

# Electoral College Panel Transcript

**Alma Couverthie** 00:00

Thank you, and good evening to our audience here in Washington, Hilton and our nation's capital. I am Anna Couverthie, and on behalf everyone in the League of Women Voters of the United States, I want to say welcome to our members from across the United States. And I cannot do it from there, actually, sorry. This is my first time with a teleprompter, if you can, yes. So I just want to welcome everybody, because we are so excited that we are back in DC for our convention.

**Kelly McFarland Stratman** 00:40

Thank you, Alma. I am Kelly McFarland Stratman, and I want to extend that welcome to our virtual audience joining us. Facebook. Tonight's panel is on an important and timely topic, and we appreciate the technology is allowing us to share it with a wider audience.

**Alma Couverthie** 00:58

So when we cast our votes for our president. You know that we aren't voting for the President, right? We're voting for intermediates. We're voting for electors from each party who select the president on our behalf. Five times in American history, the person elected for President did not have the most votes, but was elected by the Electoral College. The Electoral College is a group of people in each state elected by political parties who act as a proxy for voters in selecting the president. And this spring, the league launched One Person One Vote, our long term campaign to drive a movement, a movement that will eliminate the electoral college. Together, all of us, we will move our nation beyond the archaic, racist Electoral College and towards true representation for all.

**Kelly McFarland Stratman** 02:08

So later in the program, we will be sharing more about how you can get involved in One Person One Vote, how we can all work to dismantle this racist system and build a democracy that is powered by the people and for all the people, and we have an opportunity for you to engage tonight. For those of you tuning in online, you are welcome to post questions to the panel in the chat, and there are some note cards for those of you in the room, on your tables, and staff will be around to gather those questions from our panel. But right now, we'd like to begin our panel presentation. We have brought together an impressive group of experts to share their views on the electoral college. So I want to welcome tonight's panelists to the stage as well as our moderator for this evening, I want to welcome Celina Stewart, our Chief Counsel for the League of Women Voters.

**Celina Stewart** 03:18

Hello, League. Okay, we're gonna have to fix this. There we go. Okay, hello League. How are we tonight? Thank you, Alma and Kelly. I'm Celina Stewart. My pleasure to introduce our remarkable panelists. Show of hands. You have attended a panel or talk the electoral college or the national vote. No surprise, a good number of us, right. Okay, how many times have you attended a panel on this topic featuring all women? Yes, that's that deserves an applause. Well, I know I haven't oftentimes we hear

men, no offense, talk about the Electoral College, and then the women are called on to do the work. I Tonight, we'll be hearing from three dynamic women who are pushing the boundaries to power a real conversation about this important topic and pushing for change for a fair and more representative voting process. joining us tonight are Na'ilah Amaru, pronounced like umbrella, Amaru, an advocacy and policy strategist with experience in organizing around structural reforms,

04:43

Carolyn Dupont,

**Celina Stewart** 04:50

Professor of Eastern Kentucky University, and Keesha Gaskins-Nathan Program Director of Democratic Practice at the Rockefeller's fund. Just to share. Yes, you can clap, just to share a little more esteemed panelists. Na'ilah is a nationally recognized political strategist and campaign architect with an established track record influencing public policy through gender justice and the racial equity lens. She has led transformational issue campaigns and commanded high-level leadership roles in nonprofit organizations and government where her advocacy work amplifies diverse voices and legislative conversations. Na'ilah's political impact and mobilizing grassroots efforts to progress social justice issues has positioned her as a sought after. speaker, thought leader and media commentator. She holds master's, master's degrees. Yes plural in public administration, public policy, and urban affairs, dual bachelor degrees. Come on, Na'ilah, for real? Dual bachelor degrees in political science and criminal justice, and is currently completing her PhD in Political Science. Please join me in welcoming Na'ilah. Next we have Caroline Dupont, author and professor of history at Eastern Kentucky University, where she specializes in African American History and American religious history. Her book Mississippi Praying: Southern White Evangelicals and the Civil Rights Movement, 1945 to 1975, won the Frank and Elizabeth prize from the American Society of Church History September 2014. upcoming Prometheus press will publish her most recent book, Distorting Democracy: the Forgotten History of the Electoral College and Why it Matters Today. Her opinion writing has appeared in the Huffington Post, The Washington Post, among other outlets. Last, but certainly not least, Keesha Gaskins-Nathan as a program director. We know Keesha, right? Many of us in the room know Keesha because she has funded our work. She is the program director of democratic practice, United States and racial justice initiative at Rockefeller Brothers' Foundation. Keesha is a long-time organizer, lobbyist and trial attorney. Prior to joining Rockefeller Brother's Fund, she was the senior counsel for the Brennan Center for Justice serving as the director of the redistricting and representation program. She is dedicated to advancing measures and ideas that improve democratic systems and engage democratic culture in the US to support full and fair opportunity for all residents. By the way, Keesha is also a long time League member. . She was the executive director of the League of Minnesota, yes, Minnesota in the house. And when I have been on panels with Keesha, she often tells me info about the League that the average person just doesn't know. And she surprises me, even me. Finally, she is the 2021-2022 Daynard public interest fellow at the Northeastern University School of Law, International and Public Affairs 2019 Aspen ideas scholar, and the 2008 and the a feminist leadership fellow with the University of Minnesota Humphrey H Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs Center on Women and Public Policy. She has been featured on background briefing the great battlefield, PBS, News Hour, MSNBC and Bill Moyers. Now Are y'all excited about this panel? So let's get into it. Good evening,

