



# THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE: A GOOD IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS PASSED?

A PRESENTATION TO THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF BUTTE COUNTY

BY CHARLEY TURNER

# THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE

- How did we get it?
- How does it work?
- Pros
- Cons
- How could one eliminate it?
- With what could one replace it?





## THE ORIGINAL PROBLEM

- Virginia Plan: Congress picks (too much national power, president at their mercy)
- State legislatures pick (regionalism, cabalism amongst elites)
- Not seriously considered: popular vote (did not want to risk demagoguery, already had a “popular” branch)
- James Wilson: “how about ‘electors’?”

# IT WORKED UNTIL IT DIDN'T...

## ELECTION OF 1789

Before the ratification of the 12th Amendment in 1804, each elector cast votes for two different candidates. The candidate with the highest number of votes became president, while the candidate with the second highest total became vice president.

	CT	DE	GA	MD	MA	NH	NJ	PA	SC	VA	Total
Washington	7	3	5	6	10	5	6	10	7	10	69
Adams	5				10	5	1	8	5	3	34
Jay	3					5		1		9	
Harrison					6						6
Rutledge						6					6
Hancock						2	1	1		4	
Clinton									3	3	
Huntington	2										2
Milton					2						2
Armstrong					1						1
Lincoln					1						1
Telfair					1						1

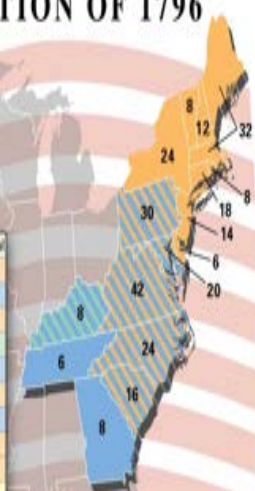


Washington 69 electoral votes  
 Not voting  
 Adams 34 electoral votes    Jay 9 electoral votes    Harrison 6 electoral votes    Rutledge 6 electoral votes    Hancock 4 electoral votes    Clinton 3 electoral votes  
 Huntington 2 electoral votes    Milton 2 electoral votes    Armstrong 1 electoral vote    Lincoln 1 electoral vote    Telfair 1 electoral vote  
<sup>1</sup> Two Virginia electors and two Maryland electors did not vote.

## ELECTION OF 1796

Before the ratification of the 12th Amendment in 1804, each elector cast votes for two different candidates. The candidate with the highest number of votes became president, while the candidate with the second highest total became vice president.

	CT	DE	GA	KY	MD	MA	NH	NJ	NY	NC	PA	RI	SC	TN	VT	VA	Total
J. Adams	9	3			7	16	6	7	12	1	1	4				4	71
Jefferson				4	4	4			11	14	8	3				20	68
T. Pinckney	4	3			4	13		7	12	1	2		8	4		1	59
Burr					4	3			6	13		3		1			30
S. Adams																	15
Ellsworth								1	6							4	11
Clinton								4									7
Jay																	5
Iredell										3							3
Henry									2								2
Johnston										2							2
Washington											1						2
C. Pinckney																	1



J. Adams (Federalist) 71 electoral votes  
 Jefferson (Democratic-Republican (DR)) 68 electoral votes  
 T. Pinckney (Federalist) 59 electoral votes    Burr (Anti-Federalist) 30 electoral votes    S. Adams (DR) 15 electoral votes    Ellsworth (Federalist) 11 electoral votes    Clinton (DR) 7 electoral votes  
 Jay (Federalist) 5 electoral votes    Iredell (Federalist) 3 electoral votes    Henry (Independent) 2 electoral votes    Johnston (Federalist) 2 electoral votes    Washington (Federalist) 2 electoral votes    C. Pinckney (Federalist) 1 electoral vote

## ELECTION OF 1800

Before the ratification of the 12th Amendment in 1804, each elector cast votes for two different candidates. The candidate with the highest number of votes became president, while the candidate with the second highest total became vice president.

	CT	DE	GA	KY	MD	MA	NH	NJ	NY	NC	PA	RI	SC	TN	VT	VA	Total
Jefferson				4	4	5			12	8	8		8	3		21	73
Burr				4	4	5			12	8	8		8	3		21	73
Adams				9	3				5	16	6	7		4		4	65
Pinckney				9	3				5	16	6	7		4		3	64
Jay															1		1



Jefferson (Democratic-Republican)<sup>1</sup> 73 electoral votes  
 Adams (Federalist) 65 electoral votes  
 Burr (Democratic-Republican)<sup>1</sup> 73 electoral votes    Pinckney (Federalist) 64 electoral votes    Jay (Federalist) 1 electoral vote  
<sup>1</sup> As both Jefferson and Burr received the same number of electoral votes, the decision was referred to the House of Representatives.





