

# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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## OUR VIEW

# There's no reason to get rid of the Electoral College

For the second time in the past five presidential elections, the candidate who won the most votes will not win the election.

This has turned the Electoral College — the mechanism by which this country chooses its leader — into the punching bag of the moment. It appears especially detrimental to democracy right now, after it enabled a candidate widely agreed to be unqualified for the job to land it. Acting on that feeling last week, U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., filed a long-shot bill to abolish the college and have elections decided solely by a popular vote.

We're taking a step back and the long view. Despite the results of 2016, we remain in favor of the Electoral College and think it is an appropriate way to choose the nation's leader.

### Founding Fathers

First, a quick history lesson: Detailed in Article II of the Constitution, our means of electing a president — not called the Electoral College until roughly a century later — was designed by the Founding Fathers. It mixed the power of electing a president between states and individual voters.

Back in 1787, the country was dealing with the difficult issues of states, regional populations and slavery. The South had lots of people living there, but many of them were not citizens and not allowed to vote. That meant more individual ballots could be cast in the Northeast, overwhelming what those in the South wanted. The Electoral College was a compromise — individual votes mattered, but those votes were slotted by state. The system roughly evened out the electoral power between regions.

It does much the same today, though thankfully the scourge of slavery is long overturned.

### Campaigning

The system requires that a man or woman convince a wide swath of this country of their fitness for the job, to campaign in out-of-the-way places and to listen and be aware of the issues, needs and beliefs of many disparate Americans. It does make things a bit unfair — swing state voters get more attention and more helpful policies. It also means that rural and suburban voters have a larger voice, when compared to the packed population centers of the east and west coasts. But it also means that flyover states have their say and that geographically limited majorities cannot dominate the country at large.

President-elect Trump is a proponent of the current system. He tweeted last Tuesday: "The Electoral College is actually genius in that it brings all states, including the smaller ones, into play. Campaigning is much different!"

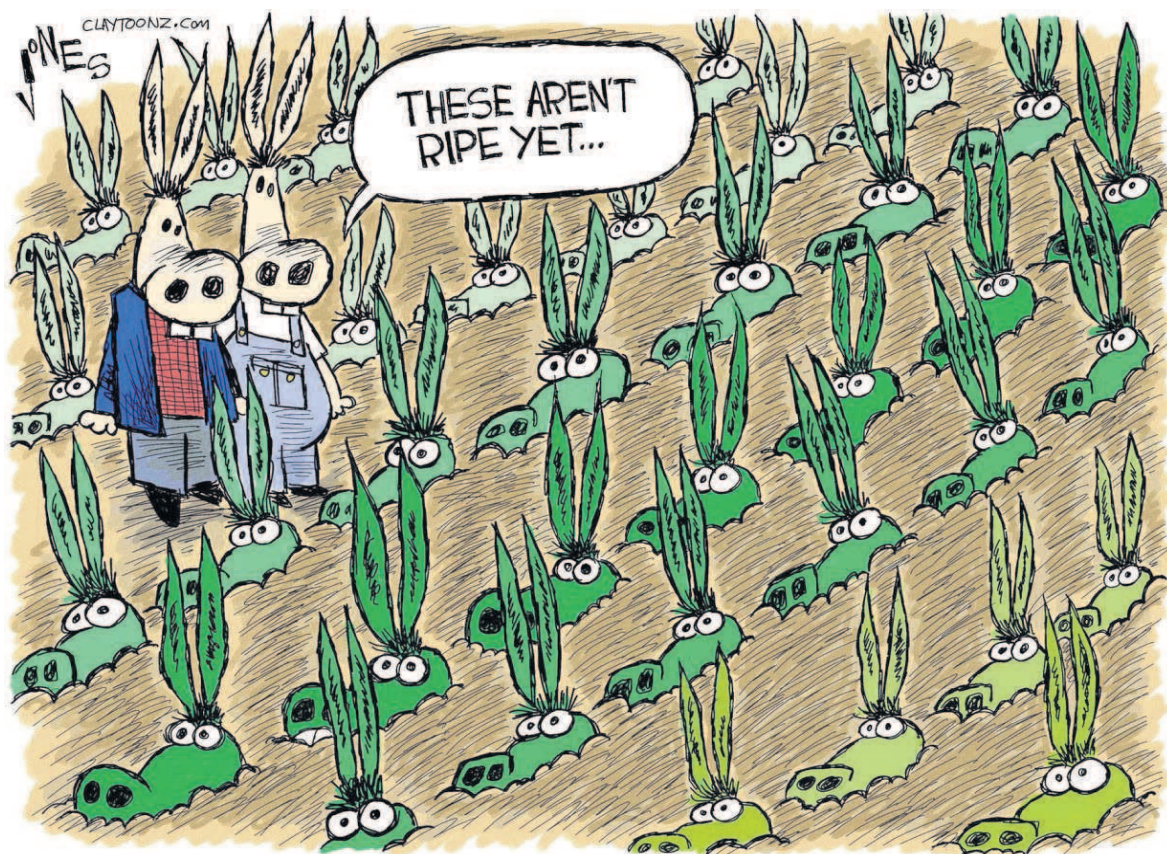
That's what he thinks right now, because the college was vital to his victory. Trump had a completely opposite opinion just four years ago after Barack Obama's win. Trump tweeted: "The electoral college is a disaster for democracy."

