

Electoral College overview

Directions: Read the following passage and answer the questions that follow.

On the first Tuesday in November every four years, the Presidential election is held throughout the United States. Unbeknownst to most Americans, the total number of votes each candidate receives from the millions of American voters (called the POPULAR VOTE) will NOT determine the winner. Instead, the winner will be determined by a group of people that make up something called the Electoral College.

The Electoral College was created to make the Presidential Election an indirect election and is a part of the Constitution, specifically Article II (section 1, clauses 2-4) as well as the 12th and 23rd amendments. Each State is allocated (given) a number of electors equal to the number of its U.S. Senators (always 2) plus the number of its U.S. Representatives (which depends of the population of the state). There are a total of 538 Electoral College members. Each elector has one vote. In order to win the election, a candidate must receive a majority of the total Electoral College votes. Today, this means a candidate must receive at least 270 Electoral College votes in order to be elected President of the United States. This system is an example of checks and balances within the election process.

In 48 of the 50 states (Nebraska and Maine are the exceptions), the Electoral College votes are winner-take-all, meaning the candidate that receives the majority of popular votes in a given state receives ALL of that states Electoral College votes. For example, if Mitt Romney receives 1,000,000 votes and Barack Obama receives 999,999 votes in Nevada – one less vote - all six of Nevada's Electoral College votes would go to Mitt Romney. In this winner- take-all format, a candidate can actually receive MORE popular votes nationwide than his or her opponent and actually LOSE the election. While most times this does not happen it has occurred four times in our nation's history, most recently during the 2000 election.

If none of the candidates receive 270 Electoral College votes, the House of Representatives choose the President out of the three candidates with the most Electoral College Votes. Each state is given ONE vote in this scenario. Details of how this process is carried out are outlined in Amendment XII of the Constitution, which was added in 1804.

Questions (Write neatly and use complete sentences.)

1. Describe the POPULAR VOTE in your own words.
2. Where, **PRECISELY**, would one find the guidelines and rules for the *Electoral College* and the process of how the president and vice president are officially chosen?
3. In your reading, CIRCLE the TOTAL number of *Electoral College* members. UNDERLINE how this number is determined or allocated. Put a BOX around the number a *candidate* needs in order to win the Presidential Election.

4. Texas has 38 *Electoral College* votes, while Michigan has 16. Explain what these numbers tell you about these two states? Explain your answer using specific facts from the reading.
5. What is the significance of 270 electoral votes (why is the “magic number” not 230 or 200 or 384)?
6. Explain how a *candidate* wins all the electoral votes for a state under this system (except in Maine and Nebraska).
7. In the election of 1824, there were 261 votes in the *Electoral College*. How many votes were necessary to become president?

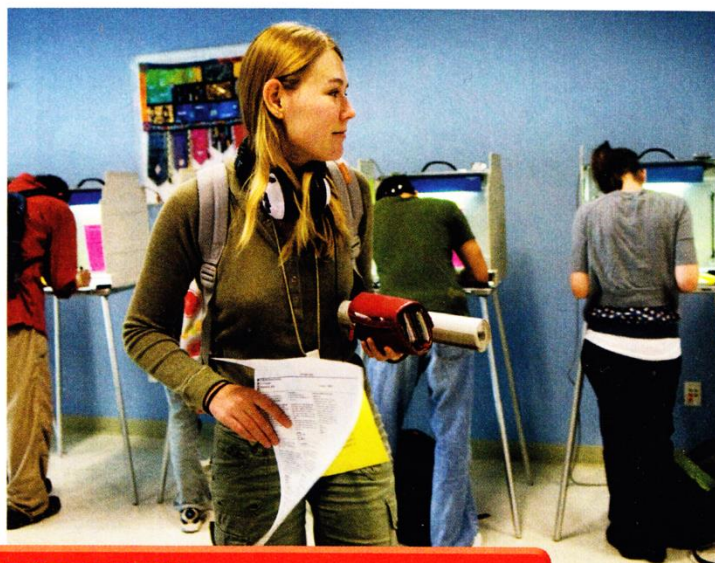
Andrew Jackson received electoral 99 votes. John Quincy Adams got 84. William Crawford garnered 41 votes and Henry Clay 37. Since none of these candidates had a *majority* of the electoral votes, circle the candidates who were NOT eliminated from consideration and explain why they were involved in a runoff election.

Explain who ultimately decided the winner of the Presidential election of 1824?

Which *candidate* won the Presidential election of 1824?

Should We Elect the President by Popular Vote?

After hundreds of attempts to abolish the Electoral College, opponents are promoting a plan to work around it



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YES With the Electoral College, voters in two thirds of states are effectively disenfranchised from choosing the president because they don't live in a handful of battleground states.

Presidential candidates now have no reason to pay attention to states in which they are comfortably ahead or hopelessly behind. In 2008, candidates concentrated 98 percent of their time and money in just 15 states.

Another shortcoming of the Electoral College is that a candidate can win the presidency without winning the most votes nationwide. In fact, the second-place candidate was elected in 2000 (when George W. Bush lost the popular vote to Al Gore), 1888, 1876, and 1824. And in 2004, a shift of 60,000 votes in Ohio would

have given John Kerry a majority of the electoral votes, despite President Bush's 3.5-million-vote lead in the nationwide popular vote.

The National Popular Vote plan—which is based on the fact that the Constitution lets each state decide how to award its electoral votes—would solve these problems: It calls for states to award all their electoral votes to the candidate who gets the most votes nationally.

The plan has been passed by eight states (California, Hawaii, Washington, Illinois, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Jersey, and Maryland) and Washington, D.C., and is being considered by the remainder of the states. It would take effect when it is approved by states representing a majority (270) of the 538 electoral votes.

More than 70 percent of Americans say they favor popular election of the president. It's time to make sure every vote in every state matters. ●

—JOHN R. KOZA

Chairman, National Popular Vote

NO The Electoral College was a key part of the compromise between large and small states at the Constitutional Convention of 1787, and it has served America well for more than 200 years.

There have been more than 700 attempts to amend the Constitution to abolish the Electoral College; all have failed. The latest scheme is the National Popular Vote plan, which would circumvent the Electoral College, rather than abolish it. States would enter a compact promising all their electoral votes to the candidate who wins the popular vote nationally.

Under this plan, as few as 11 of the biggest states, which represent more than 270 electoral votes, could ignore the electoral votes of the remaining 39 states.

That's not what the Founding Fathers had in mind. They wanted to ensure that support for a president was broad as well as deep, so that a candidate who received 90 percent of the vote in one region and a slim majority of votes nationally would not be elected against the will of the rest of the country.

Minorities should also be alarmed by the National Popular Vote proposal. With the Electoral College system, blacks and Hispanics represent key voting blocs in a number of states. If we abolish the Electoral College, instead of being crucial to victory in several key states, black voters, for example, simply become 10 percent of the electorate, with less impact.

We cannot change one component of our federalist form of government without considering the others. The Founding Fathers had great wisdom, and the system they created should not be undermined. ●

—ROBERT HARDAWAY

Author, *The Electoral College and the Constitution*

The Founding Fathers wanted to ensure that support for a president was broad as well as deep.

In 2008, candidates spent 98 percent of their time and money in just 15 states.

8. Explain how the *Electoral College* system is an example of the principle of *checks and balances*. Who is being “checked” in this particular process? Do you believe this is necessary? Explain.
9. Do you think the *Electoral College* is a necessary system? Support your opinion with evidence and FACTS from the reading!