



Voting and Elections:
SS.7.CG.3.14
Electoral College
READING

Name: _____

Date: _____



SS.7.CG.3.14 Benchmark Clarification 1: Students will explain the origin of the Electoral College and the changes made to it by the 12th Amendment.

This material is adapted from resources developed by USAGov.

In the United States, citizens are able to participate in elections and cast their votes for candidates running for public office. Every level of government has elections, but the national election to select the president and vice president is the most popular. Unlike other elections, presidential candidates are not simply selected by the people. Instead, they are chosen by **electors** through a process called the **Electoral College**.

The process of using electors to select the president comes from the Constitution. During the Constitutional Convention, members debated whether to have the popular vote by citizens or a vote in Congress determine who becomes president. The conversation ended in compromise and created a group of special electors selected by the **state legislatures**. This would ensure states' rights were preserved, the president and executive branch would be independently elected, and a popular election was avoided because many believed the people would not know enough about the candidates to make wise choices.

Originally, in presidential elections, the Founders had electors cast two votes for president, each for a different person. The person with the most votes was the winner and became president, while the runner-up in second place became vice president. However, things became complicated during the election of 1800 as the rise of political parties began. During the election of 1800, Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr tied for president, leaving no clear winner. According to the Constitution, the House of Representatives must decide the presidency in the case of a tie or if no one receives more than one-half of the votes. It took 36 separate votes in the House before Jefferson was declared the winner. As a result, the 12th Amendment was created to separate electoral votes for president and vice president.

In modern elections, after individuals cast their ballot for president, their vote goes to a statewide tally. In 48 states and Washington, D.C., there is a "winner-take-all" system, where the candidate with the most popular votes gets all the electoral votes for that state, even if the candidate wins by one vote. Maine and Nebraska assign electors using a proportional system, where individual electors are appointed based on the winner of the popular vote for each congressional district. Then two more electors are appointed based on the winner of the overall statewide popular vote. There are a total of 538 presidential electors. Victory requires a candidate to have one more than half (269) of the electors; So, 270 electors are needed to win the presidency.

electoral college – a group of people chosen from each State and the District of Columbia to formally select the President and Vice President.

presidential elector – a person of the electoral college group who cast the formal votes that choose the President and the Vice President.

state legislature - the lawmaking branch of the state government

Source:

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