



Elections in America

Popular Elections and the Electoral College

Elections are the preferred method of governmental change here in the United States. The election process allows, for the most part, peaceful leadership change. Elections enable citizens to influence the actions of their government because elected officials always have to keep in mind that they may not be reelected. Societies that cannot vote their leaders out of office are left with only two options: do nothing or devise a plot for a violent overthrow of their government! Our election process is not without its problems. Campaigns often tend to appear harsh, especially during very close elections when negative ads are the most prominent. The amount of money that is required to run a campaign can be prohibitive for those candidates who do not have access to a large fundraising network. And, since both parties concentrate their campaigning efforts on the moderate voters, we rarely see big political or economic reform. But, the system does ensure that government is accountable to the people it serves and it allows for the peaceful transition of power.

There are two types of elections here in The United States:

Popular Elections

We elect our governor and our representatives (both state and national) through popular elections. This means that each vote is counted and the candidate who wins the most votes wins the election.

The Electoral College

The Constitution does not provide for popular elections of the president. Instead, it set up an indirect method of election called the Electoral College. Each state has as many electoral votes as the total of its U.S. senators and representatives. Each state counts up the number of popular votes. The candidate with the majority of votes in that state receives all of that state's electoral votes. This is called a "winner take all" system. Even though the winner of the election is usually announced the evening of the election, the electors do not formally place their votes until December.

How the Electoral College Works

Step 1:

The **electorate** (the voters) cast ballots for their choice for President of the United States



Step 2:

These popular votes are tallied in each state and the candidate who wins a majority of the popular vote in that state receives **ALL** of the **electoral votes** for that state.

A state's electoral vote is equal to the number of representatives and senators in that state.



Step 3:

The electoral votes are tallied.

It is possible for a candidate to win the popular vote but lose the electoral vote. This has happened in three elections (1876, 1888, and 2000). **The candidate with the majority of the electoral votes wins the election**

If no candidate wins a clear majority of the electoral votes, the election is decided by the **U.S. House of Representatives**. In this situation, each state has **ONE** vote. This has happened in the elections of 1800 and 1824.

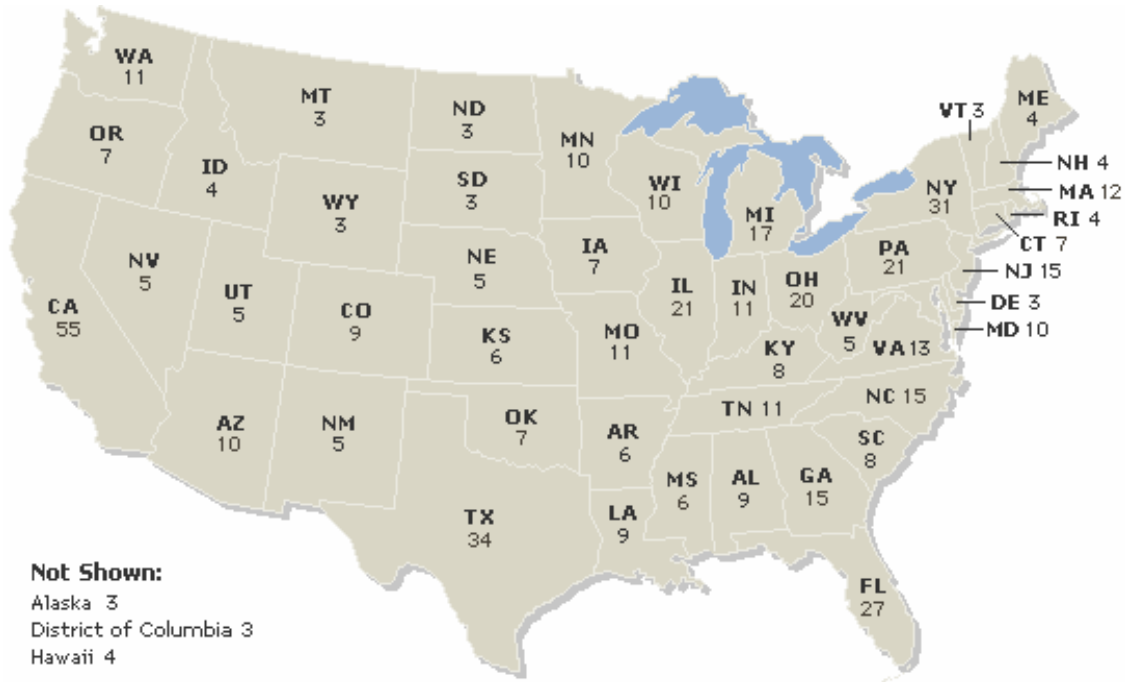


Step 4:

The candidate who receives the majority of the electoral votes nationally **or** who is voted president in the House becomes the next official President of the United States.

The Electoral College Homework Questions

Using the map below, answer the following questions in the spaces provided. The number inside each state represents the number of electoral votes each state has.



1. How many possible electoral votes are there? _____
2. How many electoral votes does a candidate need in order to win a presidential election? _____
 Name the three states with the greatest number of electoral votes.

3. Name the three states with the least number of electoral votes.

4. What is the fewest number of states necessary to win an election?

5. How many senators does Virginia have? _____
6. How many members of the House of Representatives does Virginia have? _____
7. How many electoral votes does Virginia have? _____
8. How many electoral votes does D.C. have? _____ Why is this strange?

9. If you were a campaign manager, where would you advise your candidate to go- California, or Virginia? Why?

10. When do you think that the smaller states become important during an election?
