The Electoral College – Working as Designed

Unless you've been living under a rock, the 2016 Presidential Election cycle was the gift that kept on giving. Seriously. There was alleged hacking from a Cold War era foe, the world was fully introduced to WikiLeaks, there were private email servers, deleted emails, Bleach-Bit, things being wiped with a cloth, pay-to-play scandals, FBI investigations that potentially were, then weren't, then were again, then weren't again, despotic vitriol, groupie crotch grabbing comments, alleged mockery of disabled people, not to mention baskets of deplorables everywhere… but through all of that noise, the Electoral College worked to perfection.

If the Founding Fathers could be resurrected like Lazarus, or kidnapped like Abraham Lincoln in *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*, they'd agree that their design for elections worked correctly and with the intent with which it was created… therefore, to borrow some developer IT speak, it was "working as designed".

The intent of the College is noted on the National Archive and Records Administration website, which reads:

"The founding fathers established it [Electoral College] *in the Constitution as a compromise between election of the President by a vote in Congress and election of the President by a popular vote of qualified citizens."*

So how can I make the statement that the Electoral College worked as designed?

Easy, it's all in black and white right there in Article II of the United States Constitution.

The first thing anyone living in this country has to understand is that we do not live in a democracy. No matter how many dangling chad's there were in Florida, or how many million more votes a particular candidate received, or how many city blocks are burned to the ground in protest, the fact that the United States is not a true democracy hasn't changed. This was done on purpose.

By why aren't we a truly populist, or literal, democracy?

Having more than a few people in a literal democracy is impossible. Don't believe me? Go ask ten co-workers where they want to go for lunch and only give them two choices. You see, a democracy is, at its core, a majority, or mob, rules state. No one is ever going to get 100% consensus… in the world of politics, 60% is considered a huge victory… 70% is near impossible. If the United States were a true democracy, Hillary Clinton would be President Elect of the United States as a result of a popular vote… but she's not. The reason she's not is because the United States functions, and was set up, as a Representative Democracy, or Representative Republic.

What is a Representative Democracy?

Basically, this is a form of government where "democracy" is founded on the principle of elected officials representing a group of people.

To give you a little bit of a history lesson, the Founding Fathers were basically the rock stars of the 18th century. They were the intelligentsia, the wise and learned men of the time who also happened to have studied just about everything ever written up until then. They'd traveled the world over, spoke multiple languages, lead men in battle, but more importantly, they were also students of history. They knew everything there was to know about every form of government invented by man… autocracy, monarchy, aristocracy, dictatorship, theocracy, totalitarian… it is worth noting that the governmental constructs of socialism and communism weren't invented until the 1840's.

From all of these hundreds of years of combined study and knowledge, they knew *exactly* what would *never* work and they knew what had potential.

A Representative Democracy is/was specifically designed to level the playing field in elections by sticking up for the little guy and preventing mob rule in the form of regional candidates. Unfortunately for Mrs. Clinton, as the maps below illustrate, she was a regional candidate.

Image source: Mark Newman/University of Michigan
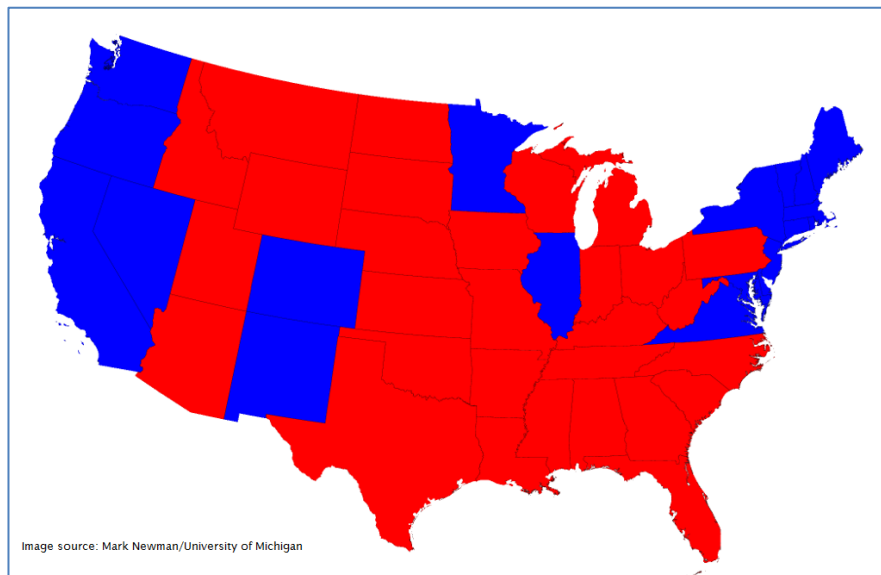
Looking at the individual states won by each candidate will tell us a great deal about their collective national strategy. States that are blue hold the nations largest population centers. Whatever the cities can't hold, in terms of population, tends to spread to the surrounding counties, as seen on the next map.