09:15

everybody. How you doing? Well, let's jump right in.

**Celina Stewart** 09:19

How would you all describe a healthy democracy? What does that mean to you? Carolyn,

**Carolyn Dupont** 09:24

you want to start Sure? So I think when we think about democracy, democracy means many things, but if we want to only focus on the aspect of democracy that has to do with voting and how our elections are structured, I think there are probably four things that I would say, characterize a healthy democracy. And at the first one would be that it's that we vote in ways that are based on important, widely shared values. Secondly, I think that we all show up with equal power at the ballot box, that some people who live in one state don't have more power than others who live in other states, and no one has less power because they don't vote with the majority in their state. I think a healthy democracy involves transparency about how the process works. I noticed one of our introducers comment is that, you know, you don't vote for a president, you vote for an elector, but how many know the name of the Elector that you voted for or the Electors that you voted for? I think most of us don't. And you know we shouldn't have to have videos that say what happens when you vote, because we should know what happens when we vote. It should be a transparent process. And then finally, I think we a healthy democracy would include systems that produce candidates that Americans feel good about supporting. Keesha, what about you?

**Keesha Gaskins-Nathan** 11:05

What's a healthy democracy? So I'm sorry. First of all, good evening, everybody. How are we today? That was terrible. We're gonna do this again. Good evening. All right. Now, I know I'm amongst friends, and we can do this. So we think, when I think about a healthy democracy, I think about the shape as we think about at the RBF, we're not a democracy program, but a democratic practice program. That means we're looking at our democratic systems and our democratic culture and the Venn diagram, where those crossover when we talk about our democratic practice. How do we actually engage in the practice of democracy and what does that look like, and what is the crucible in which that rests and for that, we need a strong liberal democracy. And I mean liberal in the very political sciencey term, not in the partisan term. And that in that case, we're talking about Republican principles, democracy principles, constitutionalism and liberalism, and that shows up with a country that operates on majority rule, in the strictest Democratic sense, with minority protections against majority, a rule of law that applies to everybody and protects everybody, and people are the mechanism through which power to govern is derived, versus authoritarian spaces where elections can still be had, but the power to government actually doesn't derive from people. It's incredibly important that we that we notice that it's not just the function and mechanics of elections, but the actual practice of how we actually elect, and that those mechanisms actually show up in our formal and informal processes to actually give and reflect the power of governments.

**Celina Stewart** 12:54

Can you all hear us? Okay, okay. Na'ilah, do you want to close us out?

**Na'ilah Amaru 13:01**

I love this question, because I think for me, democracy is both process as well as outcome, but most importantly, the connection between those two, right? And so it's the importance of those connections which is essentially what builds us our bridge, and I think that Bridge can be built primarily in three different ways. From my perspective as an organizer and all the other hats that I that I wear. First and foremost, is accessibility and responsiveness. It's been alluded to on the stage for some folks in the current political system. There sometimes their their their vote is more is more valued and in a healthy democracy in the vision that I'm building towards is that it's about responsiveness and accessibility, but that also requires public participation and engagement. We are all well learned, I'm sure, in in the trials of trying to get you know sometimes our folks to come out to the polls or to get engaged, but that is such a core part of how we how do we get to this democracy that lives and thrives and is not just dependent on the triple prime voters that come out every every election cycle. And the other component, I think, is absolutely integral that I've seen has such an important impact on the issues is reflective policy making, and this falls under, I think, like the umbrella of co-governance, of government is not, should not be thought of as this separate, abstract thing that happens to people, but oftentimes in the communities that come from that I work with and work on behalf of, it is. And so I think just kind of shifting that thought process as government as a separate entity, and moving us towards a democracy where it's realized that democracy is us, government is us, government is rooted in the power of the people, and that people is us. And those are the things that I think of when I think of when I think about building a healthy democracy.

