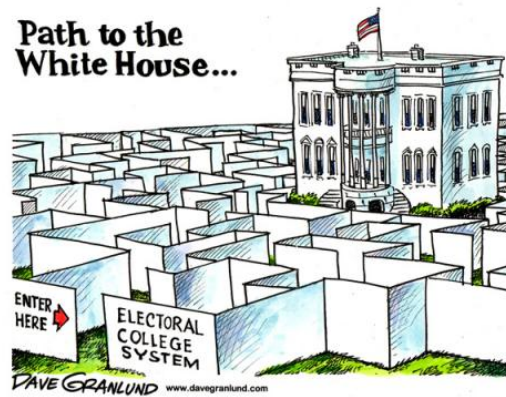




When Americans vote for their President, they are *actually* voting for people called "electors." Those electors then cast their ballots for President and Vice President.

Although millions of American citizens vote, it takes 270 elector votes to win the Presidential election. Sometimes the people give a candidate more votes, in the popular vote, than the candidate gets from the 270 electors.

A recent example of such a result—before the Election of 2016—is the Election of 2000. That year:

- For the "popular vote," the Gore/Lieberman team received 50,996,582 votes while the Bush/Cheney team received 50,456,062 votes.
- For the "electoral vote," the Gore/Lieberman ticket received 266 votes while the Bush/Cheney ticket received 271 votes.

It is the "elector vote" which matters the most in selecting America's President/Vice President, however, not the "popular vote." With fewer electoral votes, Gore/Lieberman lost to Bush/Cheney in 2000. The same thing happened in 2016, when Clinton/Kaine lost to Trump/Pence.

This seemingly weird system is called the Electoral College.

When we hear the word "college," we think of Oxford, Harvard and places of study. The Electoral College is not a place, however. It's a process.

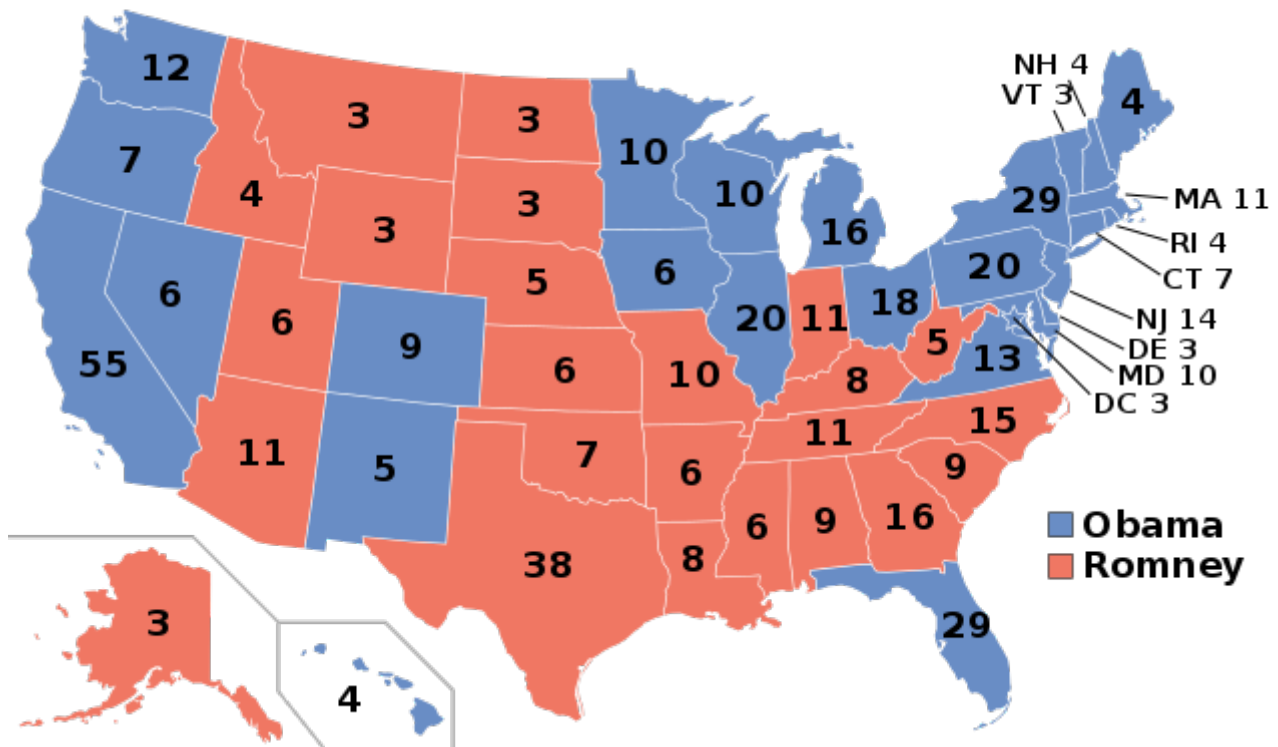
It all started when America's Founding Fathers wanted to give the people a role in choosing their President (instead of just having Congress make the choice). The Electoral College came into being as a result of the Founders compromising between the people selecting and Congress selecting the President.

Each American state has the same number of "electors" as it has members of Congress. If a state has 50 members of the House of Representatives and 2 Senators, totaling 52 members of Congress, that state also has 52 electors. The Electoral College has a total of 538 electors.

The Electoral-College process turns the voting for President into a winner-takes-all for every state except two (Maine and Nebraska). Even if the popular vote in any given state is *really* close, the result is still "winner takes all."

Here's an example of California's electoral vote in the Election of 2012. The "Certificate of Vote" shows us that every one of the 55 electoral votes for President was given to Barack Obama and every one of the 55 electoral votes for Vice President was given to Joe Biden.