That flip-flop only goes to show that our president-elect is a man all about himself, one who espouses what is good for Trump is good for all and what is bad for Trump is bad for everyone.

For those of us with a more nuanced and less self-centered view of our democracy, we see the pros and cons of our election process, and Oregon Republicans have every right to dislike the system. In solidly blue states and even regions within those states, GOP presidential votes haven't meant much for decades, but galvanizing issues can change that in any given election.

It's not perfect, but on the whole, the college is a way to balance the needs of the entire country, avoid an overwhelming and ensconced political majority and make our elections legitimately competitive. The Electoral College remains, just as the founders intended, a great evener. No person or party has an inherent advantage.

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# The danger of a dominant identity

By DAVID BROOKS  
*New York Times News Service*

Over the past few days we've seen what happens when you assign someone a single identity. Pollsters assumed that most Latinos would vote only as Latinos, and therefore against Donald Trump. But a surprising percentage voted for him.



Pollsters assumed women would vote primarily as women, and go for Hillary Clinton. But a surprising number voted against her. They assumed African-Americans would vote along straight Democratic lines, but a surprising number left the top line of the ballot blank.

The pollsters reduced complex individuals to a single identity, and are now embarrassed. But pollsters are not the only people guilty of reductionist solitarism. This mode of thinking is one of the biggest problems facing this country today.

### Generalization

Trump spent the entire campaign reducing people to one identity and then generalizing. Muslims are only one thing, and they are dangerous. Mexicans are only one thing, and that is alien. When Trump talked about African-Americans he always talked about inner-city poverty, as if that was the sum total of the black experience in America.

Bigots turn multidimensional human beings into one-dimensional creatures. Anti-Semites define Jewishness in a certain crude miniaturizing way. Racists define both blackness and whiteness in just that manner. Populists dehumanize complex people into the moronic categories of "the people" and "the elites."

But it's not only racists who reduce people to a single identity. These days it's the anti-racists, too. To raise money and mobilize people,

advocates play up ethnic categories to an extreme degree.

Large parts of popular culture — and pretty much all of stand-up comedy — consist of reducing people to one or another identity and then making jokes about that generalization. The people who worry about cultural appropriation reduce people to an ethnic category and argue that those outside can never understand it. A single identity walls off empathy and the imagination.

We're even seeing a wave of voluntary reductionism. People feel besieged, or they're intellectually lazy, so they reduce themselves to one category. Being an evangelical used to mean practicing a certain form of faith. But "evangelical" has gone from being an adjective to a noun, a simplistic tribal identity that commands Republican affiliation.

### Clueless

Unfortunately, if you reduce complex individuals to one thing you'll go through life clueless about the world around you. People's classifications now shape how they see the world.

Plus, as philosopher Amartya Sen has argued, this mentality makes the world more flammable. Crude tribal dividing lines inevitably arouse a besieged, victimized us/them mentality. This mentality assumes that the relations between groups are zero sum and antagonistic. People with this mentality tolerate dishonesty, misogyny and terrorism on their own side because all morality lays down before the tribal imperative.

### Only way out

The only way out of this mess is to continually remind ourselves that each human is a conglomeration of identities: ethnic, racial, professional, geographic, religious and so on. Even each identity itself is not one thing but a tradition of debate about the meaning of that identity. Furthermore, the dignity of each person is

not found in the racial or ethnic category that each has inherited, but in the moral commitments that each individual has chosen and lived out.