**Celina Stewart 15:07**

Awesome. I love your reference to bridge building. I always say that either you're a bridge or you're glue, depending on what the situation is. So let's talk about the glue or bridge. What is the connection between the Electoral College and this effort going around the country, the national popular vote interstate compact. Let's put that to our historian. Yes.

**Carolyn Dupont 15:38**

So the and I'm going to use the language NPVIC, National Popular Vote Interstate Compact, is essentially a workaround work around the Electoral College to ensure that the winner of the national popular vote does, in fact, occupy the White House and many of the most important reforms in our history have actually begun at the state level, and working at the state level on reforms like this raises people's awareness about the problem of the electoral college. And so on the one hand, I'm all for the NPVIC because it will do all those things. I do have concerns about it in that it could be subject to constitutional challenges. And I also have concerns that people could feel aggrieved, and, possibly, rightly so. So I live in Kentucky. The Republican candidate will likely win, Kentucky. But if Kentucky were to give its electors to the Democratic candidate, I can understand how some Republican voters in Kentucky might feel betrayed by that. And we want an election system that makes everyone feel like they were heard and treated fairly. And so those are some of my concerns about the NPVIC, but I would say let's work on it, let's pull out all the stops and work from every angle we can, but for me the goal and the most secure way to make sure every vote is equal is a constitutional amendment that abolishes the Electoral College. If I could just remind everyone. I don't know how many people know this, but in 1969, the US House

**Celina Stewart** 17:39

passed a constitutional amendment abolishing

**Carolyn Dupont** 17:41

the Electoral College, with 83% of Congress voting in favor of that amendment. And that's pretty stunning. They only needed 66 votes, but they had, or excuse me, 66% but they had 83%, and so, and 81% of the American public supported that amendment. Now it was killed by a filibuster by a segregationist in the Senate. But you know, I think we've come that close. I think we can do it, and I don't think I would like us not to take our eyes off that goal.

**Celina Stewart** 18:15

So that reminds me the Electoral College, abolishing the Electoral College, this effort has been attempted 700 times or so. I'm just wondering from the panelists, one of the things that I've noticed is that it has been missing a grassroots component. So how might a grassroots component, since we have all of these grassroots folks in the room, how might that power be leveraged? Na'ilah, maybe I'll start with you.

**Na'ilah Amaru** 18:44

I love this question. Grassroots Organizing is how we win, without question. What I've learned from my beginnings as an organizer. I worked on tenant rights issues in my beloved Georgia to now in New York, where I where I currently reside,

**Celina Stewart** 19:04

And cause trouble.

**Na'ilah Amaru** 19:06

Good trouble. Shout out from my former my former boss, the late Congressman John Lewis. Yes, I'll go off script, off my notes. I learned an important lesson under Congressman John Lewis in terms of movement building and changing systems and bringing out reform through light and heat. The simplest version is, heat is the action, it's the people, it's the boots on the ground, and light is the education, it's the awareness. And I think that touches on the multi pronged approach of the power of grassroots mobilizing, is the importance of education, just bringing awareness. A lot of people just don't know. I think sometimes there's the you know, the concept of apathy, which is certainly an issue, is you know, is tossed out as as a reason. And I would not say that it's not, but I think oftentimes it's so powerful when you teach people what they need to know, to empower them with the tools, with the information. And I think that through the education, we have to highlight the inequities of the current system, particularly for folks who may not necessarily be aware of the disparities that currently exist within it. And again, it's through that highlighting of the inequities that you bring in awareness. It's the light that brings fire to to the people, that mobilizes them in into action. And of course, it has, it has it has an impact on the overarching strategy of advocacy. I think it's important to note that advocacy at both the state level as well as the federal level is key. And one of the things I want to acknowledge, as someone who has been on both sides of the national organizing and the local organizing is to acknowledge the tension oftentimes it can come when sometimes national organizations that can oftentimes be well funded, with good all good intentions, will go into local fight with their own mapped out strategy, not

