

THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE: HOW IT WORKS AND DO WE NEED IT?

LESSON PLAN

Objectives

- Students will be able to describe how the Electoral College works.
- Students will be able to explain the advantages and disadvantages of the Electoral College.
- Students will be able to participate in debate/discussion on the Electoral College and popular vote.

Materials:

ARTICLE: *How Does the Electoral College Work?* [describes](#) how the system operates, plus its advantages and disadvantages.

VIDEO: *Why the Electoral College is So Important* – a [video](#) discussing three reasons the U.S. uses the Electoral College system. Related worksheets include:

- a) Debate [information sheet](#) describing three arguments for the Electoral College and three against it.
- b) Video [comprehension quiz](#).
- c) Video [discussion questions](#).

Suggested Procedure:

1. Elicit students' prior knowledge about the Electoral College & informally discuss any impressions they may have.
2. Present the article [How Does the Electoral College Work?](#) This may be read from the internet or printed so that students can read a copy individually or in groups.
3. Ask students to brainstorm possible negative and positive traits of the Electoral College. Students may write their ideas on the attached brainstorm worksheet. Repeat the process for the popular vote. Have them report their answers.
4. Ask why students think the Founding Fathers instituted this system.
5. Show video [Why the Electoral College is So Important](#).
Suggested places to stop and ask questions:
 - 0:50 – Who elects the president of the United States?

Liberty Nation GenZ

- 1:00 – How many electors does each state have?
 - 1:05 – How many electoral votes are there in total, and how many does a candidate need to win to become president?
 - 1:41 – Discuss James Madison quote.
 - 1:50 – Which states have the largest populations?
 - 2:36 – Discuss Edmund Burke quote.
 - 3:05 – How does the Electoral College deal with the tyranny of the majority?
 - 3:27 – Discuss Thomas Jefferson quote.
 - 4:47 – Where is the Electoral College enshrined?
6. Hand out debate [information sheet](#) and allow students to read individually or as a group.
 7. Have students complete the [comprehension quiz](#).
 8. Have students complete the [discussion worksheet](#) individually or in groups.

Extension: Research Project. Highlight historical controversies where the Electoral College has conflicted with the popular vote. Students may choose one incident and write a report of what happened, how the episode was resolved, and the societal consequences.

Students may choose from the following elections:

- 1824: John Quincy Adams vs. Andrew Jackson
- 1876: Rutherford B. Hayes vs. Samuel J. Tilden
- 1888: Benjamin Harrison vs. Grover Cleveland
- 2000: George W. Bush vs. Al Gore
- 2016: Donald Trump vs. Hillary Clinton

Extension: Research project. Students choose a Democratic country to research and write a description of its key electoral system. Student can then compare the two systems, making note of the similarities and differences between the two countries.

THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>

THE POPULAR VOTE

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>



Why the Electoral College is Important

Every four years, the United States has an election to pick a new president. While people do vote in a general election, the president is picked by a group called the Electoral College. There are 538 people, called electors, in the Electoral College. That's one for every Representative and Senator in each state. A presidential candidate needs at least 270 electoral votes to win. When you vote for president, you are picking electors who will vote for your candidate later.

*In the video "Why the Electoral College is Important," you heard **three reasons** to support the Electoral College. These were:*

1. It protects smaller states: The Electoral College was created to give each state a voice in choosing who leads the federal government. This ensures that states with smaller populations are able to contribute to presidential elections. The political influence and rights of the people living in small states are therefore protected.

2. It fights tyranny: The Electoral College prevents tyranny over people who are in the minority. The majority of an electorate places its own interests above those in the minority. The Electoral College prevents the tyranny of the majority by ensuring that every state has a say in choosing the president.

3. It assures multi-party rule: This system benefits candidates who seek broad-based support. It increases consensus and reduces political turmoil. While imperfect, the Electoral College helps to assure that one-party rule does not occur in the US.

*The Electoral College is a controversial aspect of the US electoral system. Now, let's look at **three reasons** against using the Electoral College:*

1. May not represent the majority: The most common argument against the Electoral College is that it may not reflect the will of the American people. Under this system it is possible to elect a minority president – that is, one who does not receive the majority of votes from the public.

