



## What is the Electoral College?

Often misunderstood today, the Electoral College was established early in our country's history and continues to play an important role in the American political process. Although the name suggests ivy-covered walls and classrooms filled with books, the Electoral College is responsible for formally selecting the next president and vice president of the United States.

On the night of the Presidential Election, most Americans stay tuned to news reports to find out who won. But even after the final votes are tallied and the winner is announced, our choice for president and vice president is not official until the Electoral College casts its votes.

The Electoral College is comprised of 538 people, known as electors, chosen nationwide to meet in their home states and cast one vote per person for president and vice president. Michigan has 16 electors to reflect the number of senators and representatives it has in the U.S. Congress. Presidential candidates on the Michigan ballot submit a list of 16 qualified electors to the Secretary of State's Office. The 16 electors whose candidate wins Michigan's popular vote will participate in the Electoral College at the State Capitol in December.

Electors pledge to support the candidate they represent and may not vote otherwise. Michigan voters can be assured that all 16 Michigan electoral votes automatically go to the presidential candidate winning the popular vote.

Most states distribute their Electoral College votes in the same "winner takes all" fashion as Michigan. However two states, Maine and Nebraska, apportion their electoral votes by congressional district.

To be elected president, a candidate must receive at least 270 of the 538 electoral votes cast nationwide. If no candidate receives 270 votes, the final decision is made by the U.S. House of Representatives. Only two American presidents have been chosen by the U.S. House of Representatives because they lacked enough Electoral College votes. In 1800, Thomas Jefferson and, in 1824, John Quincy Adams both took office after the election was sent to the House of Representatives.

To understand why the Electoral College, and not the people, ultimately determines who is president requires a brief look into our country's turbulent beginnings. The Electoral College was written into the U.S. Constitution in 1787, a time when our nation was new and still struggling in many ways, including politically. Of primary concern was the possibility of a nationwide election breaking down into chaos and confusion.

To counter the politically volatile environment of the late 18th century, the Electoral College was established to balance the state's and people's interests. The idea of mass communication and the dominant two-party political system we take for granted today could never have been anticipated by our country's first leaders as they wrestled with the problems of the early republic.

Our country was founded on the principle of government of the people, by the people and for the people. Voting is one of this country's most cherished rights. Our political system, including the Electoral College, is designed to ensure the full realization of this fundamental principle.

For more information, visit [U.S. Electoral College](#).