have an understanding of the nuances of how you need to build relationships and invest with folks on the ground so that the win that you're trying to get does not win on does not dissipate on Election Day, but real community power building requires long term investment, and that begins with an investment that goes beyond whatever cycle you're trying to work within, with that long-term vision in mind of community power building. And last, but certainly not least, and I would argue, probably most importantly, it is on the ground coalition building, I've worked on a lot of issue campaigns, a lot of electoral campaigns, and the more diverse your coalition, the stronger you are. We all have -- There's so much talent in this room and so much experience as well and as well as beyond it. And I have found, with every campaign that I didn't think that I always fight for, you know, the longer, the longer fight we we won because we expanded beyond the core of the everyday people who people were always used to dealing with in the state houses or in Capitol Hill, but when I introduced characters, and those characters brought in their stories into their families, the conversation changed, because now you're not just talking to Na'ilah, who you meet with multiple times a week, or the folks who you're used to meeting with to talk about this issue. You're really centering the people who are impacted by these structural inequities, and that changes the conversation the way that I have found to always be the most powerful and transformative moments when we're talking about let's expand who we are used to working with and let's really tap into our collective talents, our collective experiences, like perspectives to really lead towards transformative, transformative change and lead to democracy reforms.

**Celina Stewart** 23:25

I'm glad that you mentioned apathy, because apathy is a word that irritates me. And I think it was our CO CEO Alma who

**Kelly McFarland Stratman** 23:36

expressed or articulated in a way that like, "aha!"

**Celina Stewart** 23:40

that is why I'm irritated." Because it's so complex. The things that lead to people not doing what is expected, or what people think they should do is oftentimes based on epigenetics. I'm not going to tell those stories about cherry blossom and the mice, but it's often because of trauma that comes from intergenerational past, and so all of those things are coming against you when you're just trying to make everyday decisions. And so we have to, we have to think about apathy a much different way, instead of victimizing the people who have already been victimized. So Keesha, I want to talk with you, because we started talking about grassroots movements. But you know grassroots movements, and you also know the League. So I'm just curious what your thoughts are and how the league and our grassroot movement could be critical at this time.

**Keesha Gaskins-Nathan** 24:34

So structural reform demands civil society to be a driver, period, all stop. We want our elected officials to be leaders and champions of

24:46

this issue, and for issues around structural democracy, specifically issues like the



**Keesha Gaskins-Nathan** 24:50

Electoral College, but sometimes we lose sight of the fact that that actually is asking folks to shoot the horse they rode into power on, and that actually the drivers of change and the drivers of reform are going to come from places and community when we think about spaces like the league. I love Carolyn's point that Congress was in 1969 to abolish the Electoral College after the League did it in 1968.

**Celina Stewart** 25:19

Thank you. She always has fun facts.

**Carolyn Dupont** 25:23

Let's be clear, they were all afraid of George Wallace.

**Keesha Gaskins-Nathan** 25:28

I don't know I ran the league. I know who they're afraid of. I think that in partnership, being in partnership with the local leagues and understanding what it needs to be into the level that understanding very deeply that communities are intelligent collectives

**Celina Stewart** 25:47

of people who understand what they need.

**Keesha Gaskins-Nathan** 25:50

And when Na'imah talks about education, I mean that is the connective tissue, it's not that we're giving them some sort of magical power, right? People know what they have and they know what they need, but they're not always a dots, and the link is always very important place around connecting those dots, I have moved many things in my adult life, and every time I go into a new city I'm trying to figure out the legal structure when I move, or the political structure. When I moved to New York City, I was like, so there's a city council and there's community boards and there's a president of what is all this? And I went straight down to LWV New York City, and they explained to me, and they helped me understand where I wanted to enter, what it meant, what it meant to be a citizen, what it meant to do, what those are the understandings of the structural issues, so people can actually understand why these structures, when they're connected to their desires, and that connect between their ability to work within the formal systems of our democracy and our informal systems, and when they're largely unsuccessful, over and over and over and over again, It's that's when the structures come into play. It feels to me that the League is such an essential, particularly when the League works effectively in partnership

**Celina Stewart** 27:19

with, I think, the

**Keesha Gaskins-Nathan** 27:21

amazing way that the League can come in with lots of knowledge, but with also humility and grace, in a way that really allows communities to shine through those relationships. So I think the League has got a very long and important history of understanding the large systems, the ability to be in community on the ground, deeply understanding the structure dynamics and dynamism of political systems where they operate in at the most local of all levels, and being able to translate

27:47

So I've talked about who has drove this conversation for many years. I just wonder

**Keesha Gaskins-Nathan** 27:47

that in partnership to all communities around them for the future. Back to you guys.

