



How the Electoral College Works

Helping America Vote



The Electoral College is the procedure of electing the president and vice president designed by the framers of the Constitution. It is made up of representatives (“Electors”) selected in every state and the District of Columbia who, in mid-December of each presidential election year, cast their votes according to the laws in their states for one of the nominees for president and one of the nominees for vice president. These votes are then transmitted to the National Archivist and Congress where, on January 6 following the election, they are read and ratified by the new

Congress. The presidential and vice presidential nominees that receive more than 270 of these Electoral College votes then officially become the president-elect and vice president-elect, and, on January 20 (or 21, when January 20 falls on a Sunday), are sworn into office.

The current workings of the Electoral College are the result of both design and experience. As it now operates:

- Each state is allocated Electors equal to the number of its U.S. Senators plus the number of its U.S. Representatives (which may change each decade according to state's population following the Census).
- Presidential candidates in each state submit to the state's chief election official a list of individuals pledged to their candidate equal in number to the state's electoral vote. Usually, the major political parties select these individuals either in state party conventions or through appointment by state party leaders while third parties and independent candidates designate electors.
- The last day for voters to cast their ballots is on the Tuesday following the first Monday of November in presidential election years. Voters in each state cast their ballots for the slate of Electors representing their choice for president and vice president (although as a matter of practice, general election ballots normally say "Electors for" each set of candidates rather than list the individual names of the Electors on each slate).
- Whichever slate wins the popular vote in the state becomes that state's Electors. In effect, whichever presidential ticket gets the most popular votes in a state wins all the Electors of that state (except for in Maine and Nebraska, where one elector is decided per Congressional district and two are allocated to the winner of the statewide vote).





- On the first Tuesday following the second Wednesday of December, each state's Electors meet in their respective state capitals and cast their electoral votes - one for president and one for vice president.
- To prevent Electors from voting only for "favorite sons" of their home state, at least one of their votes must be for a person from outside their state.
- The electoral votes are then sealed and transmitted from each state to the president of the Senate who, on the following January 6, opens and reads them before both houses of the Congress.
- The candidate for president with the most electoral votes, if it is an absolute majority (one over half of the total), is declared president. Similarly, the vice-presidential candidate with the majority of electoral votes is declared vice president.



- In the event no one obtains an absolute majority of electoral votes for president, the U.S. House of Representatives selects the president from among the top three contenders with each state casting only one vote and an absolute majority of the states being required to elect. Similarly, if no one obtains an absolute majority for vice president, then the U.S. Senate makes the selection from among the top two contenders for that office.
- At noon on January 20 (unless on a Sunday, then on January 21), the duly elected president and vice president are sworn into office.