



Washington won the first two presidential elections with 100% of the electoral vote, each time.

## Electoral College

Trump won the 2016 presidential election with 46.1% of the popular vote; Clinton got 48.2%.



### Functions and Constitutional Guidelines

The Electoral College consists of 538 electors, who cast votes for the President and Vice President of the United States. States are granted a number of electoral votes equal to the number of their Senators and Representatives; Washington, D.C. is given 3 votes. 435 Representatives and 100 Senators, plus WDC's 3, make 538 votes, and so a candidate needs 270 (a majority of 538) to win.

The Constitution allows each state to decide how its electors are chosen. All but 2 states (Maine and Nebraska) have a winner take all system, where each state awards all of their electoral votes to the candidate who gets the most popular votes from that state. For example, Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election got 61.7% of California's popular vote, but all 55 of California's electoral votes. The EC and this winner take all system create the possibility of losing the popular vote, but winning the electoral vote. You don't need even a majority of popular votes in any single state—all you need is the most votes (a plurality) in enough states to give you 270 electoral votes.

### Was its purpose to thwart the will of the people?

No. At that time, even if a nation had popular voting for a representative legislature, usually the King would appoint the chief executive. Just having the people vote for electors, who would then vote for the President, was a major step in the direction of power to the people.

The delegates who were most vocal about limiting the power of the national government, were the most opposed to popular elections for the President. Some wanted to have direct popular elections; others wanted Congress or the state legislatures to vote for the President. Some didn't want a President elected by an already existing body of officials because that would weaken the President; or it would invite foreign intrigue. Critics of direct popular elections argued that factions would dominate them. So the Electoral College came into being as a compromise.

### Reasons to Retain It

Some have suggested that we should get rid of the Electoral College, and have our President elected by direct popular vote. In 4 of our 58 presidential elections, the winner of the popular vote has not gotten the most electoral votes. A direct popular vote would eliminate this scenario.

However, the EC actually *protects* the will of the people. The will of the people could and probably would, be violated if the electoral college were to be dismantled, because:

- (1) More votes go to losers of popular vote now (like Trump), than would if the EC were abolished, and a multiparty system were to develop
- (2) Motivation for cheating is greatly reduced under the EC
- (3) Militant, radical votes are channeled into the two mainstream parties under the EC
- (4) The EC has functioned to channel the popular will fairly effectively for over 225 years (54 out of 58 elections have allotted the victory to the winner of the popular vote). If we tinker with the system, who knows what evils might occur, that nobody can predict right now?