

Rethink reapportionment

BY ANN M. LOUSIN AND LEONA L. MIRZA

Later this year, as soon as the Federal Decennial Census is complete, Congress will decide how many members of the U.S. House of Representatives each state will get. Among other things, the apportionment of seats to each state will decide the composition of the Electoral College, which determines who will be the president and vice president of the United States.

In the hope of avoiding a repeat of the 2000 election, when Al Gore won the popular vote and the U.S. Supreme Court decided that George Bush won the vote in the Electoral College, we offer a different system for determining the size of the House and, therefore, of the Electoral College. We want to reduce the risk of another anomaly, such as happened in 2000.

We have no quarrel with the Huntington-Hill method that currently determines how many representatives each of the 50 states will have. This complicated formula works superbly. Under it, each state has almost exactly the same percentage of representation in the U.S. House as its percentage of the total population. For example, as of 2000, Wyoming, the state with the smallest population, had 495,304 people, which is less than 1% of the population of the country: 281,424,177. Wyoming has one representative in Congress, which is also less than 1% of the 435 representatives. California, the most populous state, had 33,930,798 people, which is just above 12% of the total population. California has 53 representatives, which is also just above 12% of the House.

The system is good for reapportioning the House, but it has an ominous consequence for the Electoral College. Because the Constitution requires each state to have two U.S. senators and because the Electoral College is comprised of electors equal to each state's total representation in Congress, even the smallest states are awarded three electoral votes—affording those states disproportionate influence over the selection of our country's chief executive.



CHADS?: Two men inspect punch ballots in West Palm Beach, Fla., during the 2000 recount. If proposed system had been used, Florida would not have been pivotal.

There is little chance of Congress requiring the states to adopt other ways to choose electors except by constitutional amendments. In fact, all types of constitutional amendments to change the presidential election system have failed and probably will continue to fail.

We suggest that the best, easiest and cleanest way to change the composition of the Electoral College would be to replace the Huntington-Hill method of determining the total number of U.S. representatives every decade with a process using the smallest-populated state as its key. The state with the smallest population, currently Wyoming, would be awarded one U.S. representative (and two senators, of course). A state that had twice Wyoming's population would be awarded two U.S. representatives; a state with three "Wyomings" would have three representatives, and so forth.

Under our proposal and using the 2000 census, most states would have more representatives than they currently have. Wyoming would still have only one, but California would have 68 instead of 53. In all probability, more than 40 states would increase their number of U.S. representatives. Few states would oppose having more representation.

We know that some will object, asking why we need more than 600 members of the House. Wouldn't that be unwieldy? However, the House rarely meets in full session; it performs most of its work in committees. The British House of Commons has more than 600 members, scarcely half of whom are in the chamber when it is in session, even on Prime Minister's Question Time days. Moreover, the population of the United States has more than doubled in a century—which means that most members of the House now represent approximately 650,000 people. Many members say it is extremely difficult to represent such a large and often diverse district.

Clearly the primary advantage for the Electoral College is that each state would hold a more accurate representation in the grave matter of selecting our president. It would be harder for any one state to be the determining factor in a presidential election. In the year 2000, the selection of the leader of the free world came down to a few votes in Florida. If the system we propose had been in effect, Al Gore, who clearly received the popular vote, would have received the Electoral College vote even if George Bush had carried Florida's electoral votes.

In the year 2000, the presidency was decided by the Supreme Court in *Bush v. Gore*. When Gore conceded the election, the country quietly acquiesced. The next time they might not go so quietly.

We would rather avoid the anomaly altogether.

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