



Electing the President

The Electoral College



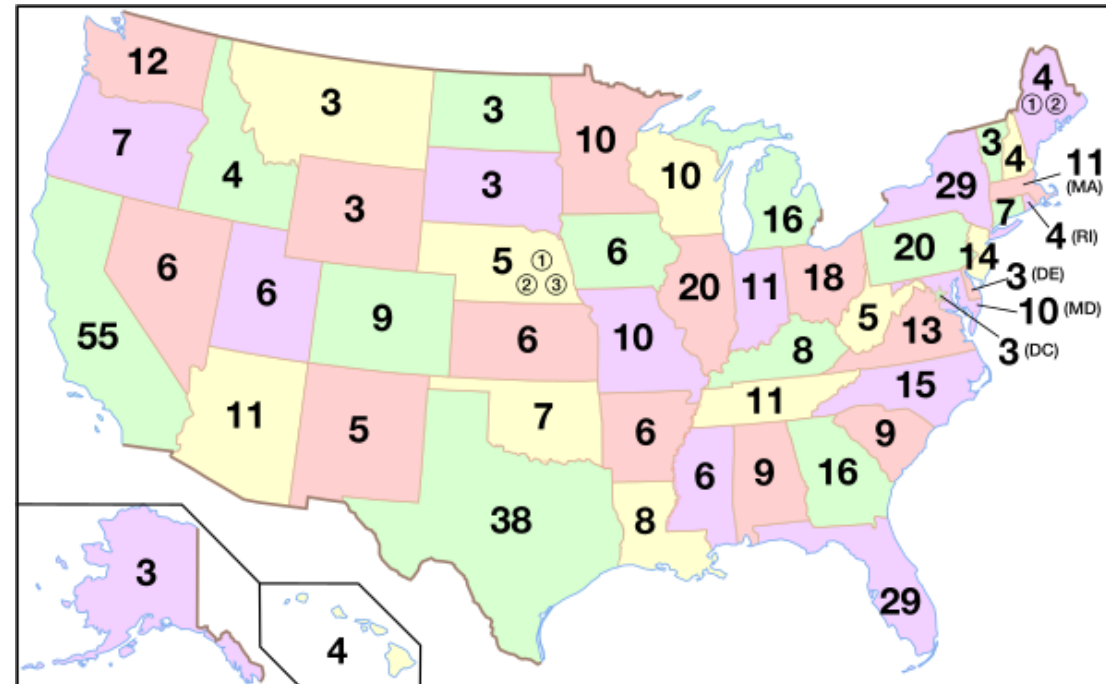
Historical Background of the Electoral College

- 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





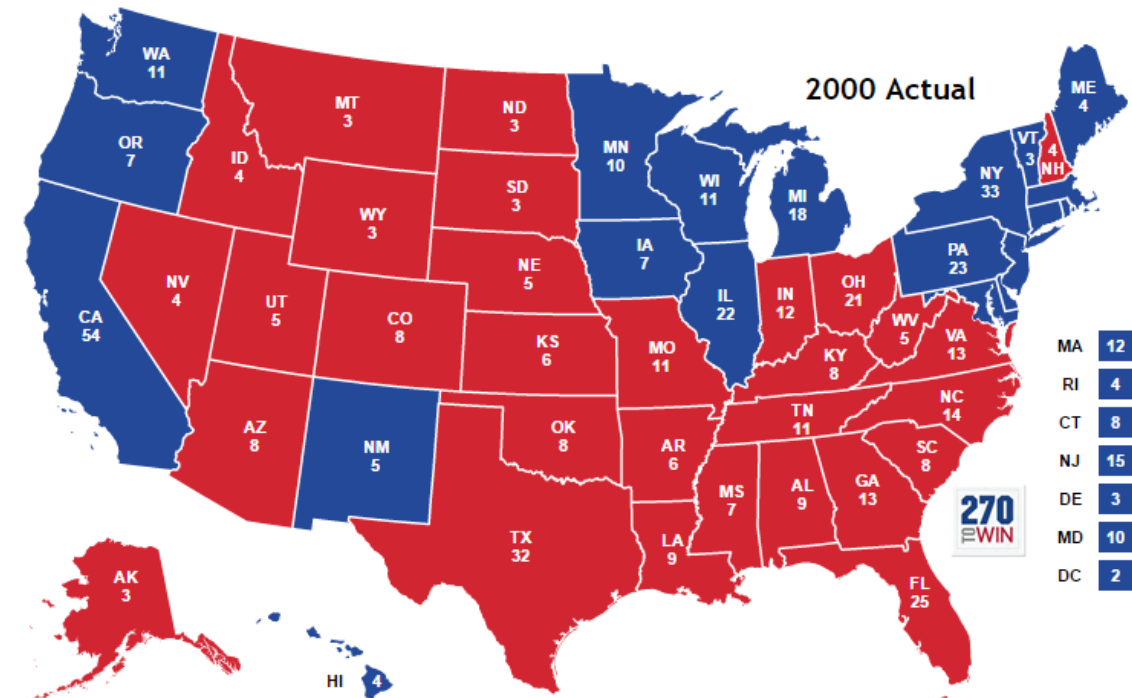
Choosing the Electors

- 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

