

The Electoral College System

The way we vote for a president was specified in Article II, Section I of the *Constitution of the United States of America*. It is a unique system of voting performed by **electors** who act on behalf of the general population.

Definition of the Electoral College: A group of persons called electors selected by the voters in each state and the District of Columbia: this group officially elects the president and vice-president of the United States. The number of electors in each state is equal to the number of each state's representatives in both chambers of Congress

Each state receives the same number as members of the House of Representatives plus 2 votes, one for each senator. See the attached Figure 9-4 Electoral Votes by State.

The Total Number of electors today is 538
100 Senators (2 per state)
435 House of Representatives (based on census population)
3 for the District of Columbia

The Electoral College system insulates the president from direct popular control as he is not elected by the popular vote. In fact, there have been several presidents who did not win the **Popular Vote** but did win the Electoral College Vote, namely: Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon (1968), Bill Clinton (1992 & 1996) and George W. Bush in 2000

One of the main reasons for this was there was a strong, third party candidate who took away valuable votes from the elected president.

A major problem with the Electoral College System is **Plurality**
A number of votes cast for a candidate that is greater than the number of votes for any other candidate but not necessarily a majority
For example a 40% vote can win and the person can become president.

What often happens is that minor parties have a difficulty winning any election or nomination as voters choose not to vote for them as they have a low percentage of winning, even if their candidate is the better person for the job!

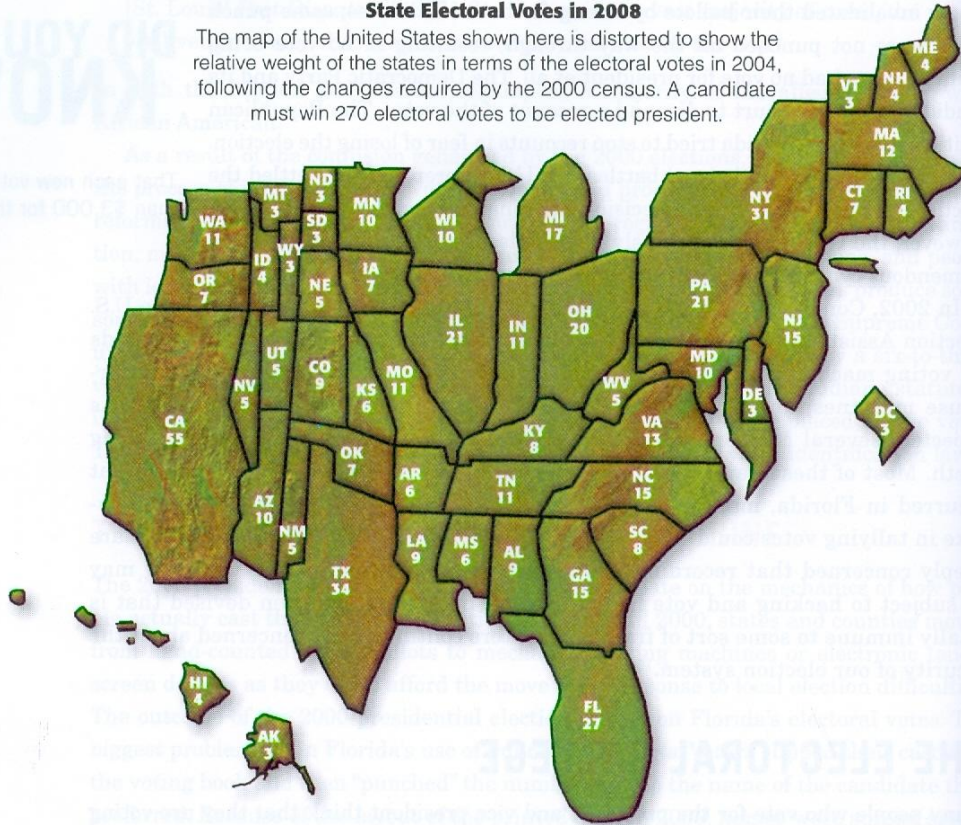
In all but two states (Maine and Nebraska) if a presidential candidate wins a **Plurality** in the state then all of the states votes go to that candidate

Change in the Electoral College System may be forthcoming. In 2007, the **National Popular Vote Movement** was established and already two states have approved this system with several others considering its adoption for the next presidential election in 2012. However, anything that changes the *Constitution* requires a Constitutional Amendment which is not an easy task.

FIGURE 9-4 Electoral Votes by State

State Electoral Votes in 2008

The map of the United States shown here is distorted to show the relative weight of the states in terms of the electoral votes in 2004, following the changes required by the 2000 census. A candidate must win 270 electoral votes to be elected president.



2008 Presidential Election Results