Image source: Metrocosm
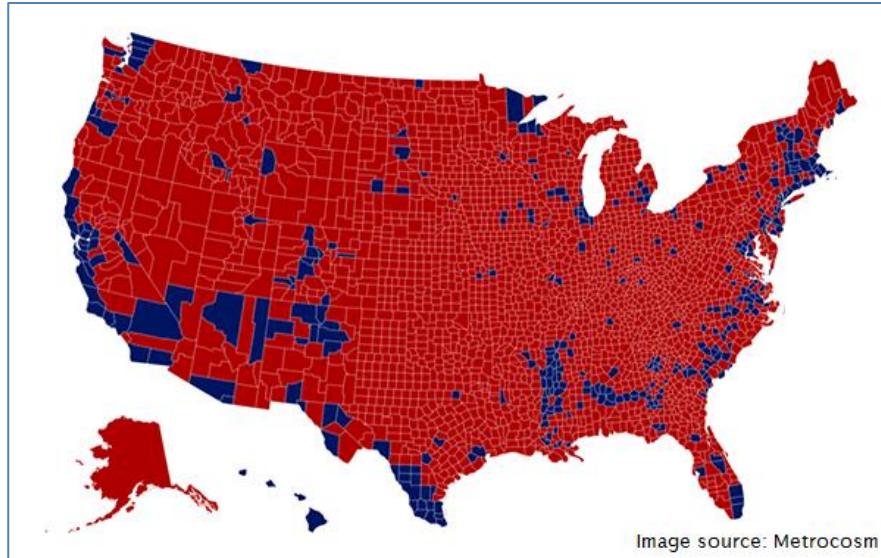
By looking at the 2016 Election results at the county level, it is clear that Mrs. Clinton was a regional candidate playing to the masses in counties with large urban centers, suburban sprawl, and, presumably, large college campuses and/or large migrant populations. By not being able to effectively translate her message to those outside of those areas she allowed Donald Trump to assume the Presidency.

So the popular vote didn't mean a thing?

Nope. Mrs. Clinton could have won by three votes or a million and it wouldn't have mattered. Many people in 2000, and again in 2016, called for the abolition of the Electoral College and the implementation of the popular vote. So let's look at the popular vote.

Mrs. Clinton won the popular vote by over three-million votes in 2016, which is impressive. However, to put it another way, her three-million extra popular votes roughly equates to the number of more votes she received in New York City (NYC) alone. Now, NYC is comprised of 5 counties (boroughs) and 312 sq. miles. She won four of the five counties incidentally.

The United States, as a whole, is comprised of over 3.8M sq. miles and 324M people. Now, if we had a popular vote, every single one of the red counties noted in the map above would have had a President making national decisions for them based on the mood of New York City on Election Day. New York, LA, Boston, Chicago, Miami, Portland, Seattle… none of these cities should be the voice of America. Why? Because the things that are important to a single mom in Brooklyn aren't necessary the same things that are important to the farmer with three kids and 1,000 head of beef cattle in Kearney, Nebraska, or Corydon, Iowa. To bridge the gap and get elected President, you have to appeal to *both* the single mom *and* the farmer.

By focusing on large population centers, Mrs. Clinton was always going to win the popular vote. However, by focusing on states with widely understood large, democratically entrenched, population centers *exclusively* is what cost her the election. There are other factors at play, but this is dominant reason.

In contrast, by stringing together enough states with small Electoral College vote tallies (Alaska-3, Arkansas-6, Iowa-6, Kansas-6, etc.), and staying hyper-focused on a handful of states assumed to be voting for Mrs. Clinton (Ohio-18, Pennsylvania-20, Michigan-16, Wisconsin-10), Donald Trump was able to secure over 270 Electoral College votes and become the 45th President of the United States.

Presumably, every candidate goes into a Presidential election with a firm and thorough understanding of the rules governing how Presidential elections work in the United States… and it's not the popular vote.

You don't have to like how the election turned out, but you do need to know that the law of the land prevailed in terms of the Electoral College with regard to its intent, design, and function.