

# The Electoral College – How we Elect the President

Members of the Constitutional Convention explored several possible methods of choosing a President:

1. have the Congress choose the President;
2. have the State Legislatures select the President;
3. elect the President by a direct popular vote.

The prevailing suggestion was to have a College of Electors select a President through an indirect election.

## The Electoral College Today

- Each state is allocated a number of Electors equal to the number of its U.S. Representatives plus its two senators (in CA the total electoral votes is 55 – 2 Senators and 53 members of the House of Representatives).
- The political parties of each state submit a list of individuals pledged to their candidates for President (that is equal to the number of electoral votes for the state) to the State's chief election official (in CA it is the Secretary of State). Each party determines its own way of choosing its electors.
- Members of Congress and employees of the Federal government are prohibited from serving as Electors.
- After the parties hold their caucuses and the states hold their primaries, the major parties nominate their candidate for the Office of President. The names are then submitted to the state's chief election official (in CA, the Secretary of State) as they will appear on the general election ballot.
- On November 8, 2016, registered voters in each state cast their ballots for the Office of President and Vice President.
- Whichever presidential candidate gets the most popular votes in a State wins all of the Electors for that state except for the states of Maine and Nebraska which award electoral votes proportionately.
- On Monday, December 19, 2016, each state's electors meet in their respective state and cast their electoral votes (one for President and one for Vice President).
- Each Elector must cast at least one of their two votes (see above) for a person outside of their state in order to prevent the election of a President and Vice President from the same state (however, the presidential and vice presidential candidates choose each other as running-mates and are on the same ticket in the popular vote).
- The electoral votes are sealed and sent to the President of the U.S. Senate and are read aloud to both Houses of Congress on January 6, 2017.
- The candidate with the most electoral votes – 270 or more – (over one half of the total vote of 538) is declared President.
- If no one candidate receives an absolute majority of electoral votes the U.S. House of Representatives selects the President from the top three vote-getters.
- On January 20, 2017, at noon, the elected President and Vice President are sworn into office.

**The Candidate With the Most Votes Does Not Always Win:** In the past 125 years, there have been three occasions when a presidential candidate won the popular vote, but lost the election: in 1876, Samuel J. Tilden won the popular vote, but Rutherford B. Hayes won the electoral vote, and, therefore, the election; and in 1888, Grover Cleveland won the popular vote, but Benjamin Harrison won the election. Most recently, in 2000, Al Gore won the popular vote, but George Bush was elected President.

### How many electoral votes does each state have?

AL: 9, AK: 3, AZ: 11, AR: 6, CA: 55, CO: 9, CT: 7, DE: 3, DC: 3, FL: 29, GA: 16, HI: 4, ID: 4, IL: 20, IN: 11, IA: 6, KS: 6, KY: 8, LA: 8, ME: 4, MD: 10, MA: 11, MI: 16, MN: 10, MS: 6, MO: 10, MT: 3, NE: 5, NV: 5, NH: 4, NJ: 14, NM: 5, NY: 29, NC: 15, ND: 3, OH: 18, OK: 7, OR: 7, PA: 20, RI: 4, SC: 9, SD: 3, TN: 11, TX: 38, UT: 6, VT: 3, VA: 13, WA: 12, WV: 5, WI: 10, WY: 3 **Total:** 538

For more information on the Electoral College, visit the National Archives and Record Administration website at <http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/>