Consider the view that the arguments for having an electoral college to elect the President are no longer valid

The United States' constitution was created in 1787 and, whilst creating the document, the Founding Fathers' opted on a method to indirectly ele ct the President. The "electoral college" system was born. The Founding Fathers believed that the electorate may, in the future, be easily taken in by the showmanship of extremists and so determined that the popular votes cast would only "influence" electo rs and not directly elect the President. Each state would have as many electors as they have congressmen (so 2 for each Senator and then so many for however many Representatives) who would cast their ballots in early January (after the national election in November) for a candidate, having been "influenced" by the results of the election day polls.   In effect, this system both undermines the integrity of the voters and is undemocratic, effectively allowing the power to fall to a small number of people. Unsur prisingly, especially in the wake of the 2000 election, there have been calls for reform with many citing the Electoral College as a "no longer valid" method of electing the leader of the country.

As I have already mentioned, the original reason for introd ucing the Electoral College system was to prevent against dictatorship and extremism. In theory, this sounds great and not many can argue against this basic reasoning. However, its execution is woefully wrong as it fully underestimates the electorate assum ing they cannot be trusted to make informed decisions. However, this is not the only basic flaw with the system: it is also, in theory at least, incredibly undemocratic. Legally (and constitutionally) the electors are only to be "influenced" by their state 's results on Election Day and therefore should, in theory, be apolitical beings. Fortunately, the vast majority of the time the electors respect the unwritten rule that they should vote "with their state", however occasionally this is not the case. These so-called "rogue electors" can, for one reason or another, vote against their state thus distorting the results and giving one candidate more Electoral College votes than they should receive according to the popular vote.   In 1968, for instance, a North Carolina elector should have voted for Richard Nixon; instead they cast a vote for George Wallace. In the end, Nixon won the state but the case is all the more alarming in 2000: a Washington DC elector should have cast a ballot for Democrat Al Gore; instead t hey abstained citing the city's lack of congressional representation. Whilst this may not have made a difference in the election, in such a close race every ECV counted. It is undeniable that this system of electors is open to corruption, is undemocratic a nd elitist.

As mentioned, the Electoral College distorts the results when compared with the popular vote; however this is far, far greater than 1 or 2 altered ECV votes due to rogue electors. The whole system is a great advantage for the two main parties, making life very difficult for minor third parties. Take Ross Perot's Independent campaign in 1992: nationally he gained almost 20% of the vote, which was a little under half of Clinton's 40%. Clinton gained 370 ECVs; Perot gained 0. Obviously the very nature of third parties mean they find finding support difficult, possibly due to the two main parties operating "catch all" or "big tent" policies. Perot's support was distributed throughout the country, meaning he could not gain one whole state, resulting i n no ECVs. Truly, this is a two party system! However, the 1968 election paints a different picture. George Wallace (also running as an independent) only gained 13% of the popular vote, far below that Perot would gain 24 years later, however he managed to claim almost 50 ECVs and 5 states. Wallace concentrated his campaign in the Deep South playing on people's fears of immigrants and crimes arising from them. He gained support from the Democrats who traditionally held the area, citing they had "gone soft" o n this particular issue. As this proves, to use the Electoral College system properly, third party candidates need to focus their campaigns on particular states, however (as seen in 1992) this effectively wastes the votes of millions.

Because of the small number of electors and ECVs up for grabs, the smaller states are often overrepresented. In 2008, for instance, Wyoming only had 3 ECVs, whilst California had 55; however the population of California is 70 times larger than that of Wyoming, meaning that proportionally the state has too many votes. What can be done about this is uncertain, as ECVs cannot be taken away as they are mandated by the number of congressmen. This in itself is another flaw in the system, in that the ECVs are allocated according to re presentation rather than direct population. However, this can be considered to be a positive, given that it means the small states still "have a voice" aren't drowned out by the larger states.