Getting out of this mess also means accepting the limits of social science. The judgments of actual voters are better captured in the narratives of journalism and historical analysis than in the brutalizing correlations of big data.

Rebinding the nation means finding shared identities, not just contrasting ones. If we want to improve race relations, it's not enough to have a conversation about race. We also have to emphasize identities people have in common across the color line. If you can engage different people together as Marines or teachers, then you will have built an empathetic relationship, and people can learn one another's racial experiences naturally.

Finally, we have to revive the American identity. For much of the 20th century, America had a rough consensus about the American idea. Historians congregated around a common narrative. People put great stock in civic rituals like the pledge. But that consensus is now in tatters, stretched by globalization, increasing diversity as well as failures of civic education.

Now many Americans don't recognize one another or their country. The line I heard most on election night was, "This is not my America." We will have to construct a new national idea that binds and embraces all our particular identities.

The good news is that there wasn't mass violence last week. That could have happened amid a civic clash this ugly and passionate. That's a sign that for all the fear and anger of this season, there's still mutual attachment among us, something to build on.

But there has to be a rejection of single-identity thinking and a continual embrace of the reality that each of us is a mansion with many rooms.

# The Medicare killers are on the hunt

By PAUL KRUGMAN  
*New York Times News Service*

During the campaign, Donald Trump often promised to be a different kind of Republican, one who would represent the interests of working-class voters. "I'm not going to cut Social Security like every other Republican and I'm not going to cut Medicare or Medicaid," he declared, under the headline "Why Donald Trump Won't Touch Your Entitlements."

It was, of course, a lie. The transition team's point man on Social Security is a longtime advocate of privatization, and all indications are that the incoming administration is getting ready to kill Medicare, replacing it with vouchers that can be applied to the purchase of private insurance. Oh, and it's also likely to raise the age of Medicare eligibility.

So it's important not to let this bait-and-switch happen before the public realizes what's going on.

Three points in particular need to be made as loudly as possible.

### Violating the promise

First, the attack on Medicare will be one of the most blatant violations of a campaign promise in history.

Some readers may recall George W. Bush's attempt to privatize Social Security, in which he claimed a "mandate" from voters despite hav-

ing run a campaign entirely focused on other issues. That was bad, but this is much worse — and not just because Trump lost the popular vote by a significant margin, making any claim of a mandate bizarre.

Candidate Trump ran on exactly the opposite position from the one President-elect Trump seems to be embracing, claiming to be defending the (white) working class. Now he's going to destroy a program that is crucial to that class?

Which brings me to the second point: While Medicare is an essential program for a great majority of Americans, it's especially important for the white working-class voters who supported Trump most strongly. Partly that's because Medicare beneficiaries are considerably whiter than the country as a whole, precisely because they're older and reflect the demography of an earlier era.

Beyond that, think of what would happen if Medicare didn't exist. Some older Americans would probably be able to retain health coverage by staying at jobs that come with such coverage. But this option would by and large be available only to those with extensive education: Working-class seniors would be left stranded.

Doesn't something have to be done about Medicare? No — which is my third point. People like Speaker Paul Ryan, have often managed to bamboozle the media into believing that their efforts to dismantle Medicare and other programs are driven by economic concerns. They aren't.

It has been obvious for a long time that Medicare is actually more efficient than private insurance, mainly because it doesn't spend large sums on overhead and marketing, and, of course, it needn't make room for profits.

What's not widely known is that the cost-saving measures included in the Affordable Care Act have been remarkably successful in their efforts to rein in the long-term rise in Medicare expenses. Since 2010 Medicare outlays per beneficiary have risen only 1.4 percent a year, less than the inflation rate. This success is one main reason long-term budget projections have dramatically improved.

So why try to destroy this successful program, which is than ever? The main answer, from the point of view of people like Ryan, is probably that Medicare is in the cross hairs precisely because of its success: It would be very helpful for opponents of government to do away with a program that clearly demonstrates the power of government to improve people's lives.

In summary, privatizing Medicare would betray a central promise of the Trump campaign, would betray the interests of the voter bloc that thought it had found a champion, and would be terrible policy.

What's crucial now is to make sure that voters do, in fact, realize what's going on. And this isn't just a job for politicians. It's also a chance for the news media, which failed so badly during the campaign, to start doing its job.