



# Electing the President

The Electoral College



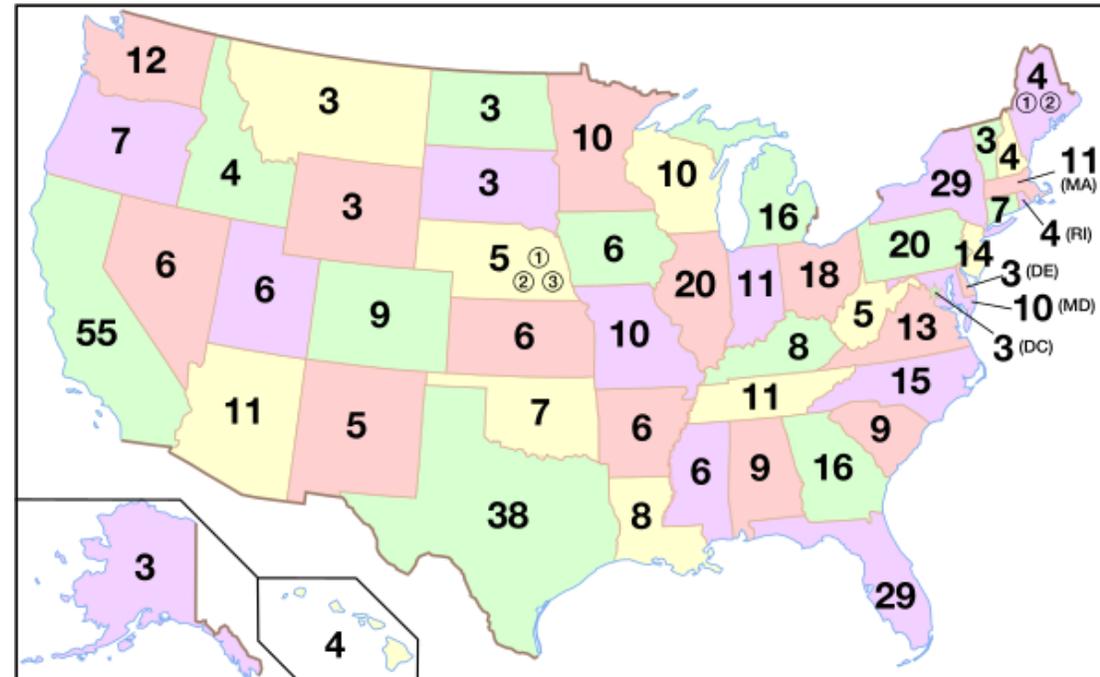
# Historical Background of the Electoral College

- The framers of the Constitution disagreed on how to elect a president
  - Congressional selection
  - direct popular election
- The electoral college was a compromise
  - combining features of both approaches
- The electoral college also reflects the federal nature of the Constitution
  - Ensures that the states have a role in selecting the president.



# Delegating Electoral Votes

- Each state is entitled to as many electoral votes as the sum of its representation
  - U.S. House of Representatives
  - U.S. House of Senate
    - Ex. Nebraska has 2 senators and 3 representatives for a total of 5 electoral votes
- Total of 538 Electoral Votes
  - 435 House members
  - 100 senators
  - 3 electors for the District of Columbia
- 270 Electoral Votes needed to win





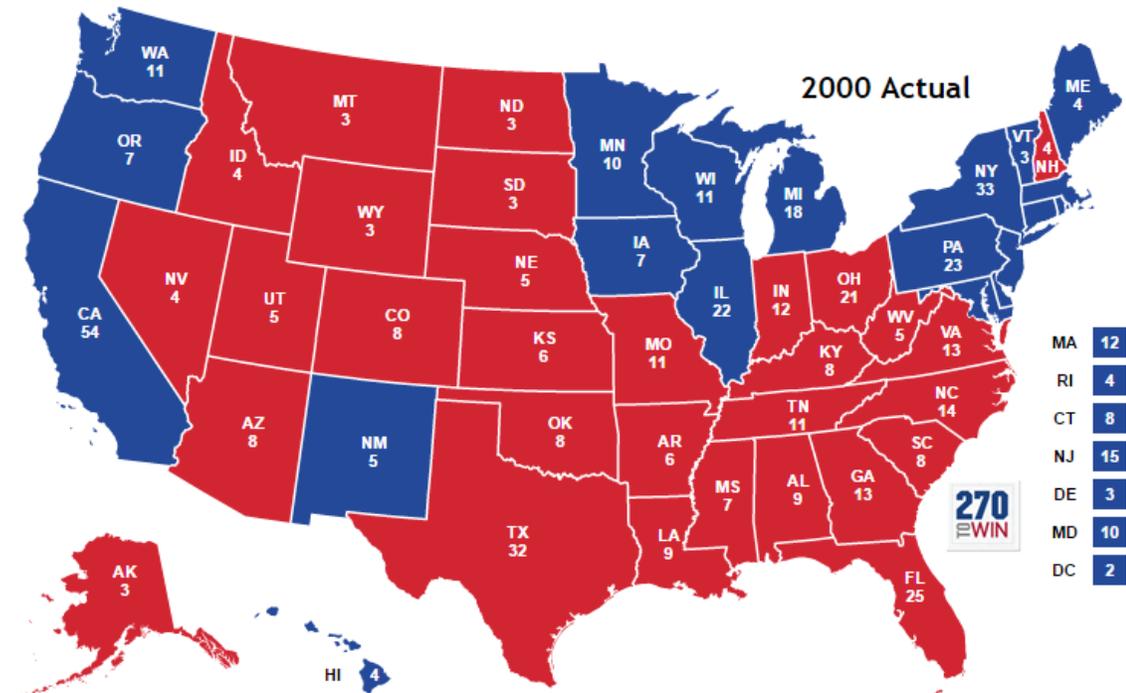
# Choosing the Electors

- Individuals selected in each state to officially cast that state's electoral votes.
  - Ex. Ohio selects 20 electors to cast the state's 20 electoral votes.
- Framers anticipated that electors would be state leaders who would exercise good judgment.
- Today, party leaders select electors who are typically long-time party activists.
  - Electors almost always vote for their party's candidates.



# Results of the November Election

- Each state determines the manner of selection
- All but two states use a winner-take-all delegates statewide election system
  - Nebraska
  - Maine
- Everyone else
  - If Candidate A gets the most votes in a state, Candidate A gets the all of the delegates.





# The Electoral Election

- In December of election year
  - The electors gather in their respective state capitols to cast ballots for president and vice president.
- In January
  - Congress comes into session
  - They open the ballots received from each state
  - They announce the official outcome.





# Electoral Complications

- To win, a candidate needs a majority,
  - 270 electoral votes.
- If no candidate has a majority
  - the House of Representatives selects the president from among the three presidential candidates with the most electoral votes.
  - If this happens, each state has one vote.
    - Happened only once
      - 1824 Congress chose John Quincy Adams over Andrew Jackson and Henry Clay.
- The Senate selects the vice president from the top two vice-presidential candidates.





# The Representative of the People?

- In a close race, the popular vote winner may not win the electoral college.
  - One candidate may win states by lopsided margins while the other wins states by narrow margins.
- Electoral vote winners who lost the popular vote
  - Bush over Gore in 2000
  - Benjamin Harrison over Grover Cleveland in 1888
  - Rutherford B. Hayes over Samuel Tilden in 1876



# Criticism of Electoral Voting System

- The popular vote winner may lose the presidency
- Electors may vote for persons other than their party's presidential and vice presidential candidates
- If no candidate receives a majority, Congress will pick the president and vice president

