

The Electoral College – How It Works!

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So here we are again, election time, and many of us have no idea how the process of electing our new president works, more specifically, the Electoral College. The election process is divided into four stages: the pre-nomination phase, the national conventions, the general election campaign, and the Electoral College. The process of electing a president is a long process, but the most important, and most difficult to understand, is the Electoral College. The Electoral College is based on a popular vote, put in by the citizens of the United States of America, and electoral votes, put in by the electors of each State. Every state has a number of electors equal to its number of U.S. senators, 2 for each state, and U.S. representatives. The number of U.S. representatives for each state varies, as it is based on population. The Electoral College currently includes 538 members, 3 of which represent Washington D.C., under the Twenty-Third Amendment of 1961. The other 535 members include one for each senator and representative. The process of choosing electors is never simultaneous, as each state has its own way of deciding electors. The most common however are by State party convention, and by State party committee.

Okay, now we know about how the electors are chosen, what about the faithless elector? Most of the time, the candidate who won the popular vote generally wins the electoral vote and becomes president of the United States, but it is possible for a candidate to win the popular vote and not become president, or vice versa. By constitutional rights, the electors are free agents – they vote for the candidate that they find is most fit for the job, though electors are not expected to go against the popular vote. Over time, a number of electors have gone against the popular vote -this phenomenon is known as the “faithless elector.” In 2000, when Bush was sworn into presidency of the United States of America, he did so based on the electoral vote. Though Gore had won the popular vote, Bush won the electoral vote, and became president—for two terms!

Okay, summing up what we have so far- The Electoral College is made up of 538 members, 2 for each state, and a faithless elector is when an elector votes differently than what he or she pledged. What happens on Election Day? Election Day occurs every four years, on an even year, on the first Tuesday of November. All citizens of the United States who are registered to vote head to the polls in their district and put in a ballot for their chosen elector, the members of the Electoral College. This is known as the popular vote. The chosen electors then meet to confirm the popular choices for President and Vice President. The electors are most always guaranteed to meet in the State capital. The results of the Electoral College are forwarded to the Vice President, the Secretary of State of each respective State, the archivist of the United States, and the Judge of the Federal district court of the district in which the electors met. Once this is completed, the Electoral College is over until the next Election Day, four years later.

But wait - what if there is a tie? If there is a tie then the decision to select a new president is passed on to the House of Representatives. However, instead of each House member getting to vote on the issue, each state delegation receives a vote. The Vice President is not decided on by the House, but instead by the Senate. Furthermore, if there is a tie in the Senate for Vice President, the sitting Vice President will cast the deciding vote.

Hopefully this will clear up some of the confusion, and make for a less exasperating voting day – not to mention the general confusion as the votes are tallied. Have a great election, America!

Resources:

Congressional Digest, January 2001

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