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Gabriel Mott

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10/30/2024

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Introduction

With the national Presidential election on November 5, the vast majority of Americans will reach the end of their civic duty. There is still, however, an under-represented and often misunderstood group whose duties extend beyond the general election into the following months, and determine the next President of the United States: the Electoral College.

Question 1: What is the Electoral College?

The Electoral College is the formal process by which the President of the United States is elected. In short, each state selects its own slate of electors, and the electors vote for the President and Vice President. The [number of electors](#) given to each state is equal to their total representation in Congress (# of House seats + 2 Senate seats), while the District of Columbia receives three electors. A map of the 2024 electoral divisions can be found [here](#). A candidate must receive 270 electoral votes to tip a simple majority.

In all states except Maine and Nebraska, the candidate with the most popular votes receives [all](#) of that state's electoral votes. Both Maine and Nebraska [assign](#) two electoral votes to the overall winner of the state popular vote, then one electoral vote for the individual winners of each Congressional district. After the popular election on November 5, the electors hold the formal vote on [December 17](#). Then, on January 6, Congress counts and certifies this vote.

Question 2: Why was the Electoral College created?

Although not detailed by name, the function of the Electoral College is established in Article II, Section 1 of the [United States Constitution](#). The system was an invention of the [Constitutional framers](#) to “compromise between the election of the President by a vote in Congress and election of the President by a popular vote of qualified citizens.”

Arguments at the [Constitutional Convention](#) concerned the Electoral College's role in maintaining a balance of powers: Roger Sherman of Connecticut was concerned with Congress having the power to control the President and Pennsylvania delegates called for a national election, while others found a decentralized electoral system unwise.

Question 3: How could the Electoral College produce unexpected results in the 2024 election?

Although electors are selected according to the winning party, state laws differ as to whether they are obligated to vote for the nominee of their party. Electors who vote for the opposing candidate to their party are called “Faithless Electors,” and most states impose [sanctions](#) on those who do. Still, Faithless Electors are very rare, and “[have never changed an election outcome](#).”

Since there are a total of 538 electoral votes, there is also a small chance that the election ends in a 269 – 269 tie. In this case, the election is [decided by Congress](#): The House of Representatives determines the President, but each state delegation gets a single vote, and the Senate determines the Vice President. In both cases, the candidate wins by attaining a simple majority.

Conclusion

The Electoral College is a consortium of electors selected by the states to cast the formal vote for U.S. President. Each state has a number of electors equal to their total representation in Congress, and most have a strictly regulated, winner-takes-all system. It was invented during the framing of the Constitution to maintain the balance of power. Faithless electors and/or a tie are unlikely scenarios that could change the outcome of the 2024 election.