

United States Electoral College

What is the Electoral College?

The Electoral College was established by the framers of the U.S. Constitution to elect the president. The Electoral College represents a compromise between the election of the president by Congress and the election of the president by a popular vote of qualified citizens.

The Electoral College is a process, not a place or college. The process begins with the selection of electors. The electors then meet to vote for president and vice president. Finally, members of the U.S. House of Representatives and of the U.S. Senate meet before a joint session of Congress to count the electoral votes.

A total of 538 electors nationwide vote on the president and vice president. A candidate must win 270 of the 538 total electoral votes to become president. If none of the candidates win the majority of electoral votes or if there is a deadlock, a “contingent election” is held. The House of Representatives elects the president and the Senate elects the vice president. Each state delegation casts one vote for one of the top three contenders to determine the winner.

Each presidential ticket includes a list of electors that have pledged to vote for the nominees of their party. When voters of a state vote for president and vice president, they are also selecting the electors that will represent their state in the Electoral College.

The number of electors allocated to each state is based on the state’s congressional delegation: one elector for each representative in the House of Representatives and one elector for each senator in the Senate. Because Washington state has 10 representatives in the House of Representatives and two senators in the Senate, Washington has 12 electors in the Electoral College.

Forty-eight states, including Washington, use a “winner-take-all” system; the presidential ticket that receives the most votes in the state is entitled to all of Washington’s electoral votes. For example, if the Democratic nominees for president and vice president receive the most votes in Washington’s 2016 General Election, then the 12 Democratic electors will go to Olympia to vote for the Democratic nominees at the meeting of the electors in December of the election year. Likewise, if the Republican nominees for president and vice president receive the most votes in Washington’s 2016 General Election, then the 12 Republican electors will go to Olympia to vote for the Republican nominees at the meeting of the electors in December of the election year. The meeting for 2016 will take place on December 19.

The electoral vote is recorded on a “Certificate of Vote” that is prepared at the meeting by the electors. Washington’s Certificate of Vote is sent to Congress and the National Archives and

Records Administration to become part of the official records of the presidential election. Each state's electoral votes are counted in a joint session of Congress on January 6 in the year following the meeting of the electors. Members of the House of Representatives and of the Senate conduct the official tally of electoral votes.

The vice president, as president of the Senate, presides over the count and then declares which candidates have been elected president and vice president of the U.S.

The president-elect takes the oath of office and is sworn in as president on January 20 in the year following the General Election.

What are the qualifications to be an elector?

Article II, Section 1, clause 2 of the Constitution states that "no Senator or Representative, or Person holding an Office of Trust or Profit under the United States, shall be appointed an Elector."

A state's certification of its electors is sufficient proof that the electors have meet the qualifications of their position.

Who selects the electors?

The process for selecting electors varies throughout the U.S. Typically, the political parties nominate electors at their state party convention or nominate electors by a vote of the central committee in each state.

The political parties generally select the electors through their caucuses and convention systems, which usually occur in the spring of the presidential year.

Electors are often chosen based on their service and dedication to their political party. They may be state-elected officials, party leaders or people who have a personal or political affiliation with a presidential candidate.

Why do we still have the Electoral College?

As the Electoral College process is part of the Constitution, it would be necessary to pass a constitutional amendment to change this system.

Hundreds of different proposals to change the presidential election process have been offered over the last 200 years, such as election by the people, but none have been passed by Congress and sent to the states for ratification as a constitutional amendment. Under the most common method for amending the Constitution, an amendment must be proposed by a two-thirds majority in both houses of Congress and ratified by three-fourths of the states.

For more information, please click on the following link:

<http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/about.html>