**Nov. 5**  
Election Day



**Dec. 17**  
Electors vote in states  
**Dec. 25**  
Electors vote are due



**Jan. 6, 2025**  
Congress counts/  
certifies electoral votes  
**Jan. 20, 2025**  
Inauguration Day

## THE BASICS OF HOW IT WORKS

- $100+435+3 = 538/2 + 1 = 270$
- States of electors are submitted by each candidate
- State certifies its vote and awards electors, who then vote at the state capitol and the results are sent to Congress
- Electoral Count Act (1887) revised in 2022 to clarify that vice-president's role is procedural/custodial, not one of independent judgement



STATE OF ALABAMA  
CERTIFICATE OF VOTE  
ELECTORAL COLLEGE  
2000

*We, the undersigned, being duly elected Electors for President and Vice President of the United States of America, for the State of Alabama, at the General Election held on Tuesday, November 7, 2000, pursuant to the Constitution and laws of the United States and of this State, certify that the following candidates for President and Vice President received the following number of votes, by ballot, at the meeting of Electors held December 18, 2000, at the State Capitol in Montgomery, Alabama.*

FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

GEORGE W. BUSH

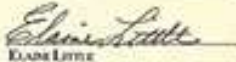
NUMBER OF ELECTOR VOTES: 9

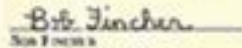
FOR VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

DICK CHENEY

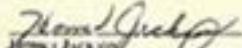
NUMBER OF ELECTOR VOTES: 9

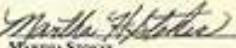
  
GUS DUNLAP

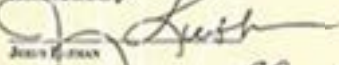
  
EDNA LITTLE

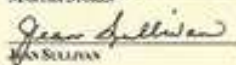
  
BOB FINCHER

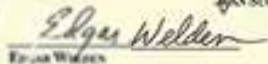
  
MELBA PETERS

  
HOMER JACKSON

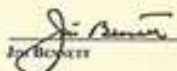
  
MARTHA STOKES

  
JERRY EDDAN

  
JOAN SULLIVAN

  
EDGAR WELDEN

*In Testimony Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the Great Seal of the State of Alabama at the State Capital in the City of Montgomery on this Eighteenth day of December, 2000.*

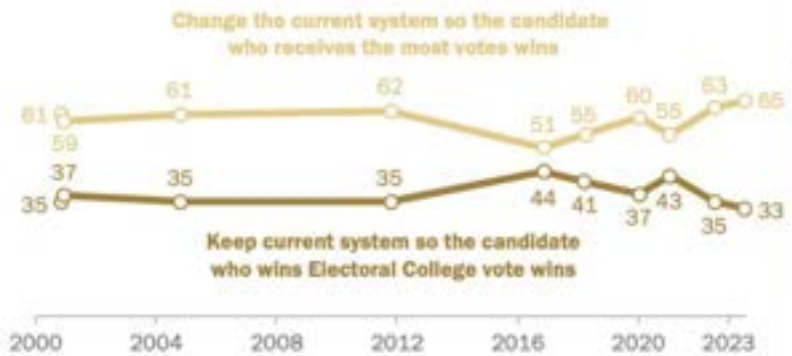
  
J. BENNETT  
SECRETARY OF STATE

# PROS

- Was the best plan for 1787
- Maintains role/identity for states
- Quick, decisive results (usually)
- We are used to it
- Maintains dominance of two-party system (maybe a con?)

## By about 2 to 1, Americans want popular vote, not Electoral College, to decide who is president

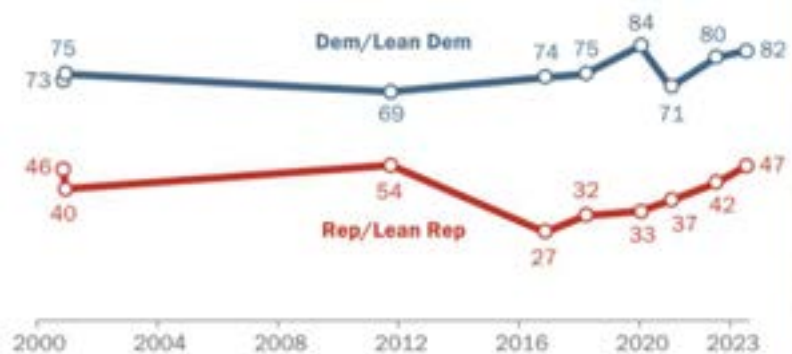
Thinking about the way the president is elected in this country, would you prefer to ... (%)



