



YONKERS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

US History and Government
Regents Review

Electoral College

Electing the President

Article II describes the process by which the president is elected. Amendments 12, 20, 22, and 25 have changed this process.

A key compromise of the Constitutional Convention involved the method of electing the President. Under the resulting **electoral college** system, voters cast their ballots for electors. Those electors cast the actual votes for President and Vice President. Each state was granted as many presidential electors as it had senators plus representatives.

The Constitution requires that a census, or counting of the population, be taken every 10 years. Changes to reflect shifts in population are then made in the number of representatives per state, which in turn affects the electoral vote. Today, data from the census is also used to make decisions about other national needs.

Customs and precedents influenced how the President is elected. After Washington's two terms, the formation of political parties forced changes in the election process. No longer did electors exercise their own judgments. Rather, they pledged in advance to vote for the presidential candidate of their party. Today, while the names of the presidential candidates appear on the ballot, voters are actually casting their ballots for electors chosen by each candidate's party.

By 1832, national conventions had become the method of selecting party candidates. Today more than half the delegates to such national conventions are selected through party presidential primaries. Such primaries are only one step in today's complex path to the presidency. The chart on the next page summarizes key steps along that path.

Debating the Electoral College System

From the days of the Constitutional Convention, people have argued over the method of selecting the president.

REASONS TO CHANGE THE SYSTEM There are two major arguments against the electoral college system.

1. It is a "winner-take-all" system. A winning candidate gets all the electoral votes in a state, no matter how close the popular vote is. Four times—in 1824, 1876, 1888, and 2000—the winner of the popular vote has lost the presidency because he failed to win a majority of the electoral vote.
2. Generally, electors are not required by law to vote for the candidate who wins in their state.

REASONS TO KEEP THE SYSTEM Despite such criticisms, the electoral college system remains in use for three key reasons:

1. It is very difficult to amend the Constitution.
2. Small states would lose the advantage they now have of being over-represented in the electoral college; they would, therefore, oppose any change.
3. Changes in the electoral college system might threaten the two-party political system. The fact that a presidential candidate needs a majority of the electoral college vote, critics believe, prevents many small political parties from springing up.

Name: _____

Questions 1 and 2 refer to the following:



- 1) The authors of the United States Constitution included the method of selecting a President referred to in the cartoon because of their belief that
 - 1) voting procedures should be as democratic as possible
 - 2) populous states should determine the outcome of Presidential elections
 - 3) this system would eliminate the influence of private interests in choosing a President
 - 4) popular majorities could not be trusted to select the best leader
- 2) Which statement *best* expresses the *main* idea of the cartoon?
 - 1) The most populous states should have greater electoral power.
 - 2) States should require Presidential electors to reflect accurately the popular vote.
 - 3) The present method of choosing a President has dangerous defects.
 - 4) Presidential campaigns tend to divide the people of the nation.

- 3) Which constitutional provision indicates that the authors of the original Constitution did *not* completely trust the common voter to make decisions?
 - 1) the veto power of the President
 - 2) direct election of Senators
 - 3) election to the House of Representatives
 - 4) the electoral college
- 4) Which statement about the electoral college is accurate?
 - 1) Most of the past injustices of the electoral college system were corrected by the Supreme Court's one-man-one-vote decision.
 - 2) Electors are chosen by State legislatures.
 - 3) The electoral college system makes minor and third parties more influential.
 - 4) The Presidential candidate who wins the most popular votes usually wins the majority of the electoral votes.
- 5) The major criticism of the electoral college system in the United States has been that it
 - 1) may select a candidate different from the candidate with a majority of the popular vote
 - 2) convenes after the general election results have been tallied
 - 3) represents the political views of the minority instead of the majority of the electorate
 - 4) encourages the emergence of numerous third-party candidates
- 6) Which is generally considered to be the major shortcoming of the electoral college system for selecting a President of the United States?
 - 1) Candidates tend to ignore the young voters.
 - 2) A candidate can win the popular vote but lose the Presidency.
 - 3) Too much time elapses between election in November and the electoral votes in January.
 - 4) Electoral votes are unevenly distributed among the states.