Finally, the "winner-takes-all" system further distorts the result, which was especially seen in the infamous 2000 election. In said election, Al Gore actually gained 48.4% of the popular vote, compared with Bush's 48%: not a huge difference but still, technically, more people voted for Gore than Bush. However, the Electoral College system resulted in Bush gaining 271 votes to Gore's 266. This was the first instance of such an event occurring in over 100 years and, unsurprisingly, sparked off a new national debate over the system. Technically, this system is therefore undemocratic and, once again, takes the power away from the people: if this were an example of direct democracy, Gore would have won the election.

However, this is not to say that the Electoral College system has no good points; after all, it was created for a reason and has survived the best part of 250 years. For one, it successfully keeps out extremist parties and prevents against dictatorships. The United States is renowned for its intricate system of checks and balances, many of which were created for this sole purpose; the Electoral College is no exception. Undeniably it has done extremely well with the Republicans and the Democrats always been the party in power (or an earlier manifestation of the party). It can also be said that it actively promotes the two party system by the use of ECVs and the fact parties need to gain at least 10% of the popular vote.

As I've already said, the Electoral College system does, importantly, preserve the voice of the small states. This concern first came about in 1787 at the writing of the Constitution: the smaller states were against the idea of the House of Representatives, believing their small populations would be easy to ignore. Hardly very democratic? The same can be said to ring true now as California and Texas' huge populations would easily undermine the tiny populations of Wyoming and Alaska, squashing their votes if a new system based directly on the popular vote was initiated.

Finally, at present there is no real call for change, although this is hard to say in the wake of the 2000 election. Unsurprisingly, the media called for Electoral College reform following this election's debacle with the Republican Party even, surprisingly, suggesting reform. A Gallup poll the week after the election even showed that 60 % of Americans supported a move to scrap the Electoral College. George Bush shot the idea down at that year's National Party Convention. However, this national outcry soon died down as the memory of the election faded away. The arguments for reform generally only come around when people are directly affected by it (hence why 3 [rd] parties are advocates of such reforms). In 2008, the result was conclusive enough so that the ECVs agreed with the popular vote: John McCain would have not have won the election eve n if it were based purely on the popular vote. However, what the future will hold is uncertain .

If the original arguments for the Electoral College are now no longer valid, or at least not as valid, what possible reforms can be made to the system? One such suggested reform is to get rid of electors entirely and operate ECVs on a purely automatic system. If ECVs were given automatically to candidates as they win states, it would eliminate the problem of rogue electors and give a theoretical "feeling" of a great democracy where there is no reason to be concerned that your vote will not be counted. This can be seen as a nice compromise between the somewhat

extreme reform of a direct election and no reform at all. At present, some states plus the District the Columbia have laws requiring their electors to vote with the state vote.

Moreover, the more extreme plan of directly electing the President by the popular vote could be adopted, however this comes with a myriad of problems. As mentioned the smaller states would lose out and swing states may end up with far more inconclusive results due to close races, similar in style to the Florida happenings of 2000. It is unlikely, however, that this reform would take place as it would require a constitutional amendment – something the small and / or more conservative states would undoubtedly be against.

Finally, a system of proportional representation could be adopted at state level. This would be deemed to be fairer and along similar lines to a direct election, but without many of the problems the latter brings. Furthermore, it would more fairly represent third parties, especially when considering Ross Perot's 20% of the vote compared to his 0 ECVs in 1992. However, such a system would encourage more to vote for these smaller parties probably resulting in no party gaining an absolute majority. Like any other reforms this brings with it disadvantages, however these need to be weighed accordingly to its pros.

The Electoral College system is never going to be deemed perfect and it is unlikely it ever has been. However, it has served the country well for almost 250 years and the main reasons why people wish to change it seem fluid and inconclusive. Moreover, the reforms, at least on paper, do not sound to work as well as the EC system especially when considering that only 3 times in the nation's history as the present system extremely distorted the result. Sure, the original reason for creating the Electoral College is no longer as valid as it once was, but this is not to say that the system hasn't adapted to modern times and it's certainly not to say that it should be done away with all together.