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February 10, 2015: The Deep Cynicism of the Political Parties on the Electoral College

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Title: The Deep Cynicism of the Political Parties on the Electoral College

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2/10/2015—A couple of years ago, the national Republican Party floated the idea of moving a couple of blue leaning states they controlled from winner-take-all Presidential election states to congressional district winning states. What the Republicans did not explain is that such a move would destroy democracy in the United States. The reason this is so is the peculiar way we Americans elect the President. We do not vote directly for President but for Presidential Electors state by state who meet in the Electoral College and cast their votes for President. This system is a holdover from a theory of the framers of the Constitution that the President would be selected not democratically but as a result of a deliberative process—like the way Cardinals elect the Pope. America evolved to regard its President as necessarily democratically elected and that understanding sits uneasily on top of this rickety structure. Most of the time, the Presidential candidate with the most votes wins. Even when this does not happen, as in 2000, the vote is close. The reason an undemocratic Electoral College usually yields democratic results is that most 48 states practice winner-take-all. Thus, Republican votes in California are discounted, as are Democratic votes in Texas. The system only works as a whole. The system would also work if all the states divided their electoral votes by congressional district. But if a couple of blue states changed to congressional district while the rest remained winner-take-all, only democratic votes would be discounted nationally. The result would be that the Republican candidate for President would usually win, even if that candidate received less votes. This might happen every time. Obviously, that would be the end of democracy in America. Eventually, the people would wise up and some military coup would end Republican rule. The Republicans who floated this idea had no notion of how dangerous this idea was. But to see how deep the cynicism is, in both Parties, the New York Times reports that Nebraska, one of the two states with congressional district election, is considering moving to winner-take-all. All believers in democracy should rejoice. We need all states to go to winner-take-all and stay there. But this is not how the matter is seen. Republicans are pushing it because they want to maximize their electoral vote—“It’s obvious that the majority of citizens of the State of Nebraska are Republicans,” said J.L. Spray, the state Republican chairman. “They want to have the maximum voice in the Electoral College.” Meanwhile, “Democrats, not surprisingly, are fighting back.” No. Democrats should be very happy. They should press for a national commitment to keep the Electoral College as democratic as possible by having the same system in every state. But Democrats are no more committed to democracy than are Republicans.