

The Electoral College or “How we elect the President and Vice President”
A 2-Page Brief Summary by Barry A. Schlech, Ph.D.
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American citizens must vote on Election Day to select our next **President** and **Vice President** [no brainer, usually]. By law, **Federal Election Day** is scheduled on the Tuesday after the 1st Monday in November every 4 years [i.e., November 8th in 2016]. Congress selected this date in 1845 for all national elections in all states [1845 happens to be the year Texas entered the Union and Texas participated in its first Presidential election in 1848].

Most people think we select our President by adding up all the votes cast for either candidate throughout the United States on **Election Day** and the candidate who had the most votes wins. This is called the **Popular Vote**. But this is NOT the way we elect our President and Vice President in the United States. According to the **U.S. Constitution**, we must use the services of the **Electoral College** and it is the **Electoral Vote** that determines the winner of the Presidential Election.

So what is this mysterious **Electoral College**? How does it work and how do they cast the **Electoral Votes** to elect our President?

Remember that the United States is **NOT a Democracy**.... It is a **Constitutional Republic** and as such, the individual **States**, by design, always have significant roles in the functioning of this Republic. The **Electoral College** is made up of representatives [or “**Electors**”] from each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia who cast their votes on the Monday after the 2nd Wednesday in December [i.e., December 19th in 2016].

How are these prestigious “Electors” chosen?

The number of Electors from each state equals the sum of the number of the state’s U.S Senators and U.S. Congressmen. For all of the U.S., there are **100 Senators** and **435 Congressmen**. So the **Electoral College** is made up of 535 Electors [PLUS 3 allowed for the District of Columbia]. Thus the **TOTAL Number of Electors in the Electoral College is 538**. A majority of their votes would be **270**.... the magic number to win the Presidency. **Texas** has 2 U.S. Senators and 36 U.S Congressmen...therefore Texas has **38 Electoral Votes**. The number of Electors allowed for every other state is calculated in the same way.

How are these people chosen as Electors?

Each state is responsible for providing their Electors to the Electoral College. Selecting Electors is a 2-step process.

- **Step 1** is controlled by the political parties and each party [Republican, Democrat, etc.] nominates a “Slate of Electors” at their State Convention. The Texas GOP selected a slate of 38 Electors this year at their Texas State Convention in Fort Worth; the Democrats selected their slate of 38 Electors in Dallas this year as well. Therefore, each Presidential candidate has his/her own “Slate of Electors”. Trump has the 38 Electors nominated at the Texas RNC State Convention and Hillary has the 38 Electors nominated at the Texas State DNC Convention.

- **Step 2** happens on Election Day [Nov 8th in 2016]. Even though voters are voting for their favorite candidate [i.e., either Trump or Hillary], voters are really voting for their party's Slate of Electors. The Slate of Electors of the winning candidate is then appointed as the state's Electors who will cast their Electoral Votes as part of the Electoral College on Dec 19th.

The Electoral College actually never meets as one body. Electors meet in their respective state capitals [in Austin, TX for us] on Dec 19th and the candidate who receives 270 Electoral Votes or more is declared the winner and the next U.S. President.

This entire process may seem a bit old-fashioned or arduous to some people, but not to those of us who appreciate the importance of a republican [little "R"] form of government. This electoral process prevents the domination of highly populated areas [e.g., NYC, Houston] AND maintains the "federal" character of the nation by requiring the states to drive the process, not Washington, DC. Critics say it favors less populous states, disadvantages 3rd parties, but most of all it is not determined by the Popular Vote.

A comment on the Popular Vote.

The power of the Popular Vote is really evident in all of this, although it is not the determinant factor in the election. Let me give you some comfort....

We have calculated the Popular Vote every year since the 1820s and used these numbers as an historic perspective of the election. Although it has no bearing on the official outcome of the election, most of the time the winner of the Popular Vote is also the winner by the Electoral College Vote.

In only 2 or 3 cases in the last 200 years, did someone win the office of President who did not win the Popular Vote:

- In 1886: Rutherford B Hayes won the Electoral Vote, but lost the Popular Vote by 300K votes
- In 1888: Benjamin Harrison won the Electoral Vote, but lost the Popular Vote by 100K votes
- In 2000: Bush won the Electoral Vote, but Gore won the Popular Vote by 500K votes
- Likewise, many races were close. In our lifetime [or at least mine], Kennedy won the electoral vote AND the Popular Vote but only by 100K votes.

So, you can see that usually both votes mirror one another. This election probably will be no different. Your vote for your candidate [or their Slate of Electors] is important.

GO VOTE with assurance that your vote does count!