

In the USA, the President is not elected directly by the people, but through the Electoral College. The process of electing a president by voting for electors and not by a popular vote is something that goes back to the framers (see [The Declaration of Independence](#)) of the Constitution, and it is a compromise between various ideas. Some of the framers wanted Congress to elect the President, others wanted state legislatures to decide, and others still wanted a popular vote. The outcome was an Electoral College that would elect the President. The framework of the election process is described in the Constitution.

This system is quite different from Denmark where we vote directly for either a candidate or a party. In Denmark each party has a list of their candidates in each voting district which the voters in that district may choose from. As you can see in the illustration to the right, there are a few more steps in the American election process.

The USA

People vote for a candidate's electors

Electors cast their vote for president

The number of electoral votes decides the winner

The President is officially elected

DK

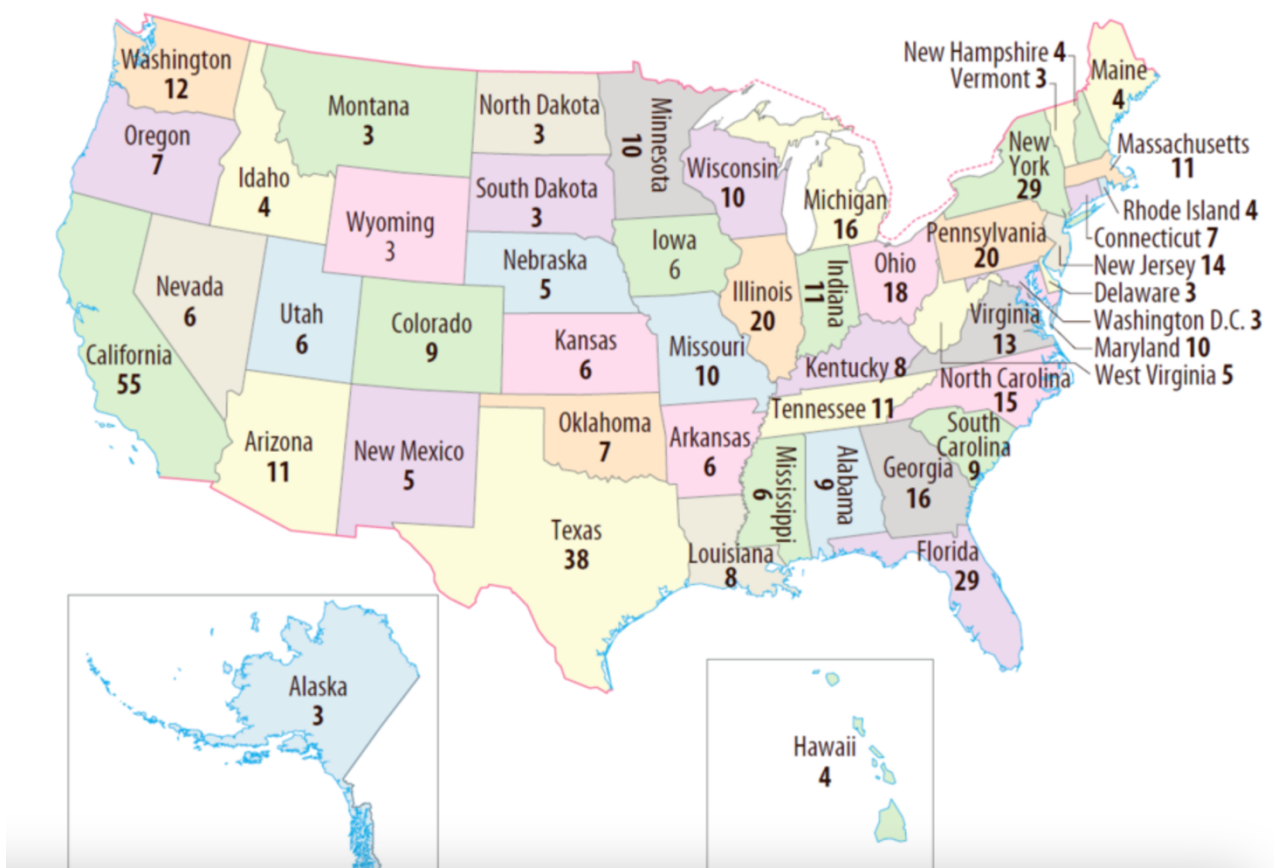
People vote for either a candidate or a party

Official count of all votes

The bloc with the most votes is the winner. The winning party within the bloc forms a coalition government with parties with similar interests – most often 1-3 other parties

Despite the name, the Electoral College is not a school, but should rather be looked upon as a process. According to Merriam Webster's dictionary, 'college' means, "an organized body of persons engaged in a common pursuit". Therefore, the Electoral College is a group of people brought together to elect a president. There are 538 *electors* in total, and 270 *electors* are needed to elect a president. The number of electors in each state corresponds to the number of congressional delegates. The number of congressional delegates depends on the number of citizens in each state. This means that a densely populated state like California will have more electors than a thinly populated state like Kansas, for example. So, the densely populated states are important for the candidates to win because of the higher number of electors. The total number of electors corresponds to the number of members of the House of Representatives and the two Senators. For example, Oregon has five Representatives and two Senators, which amount to seven, corresponding to seven electors. The map below shows the distribution of electors in the different states.

Distribution of Electors in each State



The Electoral College consists of people chosen because of their service and loyalty to one of the political parties. Because they are loyal to the party, people can trust them to cast their vote for the right candidate. Exactly how these electors are chosen varies throughout the USA. Most often, it is the political parties that nominate the electors at their state party conventions, or by a vote in the party's central committee within each state.

When the voters vote on Election Day, they choose one of the presidential candidates' names. Once the count is complete, one candidate will have the majority of votes. This candidate receives *all* the electors of this state. This system is called 'the winner takes it all'. It means that if one candidate gets 51 % of the votes in a particular state, he gets *all* the electors, despite the fact that 49 % chose the other candidate. Independents may affect the elections by 'stealing' voters from one of the candidates. For instance, if 10 % of traditional Democratic voters choose to vote for the Independent, the Democratic candidate will be deprived of this 10 %. This may tilt the balance to the Republican's advantage, giving him the majority. Due to 'the winner takes it all' system, he gets all the electors. Nebraska and Maine use another system where the electors are distributed proportionally according to the number of votes.

In December of election year, the electors meet and cast the official vote for the presidency. On January 20th the new President is inaugurated and takes office.