**Celina Stewart** 28:08

if women are in the driver's seat and the men who are so graciously supporting movement, how does that change the conversation around the Electoral College, the impact of it and the national popular vote,

**Na'ilah Amaru** 28:27

the narrative will absolutely change, because the people leading the conversation will change. You know, women, we represent so many different experiences that are framed by our identities, which impact how we move throughout life, which impact how shows up for for better or worse. But one of the things I found really important in grassroots organizing is the importance of sharing our stories. You know, we can go through different experiences, take way different lessons, and sometimes, more often not, we feel like we're the only one who's going through that particular situation. And then when we find a vulnerability to share scars with someone else or with a room full of people, you realize that you're not the only one who is suffering from that particular experience, or even if someone didn't have that same exact experience, they recognize the pain. They recognize the consequences of having something fundamentally unfair happen to you. And I found that when you're able to connect with people on an emotional, human level, it opens the door to then bring them into this journey, to not talk about the technical deficiencies of the Electoral College, yes, but start with the connection first with the understanding we've all gone through some experience that has been so fundamentally unfair that has taken away our agency to live our lives in a way that we want to and most importantly, we have the power to change that collectively. And that conversation begins one on one. It begins in room of chapters, League of Women Voters chapters meetings. It begins with outreach. And that's something that I found that women tend to lean into is not being afraid to open ourselves and to share our story and to use that connection again as an invitation into a longer journey of emotional connection in its own process, through awareness, through grassroots mobilization through advocacy at both federal and the state can lead us to dismantling the Electoral College, because we are all suffering under a system that leads us it's such an unfair representative state. We all have the collective power to change that, and that begins with one conversation, oneof connection. Thank you.

**Keesha Gaskins-Nathan** 31:09

Celina, can I challenge?

**Celina Stewart** 31:10

I was coming to you, go,

**Keesha Gaskins-Nathan** 31:14



what would it mean for women to be in the driver's seat as a student of movement, I have yet to see a movement where women have not always been in the driver's seat. I think this movement, like many others, women, are not fully engaged around the face of the movement or the narrative of movement, but this, like any other movements, would be nowhere if women weren't driving it forward. And I think the challenge of that really important points that failing to center the stories and experience of women, while allowing women to be the workforce that moves it forward is a disconnect that actually will ultimately result in failure. The driver to the work must also be the face of the movement. Must also be the narratives and the storytellers of the movement. And every time we see that women actually step forward and become that tip of the sphere, and when women fall back, we see a failure of those same movements, right, whether it's everything from the Civil Rights Movement, globally, indigenous movements for democracy and rights of land and water, right? This is where we see women sacrificing themselves. They're at the front all these spaces. Trans women at the front of the Stonewall riots, right? And when trans women and other women that fell back from being the front of the of the gay rights movement, we saw how it changed and now how trans folks are the tip of the sphere to undermine all the work that's been done. That failing to center women and failing to center experiences, while always expecting women to be the workers of every movement is consistently a failure. And so I would say women are in the drivers. There is no movement that hasn't been driven by women. And the question becomes, are we prepared to shift the face and the narrative of this particular conversation so the stories of women are centered for the success of this to arise?

**Celina Stewart** 33:19

Thank you. Carolyn, you want to weigh in here?

**Carolyn Dupont** 33:25

Yeah, it's interesting. so I want to answer this question historically, because when we think about how the electoral college is set up and structured, of course, we all know that the number of electors that a state gets is based in part on the population, which includes the women, and it has always included the women in the population from the very beginning. And so if we want to think about the Electoral College, and we do, as a means whereby electoral power has been unequally distributed, this is one of the ways that it was always until 1920, distributed away from women and given to others on our behalf. And so we all know about the three-fifths clause, but for women, it's always been a five-fifths clause. And so we were counted as whole people in the population, but until 1920 not allowed to vote in most states. So I think that that's one way that can help us think about how the Electoral College works, has worked historically unequally on different sectors of a population.

