**Advantages of the Electoral College:**

**Advantage #1:**

Supporters argue that the Electoral College system unites the country by requiring multiple regions to support a presidential candidate. Without the College, they point out, presidents would be selected either through the domination of one large region over the others or through the domination of large metropolitan (city) areas over the rural (country) ones. Indeed, it is principally because of the Electoral College that presidential nominees select vice presidential running mates from a region other than their own. For as things stand now, no one region contains the absolute majority (270) of electoral votes required to elect a president. To simply this argument, the Electoral College election system prevents one large populous region such as New York City, from overwhelming multiple less populous regions such as the Midwest.

**Advantage #2**

Supporters also claim the Electoral College actually enhances the status of minority groups. This is so because the voters of even small minorities in a State may make the difference between winning all of that State's electoral votes or none of that State's electoral votes (winner take all). And since ethnic minority groups in the United States happen to concentrate in those States with the most electoral votes, they assume an importance to presidential candidates well out of proportion to their number. The same principle applies to other special interest groups such as labor unions, farmers, environmentalists, and so forth.

It is because of this "leverage effect" that the presidency tends to be more sensitive to ethnic minority and other special interest groups than does the Congress. Changing to a direct election of the president would therefore actually damage minority interests since their votes would be overwhelmed by a national popular majority.

**Advantage #3**

Supporters further argue that the Electoral College contributes to the political stability of the nation by encouraging a two party system. There can be no doubt that the Electoral College has encouraged and helps to maintain a two party system in the United States. This is true simply because it is extremely difficult for a new or minor party to win enough popular votes in enough States to have a chance of winning the presidency.

A direct popular election of the president would likely have the opposite effect. For in a direct popular election, there would be every incentive for a many minor parties to form in an attempt to prevent whatever popular majority might be necessary to elect a president.

The result of a direct popular election for president, then, would likely be unstable political system characterized by multiple political parties and by more radical changes in policies from one administration to the next. The Electoral College system, in contrast, encourages political parties to compromise different interests into two sets of realistic alternatives. Such an organization of social conflict and political debate contributes to the political stability of the nation.

**Advantage #4**

Finally, its proponents argue quite correctly that the Electoral College maintains a federal system of government and representation. Their reasoning is that in a federal structure, important political powers are reserved to the component States. In the United States, for example, the House of Representatives was designed to represent the States according to the size of their population. The Senate was designed to represent each State equally regardless of its population. And the Electoral College was designed to represent each State's choice for the presidency (with the number of each State's electoral votes being the number of its Senators plus the number of its Representatives). To abolish the Electoral College in favor of a nationwide popular election for president would strike at the very heart of the federal structure laid out in our Constitution and eliminate the state’s role in electing the leader of the country.

**Disadvantages of the Electoral College:**

**Disadvantage #1:**

Opponents of the Electoral College are disturbed by the possibility of electing a minority president. This occurs when one candidate wins a majority of the total votes, and yet does not win the majority of the electors from the states. Nor is this concern entirely unfounded since there are three ways in which that could happen.

One way in which a minority president could be elected is if the country were so deeply divided politically that three or more presidential candidates split the electoral votes among them such that no one obtained the necessary majority. This occurred, as noted above, in 1824 and was unsuccessfully attempted in 1948 and again in 1968. Should that happen today, there are two possible resolutions: either one candidate could throw his electoral votes to the support of another (before the meeting of the Electors) or else, absent an absolute majority in the Electoral College, the U.S. House of Representatives would select the president in accordance with the 12th Amendment. Either way, though, the person taking office would not have obtained the absolute majority of the popular vote.

A second way in which a minority president could take office is if, as in 1888, one candidate's popular support were heavily concentrated in a few States while the other candidate maintained a slim popular lead in enough States to win the needed majority of the Electoral College.

A third way of electing a minority president is if a third party or candidate, however small, drew enough votes from the top two that no one received over 50% of the national popular total. Far from being unusual, this sort of thing has, in fact, happened 15 times including (in this century) Wilson in both 1912 and 1916, Truman in 1948, Kennedy in 1960, and Nixon in 1968.

**Disadvantage #2:**

Opponents of the Electoral College system also point to the risk of so-called "faithless" Electors. A "faithless Elector" is one who is pledged to vote for his party's candidate for president but nevertheless votes of another candidate. There have been 7 such Electors in this century and as recently as 1988 when a Democrat Elector in the State of West Virginia cast his votes for Lloyd Bensen for president and Michael Dukakis for vice president instead of the other way around. Faithless Electors have never changed the outcome of an election, though, simply because most often their purpose is to make a statement rather than make a difference. That is to say, when the electoral vote outcome is so obviously going to be for one candidate or the other, an occasional Elector casts a vote for some personal favorite knowing full well that it will not make a difference in the result.

**Disadvantage #3**

Opponents of the Electoral College are further concerned about its possible role in depressing voter turnout. Their argument is that, since each State is entitled to the same number of electoral votes regardless of its voter turnout, there is no incentive in the States to encourage voter participation. Indeed, there may even be an incentive to discourage participation (and they often cite the South here) so as to enable a minority of citizens to decide the electoral vote for the whole State.

Moreover, in cases where one state has overwhelming support for a dominant party (like Utah), citizens who support the non-dominate party may not bother to participate knowing their vote cannot and will not alter the elector count from the state.

**Disadvantage #4**

Finally, some opponents of the Electoral College point out, quite correctly, *its failure to accurately* *reflect the national popular will* in at least two respects.

First, the distribution of Electoral votes in the College tends to over-represent people in rural States. This is because the number of Electors for each State is determined by the number of members it has in the House (which more or less reflects the State's population size) plus the number of members it has in the Senate (which is always two regardless of the State's population). The result is that in 1988, for example, the combined voting age population (3,119,000) of the seven least populous jurisdiction of Alaska, Delaware, the District of Columbia, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming carried the same voting strength in the Electoral College (21 Electoral votes) as the 9,614,000 persons of voting age in the State of Florida. Each Floridian's potential vote, then, carried about one third the weight of a potential vote in the other States listed.

A second way in which the Electoral College fails to accurately reflect the national popular will stems primarily from the winner-take-all mechanism whereby the presidential candidate who wins the most popular votes in the State wins all the Electoral votes of that State. One effect of this mechanism is to make it extremely difficult for third party or independent candidates ever to make much of a showing in the Electoral College. If, for example, a third party or independent candidate were to win the support of even as many as 25% of the voters nationwide, he might still end up with no Electoral College votes at all unless he won a plurality of votes in at least one State. And even if he managed to win a few States, his support elsewhere would not be reflected. By thus failing to accurately reflect the national popular will, the argument goes, the Electoral College reinforces a two party system, discourages third party or independent candidates, and thereby tends to restrict choices available to the electorate.

Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Electoral College Debate

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| Advantages: | Disadvantages: |
| 1.  2.  3.  4. | 1.  2.  3.  4. |

1. Should the Electoral College remain in place or should it be replaced with a popular election? Why? (2-3 sentences)