We can also view this in map format for the 2012 election:



Are the electors, for every state, *required* to cast their ballots for the majority winner in that state? In other words ... if the majority of citizens in a state have selected one presidential candidate, do the electors *have* to vote for that same candidate?

The answer is two-fold. America's Constitution does *not* require the electors to vote for the majority candidate - but - they usually do.

We learn, from the U.S. National Archives, that throughout America's history, Electoral-College members have voted the way the people voted 99% of the time:

*There is no Constitutional provision or Federal law that requires Electors to vote according to the results of the popular vote in their states. Some states, however, require Electors to cast their votes according to the popular vote. These pledges fall into two categories—Electors bound by state law and those bound by pledges to political parties.*

*The U.S. Supreme Court has held that the Constitution does not require that Electors be completely free to act as they choose and therefore, political parties may extract pledges from electors to vote for the parties' nominees. Some state laws provide that so-called "faithless Electors" may be subject to fines or may be disqualified for casting an invalid vote and be replaced by a substitute elector.*

*The Supreme Court has not specifically ruled on the question of whether pledges and penalties for failure to vote as pledged may be enforced under the Constitution. No Elector has ever been prosecuted for failing to vote as pledged.*

*Today, it is rare for Electors to disregard the popular vote by casting their electoral vote for someone other than their party's candidate. Electors generally hold a leadership position in their party or were chosen to recognize years of loyal service to the party. Throughout our history as a nation, more than 99 percent of Electors have voted as pledged. (See "[Are There Restrictions on Who the Electors Can Vote For?](#)"—a subsection of "[What Is the Electoral College?](#)")*

Many people think that the Electoral College is "flawed" and ought to be abandoned. They ask: "If this country is a democracy, after all, why not let the popular vote decide national elections?" (That question itself is flawed, however, because America is a Constitutional Republic, not a pure democracy—and there's a big difference between the two forms of government.)

Others argue that the Electoral College system has worked pretty well, for hundreds of years, so why make changes now? (The corollary, to that approach, is the benefit of allowing a balance of voting throughout the country—in favor of all the individual states—instead of allowing the "big population centers" to control the outcome—in favor of the largest American cities.)

# Road to the white house

How to become president of the U.S.

## 1 Announce your candidacy

### ★ Who can run for president?

Anyone who meets the criteria:



### ★ Campaign to win the party's leadership

Is it a primary or a caucus?

This is the selection process that Democrats and Republicans use to choose their nominee for president of the U.S.

! All the primaries and caucuses we've been watching this year have been Republican. Democratic Barack Obama has no threatening challengers.



#### Primary

Usually set up like a general election

- Voters are given ballots; make their selection behind a closed voting booth.
- Takes only a few minutes.



#### Caucus

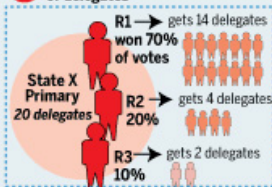
- Like a town meeting
- Involves discussion/debate among voters. Party members try to sway the voting decision.
- This process can last a few hours.

### ★ Win lots of delegates

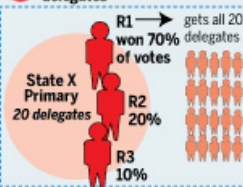
Delegates are the people you will be taking to the national convention. They will vote for you there.

Delegates can be awarded in one of two ways, depending on the party and the state.

#### A Winners get a proportion of delegates



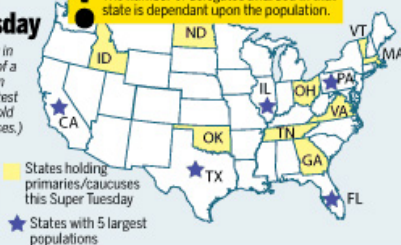
#### B Winners take all delegates



### ★ Win big on Super Tuesday

(That's the Tuesday in February or March of a presidential election year when the greatest number of states hold primaries or caucuses.)

! Every state holds a primary or caucus. The number of delegates awarded in that state is dependant upon the population.



## 2 Go to the national convention

After all the primaries and caucuses are done, everyone heads to their national convention to choose the party's presidential candidate.

- Delegates vote, state-by-state, for the candidate of their choice. The first candidate to receive a preset majority number of delegate votes becomes the party's presidential candidate.



Winner: R1 wins the party nomination

### ★ Pick your partner

Your running mate (the vice presidential candidate) should be strong in any areas where you are lacking.



## 3 Campaign to become president



### ★ On election day

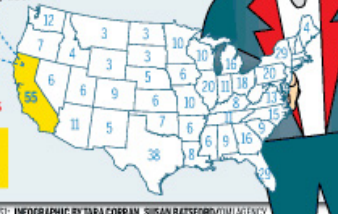
- Always held on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November.
- Eligible U.S. citizens go to a polling station and cast their vote for the candidate they want to become president.
- Each state counts the votes and the winner will receive the number of electoral votes allocated for that state.

### ★ Get a majority of electoral votes

Each state has a number of electors equal to the number of its U.S. senators plus the number of its U.S. representatives. There are 538 electoral votes up for grabs.



! A candidate must receive an absolute majority of electoral votes (currently 270) to win the presidency.



SUSAN BATSFORD, GRAPHICS EDITOR, TWITTER @SBATSFORD; INFOGRAPHIC BY TARA CORRAN, SUSAN BATSFORD/UMI AGENCY

What do you think? Should America keep the Electoral College or should the country abandon it? If you were running for President, would you be better-off with the Electoral College or without it?

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/What-Is-the-Electoral-College->

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/What-Is-the-Electoral-College->