

Antifederalist No. 68

On the Mode of Electing the President

From a speech by William Grayson given to the Virginia ratifying convention on June 18, 1788.

Mr. [William] GRAYSON. Mr. Chairman, one great objection with me is this: If we advert to..... [the] democratical, aristocratical, or executive branch, we shall find their powers are perpetually varying and fluctuating throughout the whole. Perhaps the democratic branch would be well constructed, were it not for this defect. The executive is still worse, in this respect, than the democratic branch. He is to be elected by a number of electors in the country; but the principle is changed when no person has a majority of the whole number of electors appointed, or when more than one have such a majority, and have an equal number of votes; for then the lower house is to vote by states. It is thus changing throughout the whole. It seems rather founded on accident than any principle of government I ever heard of. We know that there scarcely ever was an election of such an officer without the interposition of foreign powers. Two causes prevail to make them intermeddle in such cases: -- one is, to preserve the balance of power; the other, to preserve their trade. These causes have produced interferences of foreign powers in the election of the king of Poland. All the great powers of Europe have interfered in an election which took place not very long ago, and would not let the people choose for themselves. We know how much the powers of Europe have interfered with Sweden. Since the death of Charles XII, that country has been a republican government. Some powers were willing it should be so; some were willing her imbecility should continue; others wished the contrary; and at length the court of France brought about a revolution, which converted it into an absolute government. Can America be free from these interferences? France, after losing Holland, will wish to make America entirely her own. Great Britain will wish to increase her influence by a still closer connection. It is the interest of Spain, from the contiguity of her possessions in the western hemisphere to the United States, to be in an intimate connection with them, and influence their deliberations, if possible. I think we have every thing, to apprehend from such interferences. It is highly probable the President will be continued in office for life. To gain his favor, they will support him. Consider the means of importance he will have by creating officers. If he has a good understanding with the Senate, they will join to prevent a discovery of his misdeeds. . . .

This quadrennial power cannot be justified by ancient history. There is hardly an instance where a republic trusted its executive so long with much power; nor is it warranted by modern republics. The delegation of power is, in most of them, only for one year.

When you have a strong democratical and a strong aristocratical branch, you may have a strong executive. But when those are weak, the balance will not be preserved, if you give

the executive extensive powers for so long a time. As this government is organized, it would be dangerous to trust the President with such powers. How will you punish him if he abuse his power? Will you call him before the Senate? They are his counselors and partners in crime. Where are your checks? We ought to be extremely cautious in this country. If ever the government be changed, it will probably be into a despotism. The first object in England was to destroy the monarchy; but the aristocratic branch restored him, and of course the government was organized on its ancient principles. But were a revolution to happen here, there would be no means of restoring the government to its former organization. This is a caution to us not to trust extensive powers. I have an extreme objection to the mode of his election. I presume the seven Eastern States will always elect him. As he is vested with the power of making treaties, and as there is a material distinction between the carrying and productive states, the former will be disposed to have him to themselves. He will accommodate himself to their interests in forming treaties, and they will continue him perpetually in office. Thus mutual interest will lead them reciprocally to support one another. It will be a government of a faction, and this observation will apply to every part of it; for, having a majority, they may do what they please. I have made an estimate which shows with what facility they will be able to reelect him. The number of electors is equal to the number of representatives and senators; viz., ninety-one. They are to vote for two persons. They give, therefore, one hundred and eighty-two votes. Let there be forty-five votes for four different candidates, and two for the President. He is one of the five highest, if he have but two votes, which he may easily purchase. In this case, by the 3d clause of the 1st section of the 2d article, the election is to be by the representatives, according to states.

Let New Hampshire be for him, -- a majority of its 3 representatives is 2

Rhode Island	1	1
Connecticut	5	3
New Jersey	4	3
Delaware	1	1
Georgia	3	2
North Carolina	5	3

A majority of seven states is 15. Thus the majority of seven states is but 15, while the minority amounts to 50. The total number of voices (91 electors and 65 representatives) is . . 156. Voices in favor of the President are, 2 state electors and 15 representatives17 139.

So that the President may be reelected by the voices of 17 against 139.

It may be said that this is an extravagant case, and will never happen. In my opinion, it will often happen. A person who is a favorite of Congress, if he gets but two votes of electors, may, by the subsequent choice of 15 representatives, be elected President. Surely the possibility of such a case ought to be excluded.