

An Electoral College Q & A

What is the Electoral College?

The Electoral College is a process, not a place. The founding fathers established it in the United States Constitution in 1787 as a compromise between election of the President by a vote in Congress and election of the President by a popular vote of qualified citizens.

What are the origins of the Electoral College?

On Saturday, June 2, 1787, James Wilson, a Pennsylvania delegate to the Constitutional Convention meeting in Philadelphia, submitted a unique proposal for selecting a Chief Executive of the new United States. To read an intriguing discussion of the initial concept and its evolution over the summer of 1787, check out chapters 19 and 20 in “Decision in Philadelphia” by Christopher Collier.

How many people serve in the Electoral College?

The Electoral College consists of 538 electors. A majority of 270 electoral votes is required to elect the President.

How are electoral votes distributed among the states?

Each state receives a number of electors equal to the number of its members in the House of Representatives plus two for the Senators. In 1911, Congress approved a law limiting House membership to 435 Representatives. The decennial census leads to adjustments in the number of electoral votes for each state based upon shifts in population. Also, under the 23rd Amendment, the District of Columbia is allocated 3 electors and treated like a state for purposes of the Electoral College.

How many electoral votes does Michigan have?

Sixteen (Based on 14 members of the U.S. House of Representative and two U.S. Senators)

Who selects the Electors?

Choosing each state's Electors is a two-part process. First, the political parties in each state choose slates of potential Electors sometime before the general election. Second, on Election Day, the voters in each state select their state's Electors by casting their ballots for President.

What are the qualifications to be an Elector?

The U.S. Constitution contains very few provisions relating to the qualifications of Electors. Article II, section 1, clause 2 provides that no Senator or Representative, or Person holding an Office of Trust or Profit under the United States, shall be appointed an Elector. As a historical matter, the 14th Amendment provides that state officials who have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the United States or given aid and comfort to its enemies are disqualified from serving as Electors. This prohibition relates to the post-Civil War era.

When is the Election held?

The presidential election is held every four years on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November. Tuesday, November 3, 2020

When and where does the Electoral College meet?

On the first Monday after the second Wednesday in December (December 14, 2020), the electors meet in their respective States to cast their votes for President and Vice President of the United States.

When are the electoral votes counted in Congress?

On January 6 2021, the Congress meets in joint session to count the electoral votes (unless Congress passes a law to change the date). The Vice President, as President of the Senate, presides over the count and announces the results of the Electoral College vote. The President of the Senate then declares which persons, if any, have been elected President and Vice President of the United States.

When are the new President and Vice President inaugurated?

Inauguration Day is Monday, Jan. 20, 2021. The President and Vice President will be sworn in on the steps of the U.S. Capitol at noon, by the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Key Electoral College websites

National Archives-U.S. Electoral College

<https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/>

This is the BEST single source for information about the Electoral College.

Library of Congress “Elections...the American Way”

<https://www.loc.gov/search/?in=&q=Electoral+College&new=true&st=>

As usual with loc.gov, an overwhelming collection of materials.

FairVote: For A More Perfect Union <http://www.fairvote.org>

Unlike local and state elections where citizens directly elect officials, voters in the United States indirectly elect the President and Vice President by casting ballots for members of the Electoral College. FairVote's analysis of presidential elections has found that a majority of states have become more and more predictable, to the point that only ten states were considered competitive in the 2012 election.

League of Women Voters <http://lwv.org>

extensive information on making democracy work and promotes a wide variety of civic education programs. . Includes results of prior elections and each state's voting .

FiveThirtyEight http://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/2016-election-forecast/?ex_cid=rrpromo

An election prediction map, including percentage of vote for each candidate updated frequently. In mid-August the “States to watch” included: Arizona; Colorado; Florida; Georgia ; Iowa ; Michigan; Minnesota; Nevada; New Hampshire; North Carolina; Ohio; Pennsylvania; Virginia; & Wisconsin.