recently, I joined my colleagues in the Massachusetts House of Representatives to pass the National Popular Vote Compact. The bill now moves to the Massachusetts Senate.

A national popular vote will help to revitalize democracy in America. Voter participation would increase across the country. It would bring more focus and attention to Massachusetts which is largely ignored during presidential elections since we are not a swing state.

I'm hopeful that Massachusetts will soon become the sixth state to join the National Popular Vote Compact.

I welcome your feedback on the national popular vote or any other issues. Please visit our website at www.RepJasonLewis.com. You can also reach me at 617 722-2060 or by email at Jason.Lewis@state.ma.us.

Author's Note: Jack Cashion provided research assistance for this column.

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