**Celina Stewart** 34:47

Thank you. I have another question for you all. Very relevant question. hope. The 2024 election is just 130 days away, so close, there are a lot of things happening domestically and abroad. So would you say? What would you say to those voters who are still balancing how they might engage in November,

**Keesha Gaskins-Nathan** 35:21

I find this moment in political history, this moment where we are to be a moment of great moral and ethical courage for everybody. And at no point should we ever suggest that people should advocate their moral position in order to engage in a certain way that we would define on their behalf, that they

should engage, and I think that's the first thing that we have to see and understand. I think secondly that we do have some challenges with particularly young folks having a clear understanding of how expression shows up. What do I mean? Silence and boycott are magnificently effective ways of expressing political outrage and accountability in an economic and social media context. I withhold my dollars. I withhold my attention. I withhold and they understand that very acutely. This is what I walk away with and walk away from. But that doesn't translate into politics, right? That withholding my voice, withholding my vote, withholding these actions, actually undermines my power and causes me to walk away from the very issues I care about the most, and allowing those two things to be held together at the same time, is a challenge of the moment that we're in. to understand that the governing class, period, has a long way to go to meet the needs of the American people, and we have to understand what that means. For so many folks, we are recognizing that people are not choosing a champion. They are simply choosing the battleground for which their next fight is to be had. and so I think as we think about what are the opportunities, what do we oftentimes, we think about this, I think the first thing we do is honor people's moral convictions. Honor them and recognize them and start. I think the next step is saying, of those moral convictions, where does that lead you to how you express your power, and how does that show up in both formal and informal systems? How does that help you recognize that there's way more than one election on this ballot, right, we're going all the way down, that we have repro on the ballot. We can have up to 14 states by the time we get to November that may have it on the ballot like this is, this is a real time. And so as we think about these questions and as we think about these challenges, I think that's how I think about that balance. It's really honoring people from where they sit, recognizing the challenges from where they are, but also being able to clearly express what it means to express and hold power, and what does that mean to make that voice heard. So you're not advocating your power, but holding it, expressing it, and moving it forward to the changes people wish to see.

**Celina Stewart** 38:29

Amen. I mean, great. It sounded like a sermon. Carolyn,

**Carolyn Dupont** 38:38

yeah, I don't think I have anything profound or deep to say about this, except that I'm a blue voter in a red state, in a red County, my candidate never wins, but I vote every time. my daughter is here, and I remember the time I voted and I brought her. It's just important, because I know my grandmother was well into adulthood before she. I just think I value the vote, and we all need to value the vote. And so there's just not a question there, I'm going to show up and I'm going to vote. And then the other thing I would say, Excuse me, is politics just so imperfect, and we just have to accept that, and we have to work with the system that we have and keep working on it and make it better.

**Celina Stewart** 39:36

Have any of you all found a perfect candidate? Okay? No hands. No hands.

**Carolyn Dupont** 39:42

Would be nothing for us to do is that

39:44

we're all perfect.

**Celina Stewart** 39:44

I'm just saying there's never perfect candidates always choose. We're always making a choice. Na'ilah, you want to close this out on this question?

**Na'ilah Amaru** 39:51

I love this question because there's layers, an assignment for me to continue the work that I've been doing, and a call to action for the rest of us in this room. I think for me, I've always challenged folks who say they don't want to participate because they don't like it or because the system is XYZ, to ask themselves, what does power mean to you? Because once you're able to define it, you're able to exercise it, you're able to build it, and you're able to build it collectively, which will change the that you're frustrated with within this system. And I found even throughout Maryland journey, I started off as an organizer, knocking on doors, advocating for housing rights in Atlanta, and power meant to me at that time, organizing rallies you know, you know, holding elected officials accountable. When worked on the Hill, power was information. I've led caucuses at the city council, power was maintaining a voting block which is, which is its own exercise. And so my own understanding of power has evolved, as I, you know, been exposed to in different ways within our social processes, our policy systems, but it's so such a fundamental question, and I think that so many of us, you know, sometimes don't, don't challenge ourselves by thinking deeply with it. And you know, challenging folks within our circles, and most importantly, folks who do not feel engaged in the system. Because through that exercise, I have found that what you understand as power is only one aspect of it, and my work as an organizer is always to expand it, to always build the bigger we is my role primarily as an organizer, and I'm challenging folks to shift thinking that power is something that, but it does, and it has, and it will but it can only do that through our collective movement in our engagement, by bringing folks along with us and meeting them where they are along with us, because collective power building is the only way that we can win. And again, that begins with our conversations with ourselves, conversations with our families, and conversations as we move forward and reimagining a democracy and finally, having a government that works for with and by the people is how we win. Awesome. Thank you.