7) A United States Presidential candidate can receive a majority of the popular vote but fail to be elected. This fact could be used to justify the

- 1) abolition of the two-term limitation on the Presidency
- 2) establishment of one nationwide primary election
- 3) formation of a coalition system of government
- 4) abolition of the electoral college system

8) In a United States Presidential election, the electoral vote was distributed in this manner:

CANDIDATE	A	B	C	D
% OF ELECTORAL VOTE	38	38	16	8

Based on this information, which is a valid statement about the outcome of the election?

- 1) Candidate *A* became President and Candidate *B* became Vice President.
- 2) Another Presidential election was held in order to determine a winner.
- 3) The President was chosen by the members of the House of Representatives.
- 4) Candidate *A* was declared the winner immediately after the election.

9) To revise the electoral college process for selecting the President, changes must be made in the

- 1) Cabinet system
- 2) system of primary elections
- 3) Federal Constitution
- 4) qualifications for voters

10) Population data from the census of 2000 was used to determine the number of

- 1) senators from each state
- 2) states in the Union
- 3) Supreme Court justices
- 4) electoral college votes from each state

Popular Vote vs. Electoral Vote, 1996

1996	Popular Vote	%	Electoral Vote	%
Clinton	47,125,563	49.2	379	70.4
Dole	39,079,735	40.8	159	29.6
Perot	8,141,611	8.5	—	—
Others	1,436,755	0.5	—	—

11)

Which conclusion can *best* be drawn from the information in the table above?

- 1) Candidates are more interested in winning the popular vote than in winning the electoral vote.
- 2) Third-party candidates threaten the electoral process.
- 3) A candidate can be elected President with less than half the popular vote.
- 4) Incumbent Presidents usually win reelection.

12)

Which action in the process of electing a President of the United States is provided for in the Federal Constitution?

- 1) the President making an inaugural address
- 2) a political party adopting a platform
- 3) the opening of a national nominating convention
- 4) the electoral college casting ballots

13)

The electoral college was included in the United States Constitution primarily because the framers of the Constitution believed that

- 1) the powers of the chief executive should be limited
- 2) political parties might be regulated by the government
- 3) the voters might lack sufficient knowledge to choose their leaders wisely
- 4) cooperation between the executive and legislative branches would be encouraged

14)

Which statement *best* explains why critics have called for a change in the electoral college system?

- 1) Electors often vote for candidates not listed on the ballot.
- 2) A person who did not receive the largest percentage of popular votes can be elected President.
- 3) States with small populations have greater influence on Presidential elections than more populated states do.
- 4) The system is a threat to the two-party system.

15)



DAVID SEAVEY, USA Today

What is the *main* idea of the cartoon?

- 1) The electoral college has more value now than it did in the past.
- 2) Only the Congress should have the power to elect a President.
- 3) Free elections in the United States have almost disappeared.
- 4) The electoral college decreases the value of a citizen's vote.

Questions 16 and 17 refer to the following:

UNITED STATES PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

ELECTION OF 1876	ELECTORAL VOTE	POPULAR VOTE	PERCENT OF POPULAR VOTE
Republican Rutherford B. Hayes	118	4,036,572	48%
Democrat Samual J. Tilden	184	4,284,020	51
Minor Parties	----	81,737	1
TOTAL	369	8,402,329	100%
ELECTION OF 1888			
Republican Benjamin Harrison	233	5,447,129	48%
Democrat Grover Cleveland	168	5,537,857	49
Minor Parties	----	396,441	3
TOTAL	401	11,381,427	100%

16) Which aspect of the electoral college system is *best* illustrated by the chart?

- 1) Minor parties do not receive their fair share of the popular vote.
- 2) The person with the greatest popular vote has not always won the Presidential election.
- 3) Voters who are not enrolled in a political party cannot vote for electors.
- 4) The electoral college system favors Republicans over Democrats.

17) The most frequently proposed change to the situation shown by the chart is to

- 1) encourage more Americans to register and vote
- 2) have direct election of the President
- 3) provide equal amounts of government to all political parties
- 4) allow members of Congress to elect the President