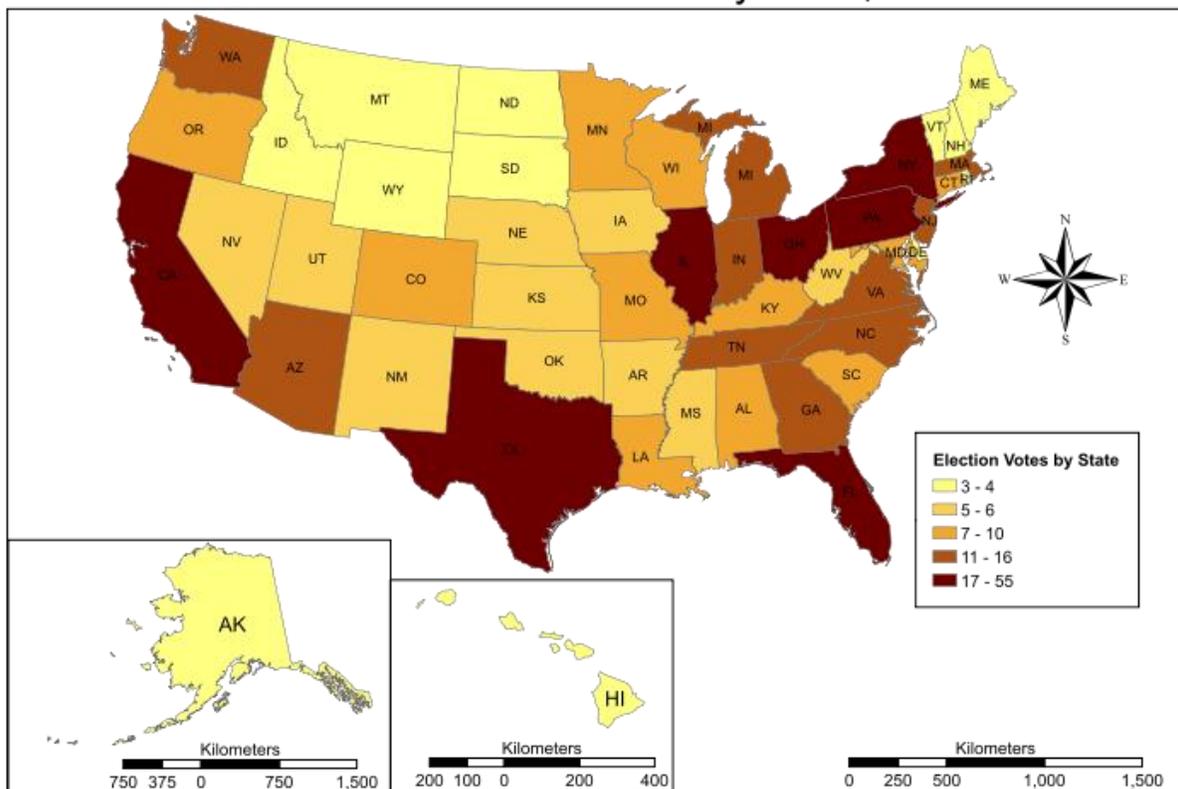


Some say a national popular vote would be a democratic method of deciding who wins the Oval Office. This would involve each individual vote counting toward the election, with the winner being the candidate who receives the most votes. It is argued that this process would better represent the true will of the American voters.

2. Limits choices: Most presidential candidates belong to either the Republican or Democratic Parties. Some voters may wish to support alternative parties like the Libertarians or the Greens, but these smaller parties are unlikely to win any Electoral College votes. This is because the most popular party in each state usually takes all the electoral votes for that state. In this way, the Electoral College system supports the two major parties and quashes other choices.

3. Discourages voter turnout: Some argue the Electoral College discourages people from voting because the state gets the same number of electoral votes, no matter how many individuals turn up at the polls.

Presidential Election Votes by State, 2012



Geographer Name: Anderson Santo
Data of Map Creation: 03/26/2012
Source of the Data: Wikipedia Website, 2012
Projection: USA Contiguous Lambert Conformal Conic for Continental USA, Alaska Albers Equal Area Conic for Alaska, Hawaii Albers Equal Area Conic for Hawaii.
Standard Parallels: 33 N and 45 N for Continental USA, 55 N and 65 N for Alaska, 08 N and 18 N for Hawaii
Central Meridian: 96 W for Continental USA, 154 W for Alaska and 157 W for Hawaii.

Why the Electoral College is Important

Test Your Knowledge: Answer the questions based on the video and information sheet, "Why the Electoral College is Important."

1. Which document enshrines the Electoral College into US law?

- a) The Declaration of Independence
- b) The Constitution
- c) The Bill of Rights

2. How many electors are in the Electoral College?

- a) 538
- b) 270
- c) 50

3. The Electoral College is used to elect...

- a) The President
- b) Members of Congress
- c) Governors

4. Every state has the same number of electors.

True / False

5. A candidate needs at least 270 electoral votes to win the presidency.

True / False

6. What are three reasons to use the Electoral College system?

7. What are three reasons against using the Electoral College system?



Why the Electoral College is Important

Discussion: Answer the questions based on the video and information sheet, "Why the Electoral College is Important." What is your opinion on the Electoral College?

1. Why do you think the Founding Fathers instituted the Electoral College system?

2. Does the Electoral College limit or promote democracy?



3. The main criticism of the Electoral College is that it discounts the popular vote. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the popular vote?

4. The Electoral College issue is often framed in terms of states' rights. What is more important – the rights of each state, or the vote of the each individual?

5. Imagine you are in charge of electoral policy. What is your vision for how a presidential election should work?
