

The electoral college

[History](#)



The Electoral College The Electoral College is the system of government in the United States and represents what is known as an indirect election. In this system, electors from each of the 50 states elect the President and Vice-President of the country, and there are 538 of these electors. Each state has a varying number of electors, and each state has different legislation on how these are elected, as specified by the US Constitution. 48 states (excluding Nebraska and Maine) elect their representatives in a winner-takes-all manner, meaning that the elector with the most votes becomes the elector with no representative for the losing competition. The number of electors within each state is dependent on the population of each state, with the most populous state (California) having 55 electors, and the seven least populous (Wyoming, Vermont, South Dakota, Alaska, North Dakota, Montana and Delaware) having only three electors each. Interestingly, the ballot on Election Day (the first Tuesday following the first Monday of November, as dictated by the federal law of the United States) contains the names of the Presidential candidates, rather than the names of the various electors of the state. The electors promise to vote for the Presidential candidate to whom they are affiliated, but the population itself does not vote directly for the President and Vice-President, the electors do. These electors are representatives of their state political parties who have been nominated, a process which occurs before the official Election Day. Additionally, electors cannot be individuals who hold a federal office. The President and Vice-President must win an overall majority from these electors (this number currently stands at 270 votes) to win the election. This system is not universally accepted by the population of the United States, and there are numerous arguments for and against this system. Within this essay, both <https://assignbuster.com/the-electoral-college/>

viewpoints will be examined using the work of Professor Judith A. Best (1997), who is for the Electoral College system, and George C. Edwards (Keyssar, 2005), who is against. One of the most important points raised against the Electoral College raised by George C. Edwards is how easy it is for the person receiving the second most votes in the popular election to come first when voted for by the electors. A recent example of this, given by Keyssar (2005), is that in the 2004 Presidential election, George W. Bush received 3.5 million more votes than John Kerry. The interesting thing here is that 60,000 votes in Ohio could have resulted in Kerry being the President for this term. More research shows that this situation has occurred on 16 occasions before 2004. This does highlight a major problem with the system. In an election where the population voted directly for the presidential candidate, Bush would have won by the 3.5 million margin that he received in the popularity vote, leaving Kerry firmly in second place. These figures just concern the races in which the second-place contestant was close; on four occasions, the candidate that lost the popular vote actually became President. Edwards argues that this constitutes a major problem with the system and that it cannot be truly described as a democracy if there is the possibility of these cases occurring. Best (1997) argues, however, that this is the benefit of the system. She argues that, without this system, a Presidential candidate would be able to make promises that appeal to only the majority of the country and still win (the examples given include suburbanites who represent half of the voting population). In this case, 50% of the population who would not benefit from a scheme intended for suburbanites would be ignored in the case of perhaps even one vote either way. By using the Electoral College system, an area without these large

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numbers of suburbanites can be represented by an elector of their choosing, and the need for the overall majority of 270 votes from the electors means that their vote has more power. This, Best argues, means that there is more likely to be a country-wide consensus; a “majority rule with minority consent”. This argument suggests that this system forces the political parties to form strong cross-national coalitions, and in many cases this is true. The Presidential candidate who wins must have representation in most states to win the election, because 270 electors need to vote for that candidate. The six most populous states combined (California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois and Pennsylvania) would only produce a vote of 189 electors, still not enough to produce the overall majority needed, and this is in the case that every single elector for that state is elected for the same party. This means that a Presidential candidate must represent policies that are beneficial to most, if not all, of the states and the lifestyles and population within them, giving the cross-national coalition that is given. Without this system, a direct vote could mean that a Presidential candidate only need appeal to the populous North-Eastern states and still win the election, despite their policies being of no benefit to those residing in Texas. To conclude, it is difficult to make a firm decision about if the Electoral College system is right, but it seems that for fair and equal representation there needs to be a system that takes the votes of each and every state and its population into account, and for this the Electoral College seems to at least achieve this at a better rate than a direct vote would, for the reasons listed above. Works Cited Best, J. (1997). Testimony On Proposals For Electoral College Reform Before The House Judiciary Subcommittee On The Constitution. Proposals for Electoral College Reform, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on the

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Constitution, Committee on the Judiciary. Washington DC. Keyssar, A. (2005).
The Electoral College Flunks. NYRB. Plan Introduction 50 states elect the
President and Vice-President 538 electors Each state has a varying number
of electors The number of electors within each state is dependent on the
population of each state, with the most populous state (California) having 55
electors, and the seven least populous (Wyoming, Vermont, South Dakota,
Alaska, North Dakota, Montana and Delaware) have 3 Against Can result in
the popular vote candidate losing For Gives proper representation to all
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which can't be achieved without agreement from many states