

## Electoral College: Overview

### The U.S. Constitution on the Electoral College

#### *Art. II, Sec. 1, Cl. 2*

*Each State shall appoint, in such manner as the legislature thereof may direct, a number of Electors, equal to the whole number of Senators and Representatives, to which the state may be entitled in Congress . . .*

#### *12th Amendment*

*The Electors shall meet in their respective States, and vote by ballot for President and Vice President . . . the person having the greatest number of (electoral) votes for President, if such number be a majority of the whole number of Electors appointed.*

### How Electors Are Chosen

According to the Constitution, electors are to be chosen in each state “in such manner as the legislature thereof may direct.”

Most states provide for the popular election of electors. Some variations do exist. For instance:

In Florida and Colorado, the state legislatures choose electors.

In Maine and Nebraska, the “district plan” is used. Two electors are chosen from the state at large and one is chosen from each Congressional district.

### A Calendar of the Electoral College Process

November						
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

#### **Tuesday after the First Monday of November**

Voters cast ballots for all electors representing a particular party in each state.

December						
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

#### **Monday after the Second Wednesday in December**

Electors of party winning the popular vote in each state cast ballots for the president and vice president.

January						
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

#### **January 6th**

Ballots cast by the electors are counted by Congress.

#### **January 20th**

Candidate receiving majority of electoral votes becomes president.

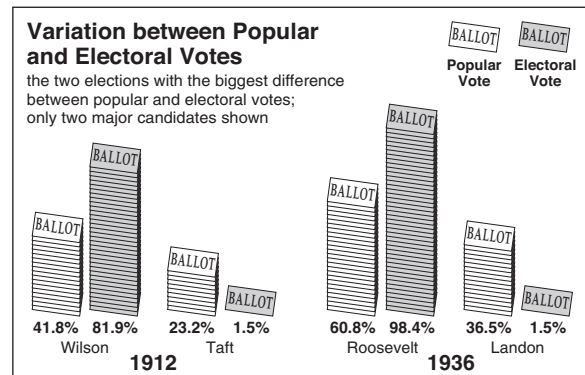
## Problems with the Electoral College System

**Problem 1** The winner of the popular vote may not necessarily win the presidency. This may be a result of:

The “winner take all” system, which gives the winner of the popular vote in each state all of that state’s electoral votes, even if the victory was by a slim margin.

Each state is guaranteed two electors because it has two Senate seats; however, this distribution of votes does not match the state’s population and voter distribution.

The law doesn’t require electors to vote for the candidate favored by the popular vote; therefore, electors may vote for someone other than their party’s candidate.



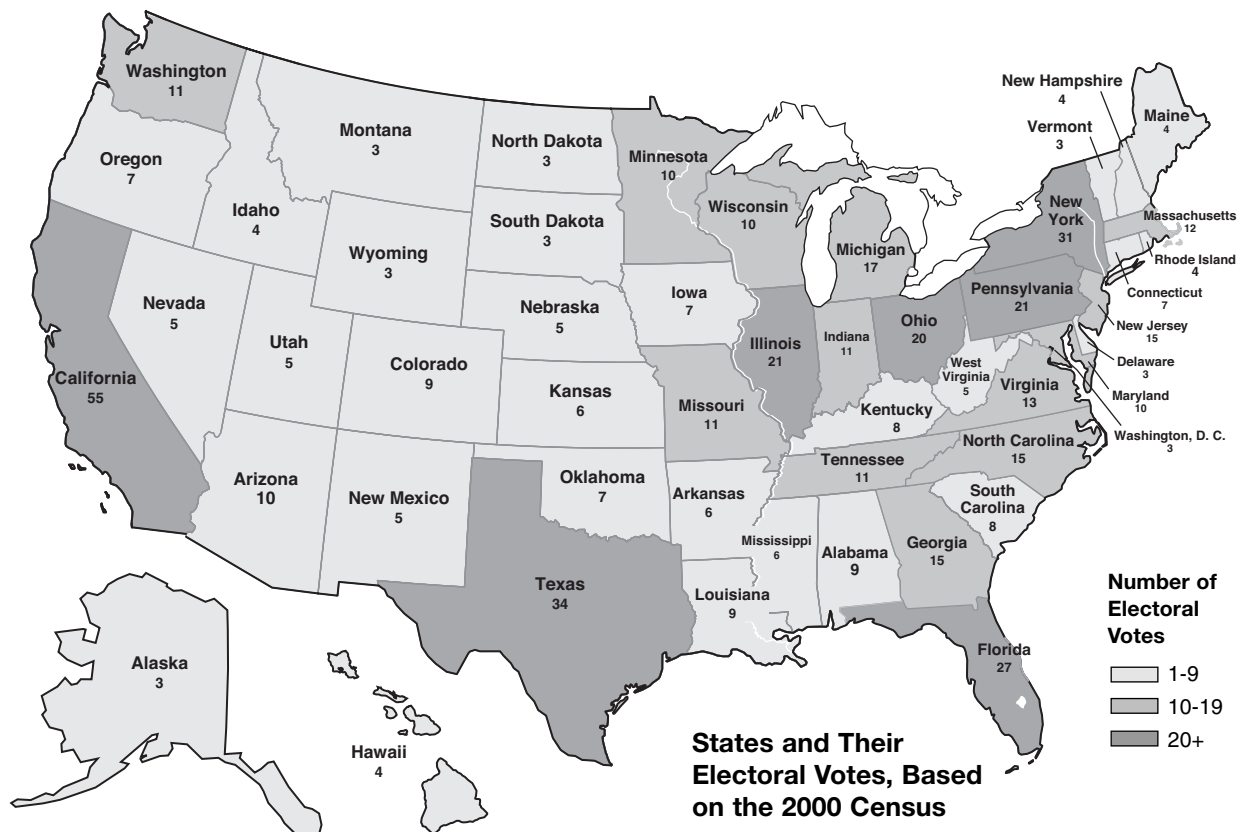
**Problem 2** It is possible that no one will receive the majority of electoral votes required to win the election. In this case, the House of Representatives must choose the president. This could present serious problems because:

The voting is by states and not by representatives; that is, each state’s representatives must decide unanimously on a candidate.

A state could lose a vote if its representatives can not reach consensus.

A majority of states must decide an election. This could be impossible if a strong third-party candidate was involved.

**Problem 3** The electoral college also forces presidential candidates to focus their campaigns on the “big ticket” states, that is, the most populous states with the most electoral votes. Look at the map and you’ll understand why so much attention is paid to states like California and Texas.



## Electoral College Case Study: 2000 Presidential Election

George W. Bush defeated Al Gore in the 2000 presidential race. Although Bush received 50,456,169 popular votes, 539,947 fewer than his Democratic opponent, he won in the electoral college (including Florida's disputed electoral votes,) and thus won the election, illustrating how winning the popular vote does not guarantee an election.

## 2000 Presidential Election Results, by State

in thousands

