



WAS THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE CREATED TO PROTECT SLAVERY?

An accusation leveled by critics of the Electoral College is that it was created to protect the interests of states with large numbers of enslaved people. History does not support this claim.

For most of the Constitutional Convention the plan was that Congress would appoint the president. Both the “Virginia Plan” and the competing “New Jersey Plan” had Congress selecting the president, but delegates worried this would make the executive too dependent on Congress.

Direct election of the president was not generally supported by delegates, but the idea of using electors to select the president was proposed several times as a way to ensure the independence of the president.

Proposals for using electors largely came from anti-slavery delegates including Alexander Hamilton, Gouverneur Morris, William Patterson, and James Wilson. Southern delegations generally favored having Congress appoint the president.

In mid-July, the convention adopted an electoral college proposal, with only Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina voting against it. Several days later the elector plan was taken out and appointment by Congress put back in, with the full support of Southern states.

Concerns about the president being dependent on Congress remained, however, and after considerable debate and discussion, the matter was referred to a committee to resolve the issue. The committee developed its proposal for the Electoral College, and after extensive discussion and a few modest changes, the convention accepted it with only North Carolina and South Carolina voting against the plan.

The Electoral College was not created to boost the slave states’ power, because congressional appointment of the president already did that. Instead, the Electoral College was created to ensure the president was independent from Congress.

KEY POINTS

- The Electoral College replaced the already-approved plan to have Congress appoint the president because it ensured the executive would be independent from the legislature, not because of slavery.
- Anti-slavery delegates from the North were the primary proponents of using an electoral college to elect the president.
- Pro-slavery delegations from the South generally favored congressional appointment of the president and many opposed an electoral college.