**Celina Stewart** 42:44

All right, y'all. We got questions from the audience and online. I

42:47

did not prep you all for these. We're gonna

**Celina Stewart** 42:51

Go through them. Okay, first question The Electoral College was created to appease the slaveholder. Considering the growth in minority voters, How do we deal with the old man

43:02

power loss fear? How

43:07

can we deal with the old man power loss? Fear? Power.

43:14

They're losing their power.

**Celina Stewart** 43:17

The fear of losing power.

**Carolyn Dupont** 43:37

I don't like to say that the Electoral College was created because of slavery. I think that's slightly inaccurate and in history, accuracy is not a virtue, it is an obligation. And so the presence of slavery helped determine the shape of the electoral college. But it's not why they chose an electoral college. And if you want to learn more about that, you can pre order Distorting Democracy on amazon.com okay, but I mean, it's clearly a fear, and I'm sorry, I just jumped right into this question to answer this question, but I think it is clearly a Fear of losing power. But let me ask a question. Do you know, who knows, from which state Donald Trump got more votes than any other in the United which gave him the most votes? California. There are 6 million Republicans in California who were unrepresented in the electoral college. And so I think that to say and help people understand is that this, abolishing the Electoral College is good for everyone. And yes, we would have a better Republican party today if we had no Electoral College, because they would have been forced to respond to the whole theory of democratic accountability, and they've not been forced to do that. And I think it's also important for us -- and we'd have a better Democratic party too. And I'm all for systems that make our parties better -- but I think another thing that we need to appreciate and understand is that seven times an amendment to alter or abolish the Electoral College has passed one house of Congress or the other, and they've always been bipartisan and the biggest champions of abolishing the electoral college during Reconstruction were Republican, and you know, it's become a partisan issue, but that is only since 2016, and you can actually look at the polling on the Electoral College, since 1944 it's been well over 60% of Americans wanted to do away with it, and then it's climbed up into the 80s and the only time it's dropped below 50% was just briefly after 2016 election. And then this narrative began to be put out, though this was something

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that the founders created, you know, so that occasionally the minority could win. That's baloney. Ordered the book, but that's what we want to emphasize, is that this has always been a bipartisan

**Carolyn Dupont** 46:39

impulse, and it's good for all of us.

**Celina Stewart** 46:42

I just want to make a note the views of the panelists are individual views, the League is a nonpartisan,

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that does not support or endorse any candidate.

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just want to make sure put that out there.

**Celina Stewart** 46:59

anybody else. If not. I have another. I live in a rural area of Colorado, and many in the rural area feel that the Electoral College offers them greater representation over popular or populated urban cities. How do I explain that their vote may not be as potent with the Electoral College?

**Carolyn Dupont** 47:28

That rural voters votes are not as electoral college? It's not rural versus urban. We're being told that it's rural versus urban, but it is not. And if you want statistics, by the way, when people say that, ask them for some data because they make these assertions with no data. If you want some data, look at Texas, which has what, five large cities, and they're still red. So it's not because the cities are overpowering.

**Celina Stewart** 48:07

But I think there's also a broader point here, I feel so often because voting is so personal. We all go the ballot box, we all cast our ballot, but it's really about the collective, the impact that we have as a collective. And so if we're only thinking about our vote, what we're doing, the impact that it has on the democracy that we live in the people around this person that are available, who has access to those things, that I think we miss part of the point. We have to get. out of the mentality, because we're always pitting ourselves against something, urban versus suburban as a party, versus party. This is about saving our democracy. Period. another question, how do we muster enough popular support to amend the Constitution and reform the electoral system? Na'ilah?