Note: Data prior to 2020 comes from telephone surveys. Data for 2016 is from CNN; data for 2000-2011 is from Gallup. Prior to 2020, the question asked about "amending the

## Most Democrats support moving to a popular vote for president, while Republicans are more divided

% who say the presidential election system should be changed so the candidate who receives the most nationwide votes wins ...



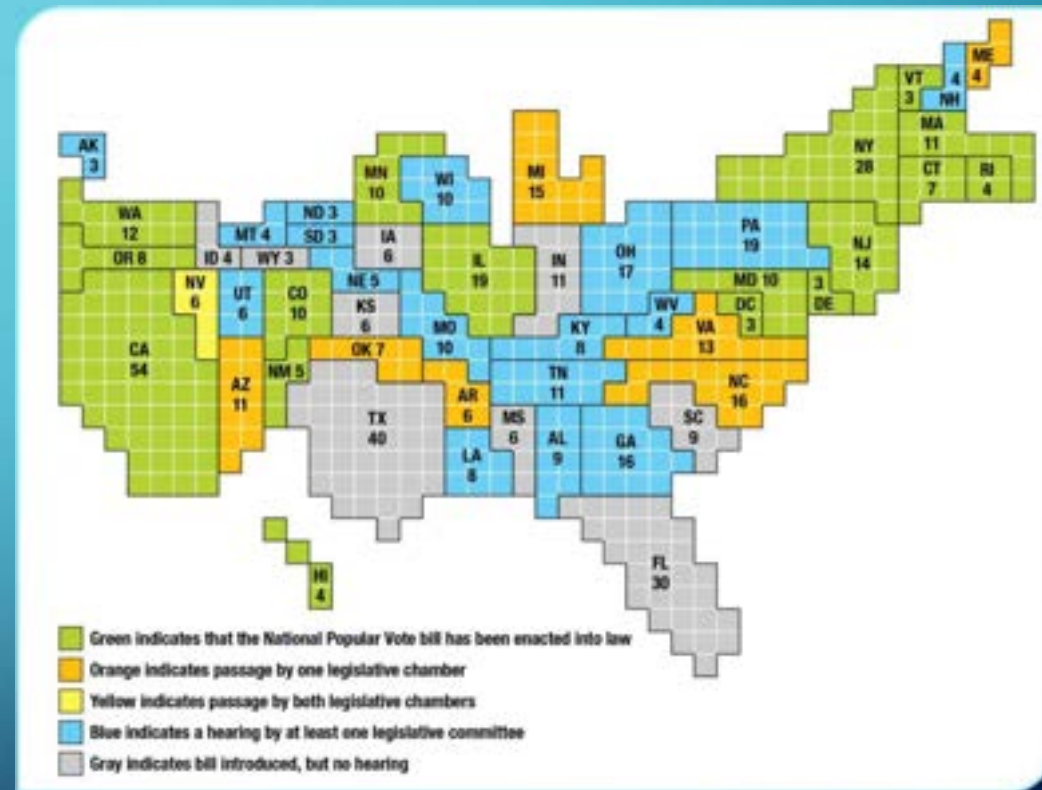
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## CONS

- Sometimes it fails: 1800, 1876, 2000, 2016
- Small state bias:
  - Wyoming: 194,686/elector
  - California: 721,578/elector
- People neither like it, nor understand it.
- Could changing demographics lead to more failure?

## HOW IT COULD BE CHANGED

- **Constitutional Amendment**
  - Popular but unlikely because 1/3 of states can block
- **National Popular Vote Compact**
  - 16 states, representing 205 electoral votes have agreed
- **Where do things stand now?**
  - NPVC could happen, but would be precarious
  - **Partisan challenge: Democrats have won 7/8 popular votes since 1992, but only 5/8 electoral votes.**







# CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

COMMENTS, QUESTIONS,  
DISCUSSION?

## REFERENCES/RESOURCES

- <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/09/25/majority-of-americans-continue-to-favor-moving-away-from-electoral-college/>
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_States\\_Electoral\\_College](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Electoral_College)
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electoral\\_Count\\_Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electoral_Count_Act)
- <https://www.nationalpopularvote.com/>