

# Source document

## Electoral College – Fact Sheet

### What are the arguments against the Electoral College?

1. The possibility of electing a minority president
2. The risk of the so called "faithless elector"
3. Depressing voter turnout
4. Failure to reflect the national will

### What presidents have received the most electoral votes?

Reagan received 525 votes in 1984. Franklin Roosevelt in 1936 received 523. Richard Nixon in 1972 received 520. Dwight D. Eisenhower received 457 in 1956. And Lyndon Johnson received 486 in 1964.

### What president has won with the fewest electoral votes?

Washington received 69 electoral votes to win the first election unopposed. At that time, only ten states had ratified the Constitution, and eight votes were not cast.

### Is it a winner take all in every state?

No. All the states do except for Maine and Nebraska. The popular vote in both Nebraska and Maine automatically get 2 electoral votes the remainder electoral votes are decided by congressional districts so they could ultimately have split electorates.

### Who is prohibited from being an elector?

Members of Congress and Federal employees

### Have faithless electors ever changed the outcome of an election?

No, usually the faithless elector has no bearing on the outcome and usually is only done as a political statement.

### How many faithless electors have there been?

Seven in this century and less than 1% in the history of the college.

### When were there faithless electors during the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

1948 - States Rights candidate Strom Thurmond of South Carolina received 39 electoral votes.

1956 - A defecting Alabama elector cast a vote for Walter B. Jones.

1960 - Virginia Senator Harry F. Byrd received 15 electoral votes.

1968 - American Independent candidate George Wallace received 46 electoral votes.

1972 - A defecting Virginia elector voted for Libertarian candidate John Hospers.

1976 - A defecting Washington elector voted for Ronald Reagan.

1988 - A defecting West Virginia elector voted for Democratic Vice Presidential candidate Lloyd Bensen for President (and Democratic Presidential candidate Michael Dukakis for Vice President).

**Are electors required by law to vote the way they are suppose to?**

Yes and No. In 24 states electors are required by law to vote as pledged. 26 states do not require their electors to vote as pledged.

**Are electors in the state of Missouri required to votes as pledged?**

No they are not legally bound to vote as pledged.

**How many times has the Electoral College failed to pick a clear-cut winner?**

2 times - 1800 between Jefferson and Burr and 1824 between Adams and Jackson

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## No Votes for the Electoral College

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*The Electoral College is the governmental body that actually elects the President of the United States. The candidate who wins the majority of the popular votes in a state usually is awarded all the electoral votes for that state. Therefore, no matter how close the popular vote might be, it is possible for one candidate to gain a tremendous majority of electoral votes and appear to win by a landslide. The following selection is concerned with recent criticism of the Electoral College and the support for election by popular vote.*

The United States, the “leader of the free world,” has one of the lowest voter participation rates of any major democracy. Analysts have blamed this embarrassing record on everything from complex registration laws to too many elections, and now research points to another villain: the Electoral College.

Designed in the 18th century to prevent “the tyranny of the majority” by providing for indirect election of the President, the Electoral College operates on a winner-take-all principle. No matter how close the margin of victory, the winning candidate gets all of that state’s electoral votes, and a vote for a losing candidate doesn’t count on a national level.

Economist Richard Cebula of Emory University reasons that this system really doesn’t give members of minority parties in a state much reason to turn out and vote, and members of a majority party might feel their vote wouldn’t be needed to win. To test his theory, Cebula examined the voter participation rate in the 1976 presidential election in 44 states where both the state assembly and senate were dominated by one political party. He found that voter turnout for both parties in these states was much lower than in the remaining six states, where the parties were more competitive. “A good example is the state of Alabama,” Cebula says, “where the Democratic Party is extraordinarily dominant, both historically and currently. The voter participation rate there was around 40 percent, and it may be that majority-party voters figure their party doesn’t need the vote, and minority voters say, ‘Why bother, we’ll be swamped.’”

The Electoral College does increase voter turnout under some conditions, contends Stephen Wayne, a political scientist and author of *The Road to the White House*. “In states where political parties are competitive, a highly cohesive minority, voting together, can swing all the electoral votes. If that group can make a difference, the winner-take-all system exaggerates that difference.” One example of this effect is in Illinois, which is split between upstate Democrats and downstate Republicans. It had a turnout rate of approximately 60 percent in the 1976 election. But Cebula responds that only six states in his study fit this description, giving further strength to the argument to abolish the Electoral College.

“I think it is a question of certainty versus uncertainty,” says George Quattrone, a Stanford University psychologist who studies inference and behavior. “The average voter probably doesn’t think about the Electoral College, but is asking the question: Will we win? When the outcome is virtually certain, one way or the other, there is no reason to go out and vote.” In an uncertain situation, where the outcome is in doubt, people are more likely to think their vote matters, Quattrone says.

“This is an archaic system,” says Cebula, “which may have had some purpose in the 18th century, but the reason that it exists today eludes me. What we have is a relatively small number of people controlling the future of the nation.” Cebula favors replacing the Electoral College with direct national elections, which he feels will increase participation.

Wayne agrees that turnout would increase in a direct election, but he also points out that the College system has some advantages: “The College provides some geographic balance to an election. In a direct popular election, candidates could concentrate on the highly populated areas like the Northeast and California, and ignore sparsely populated states. Then there is the

'hanky-panky' argument. The College isolates areas of possible fraud, by containing them within the state. It also provides election results quickly, with a minimum of uncertainty."

If one of the functions of the college is to reduce uncertainty, it obviously has not done that about itself. Ironically, it may be that our founding fathers, in their search for a fair way to elect a leader, may have hit on a solution that actually discourages people from voting for one.

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## QUESTIONS:

1. Why might many citizens feel that their votes do not count?

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2. How does the electoral process provide election results quickly, with a minimum of uncertainty?

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3. Do you think a direct national election would increase voter turnout over the current electoral process? Why or why not?

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: ~~10/25/21~~  
Define:

- 16 1. Analyst: \_\_\_\_\_
- 505 2. Tyranny: \_\_\_\_\_
- 362 3. Principle: \_\_\_\_\_
- 279 4. Margin: \_\_\_\_\_
- 482 5. Theory: \_\_\_\_\_
- 25 6. Assembly: \_\_\_\_\_
- 213 7. Historical: \_\_\_\_\_
- 467 8. Swamped: \_\_\_\_\_
- 94 9. Contend: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 10. Abolish: \_\_\_\_\_
- 525 11. Virtual: \_\_\_\_\_
- 22 12. Archaic: \_\_\_\_\_

Select 8 words above and write complete sentences using at least 5 words

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. \_\_\_\_\_
- 7. \_\_\_\_\_
- 8. \_\_\_\_\_