**Na'ilah Amaru** 49:07

organize? I think that sometimes organizing, structural reform, dismantling the Electoral College, is such like a big vision. But we've achieved big, big visions in our history. But again, it begins with the local enlightenment of education, awareness, those conversations, meeting people where they are, one of I learned a lot of lessons working for the late congressman. But it's never lost on me on how unfortunately these fights can be generational. I worked with him years and years and years ago, not that long ago, though, many, many moons ago, but not that many moons ago, and I'm still fighting for the same issues that he fought for different landscape, different political actors, but the same fundamental fight. But I'm not discouraged, because the starting point of my fight where I picked up that torch from him, he brought me a lot further in that Battlefield than I ever would have had I started without the efforts that he started generations ago. And this work in organizing can be very exhausting for those of us who do it full time. Yes, very exhausting, and it's also very inspiring. I'm always so moved and inspired by the people who do this work every day. I have the honor of sharing my platform in the ways that I can and when I can, but the wins that I've won that I started, never thinking that I would, but knowing that eventually, that we would cross that finish line happened in the timeframe they did, not because of anything that I did as an individual, not because I had any, you know, particular special type of knowledge. Collectively, we did a lot of things together, and that's how we won. And so I think again, it sounds so difficult and so far away. This is, you know, the fight for generations, but that fight is today. It's already begun, but we just have to do, I'm a woman of faith. Run our race, complete our assignment, and eventually we will win the race. We will dismantle the electoral college.

**Keesha Gaskins-Nathan 51:55**

So as someone who's been working on structural democracy issues for decades, will be kind to me and that mentioned how, many structural democracy issues are definitively unsexy. I can tell you that when we talk about how do we get people excited about. I have never had anybody rally for redistricting, it doesn't happen. There's a reality out there that I think, but it is a generational fight. I remember talking to the late and Jerry coming to me and saying "Keesha, I knew we'd be in this fight for decades, but I didn't know it would be the same fights." But I think it's been very important not to be despondent, but to say this is a continuing fight, first second that we do win, right? We do see redistricting reform show up. We do actually see, you know, New York, very machine state now has the largest campaign finance, public campaign finance system in the country, right? These things happen, right? And so as we think about what that means, it means these fights can be won. And certainly, the idea of amending the Constitution is it's a huge lift. But the notion of saying what that means, how these things continue to be connected, how we continue to get them together, I think feels very essential and important to me. Can I go back to the slavery question? I think one of the challenges I have, and whether or not the Electoral College, and because I am not the expert, and I didn't write the book, I am not going to challenge the writer of the book. What I am going to suggest, however, is that there is not a single democratic system or structure that was designed when this country was founded, that was not designed to shape and support the institution of slavery. And that means, as we think about these questions of structural racism and patriarchal norms that we know when we the people didn't mean black people, when we knew that all men are

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created equal expressly

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did not leave out women by chance, we knew

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women are not created equal, and 1920 may have been when white women showed up to the polls, but that is not when Native American women shut the polls, and is not women of color said before we have to recognize that these structural that show up for us are meaningful because of the way we experience them as people and as a country. And the evolution of these questions doesn't mean abandoning or even misstating history. I think we see the damage that

**Keesha Gaskins-Nathan 54:49**

happens. We see the damage that happens when we misstate say originalism, that how these things show up in really dangerous ways. But at the end of the day, the ability to say and see who we are, to understand the structures were designed for a small, agrarian, homogeneous country are not going to be the same ones that serve a large, diverse country with a financialized economic system that we want to see meaningful equity for everybody to show up, it is gonna have to change. And you know, it's hard for all of us, maybe harder for white guys, and it is difficult to think about what these changes mean for each and every one of us but the ability to say when we all do better, indeed, we all do better. And so while I do honor and respect the distinction that if, if you feel your power flows directly from your



whiteness, you feel a loss that is a legitimate loss. It is objectively harder to be a white guy and act with impunity today than it was 50 years ago. But as far as I'm concerned, it's not hard enough. And that's not to say we want people to feel harmed, but the fact is, we want people to show up. We don't want power to be unequally distributed. We want the ability for people to be hurt. We want that we understand that when you hold something, it always feels like a loss. I get that i You were too, if you had any siblings you knew, like, you know, that's why mom said you cut it and you pick first, right. Like, everyone became, like, you know,

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mathematicians trying to get the perfect half, right.

**Keesha Gaskins-Nathan** 56:54

We know what that means, and we understand what that means. But the fact is, our country has changed, is changing, is going to continue to change. And how power has been held historically is going to going to have to change. And if anyone feels entitled to power simply by virtue of who they were, where they were born, this is not their America anymore.

**Celina Stewart** 57:22

You I'm gonna look for my boss, who I think is gonna tell me we're done, right? Okay, we're good, okay? I just want to thank our panelists. Thank you so much to Na'ilah, Carolyn and Keesha.

57:37

for joining us this evening.