

The Electoral College

The Electoral College is a unique method for indirectly electing the president of the United States. It was established by [Article II, Section 1, Clause 2 of the U.S. Constitution](#) and modified by the [12th](#) and [23rd Amendments](#).

The Electoral College consists of a total of [538 members](#), one for each U.S. senator and representative, and three additional electors representing the District of Columbia. Each state has a number of electoral votes equal to the combined total of its congressional delegation, and each state legislature is free to determine the method it will use to select its own electors.

Currently, all states select electors through a popular vote (although how that vote works can differ), but that was not always the case throughout American history. In many states, the state legislature selected electors, a practice which was common until the mid-1800s.

The following is a summary of how the Electoral College will work in the 2020 presidential election:

- **Spring and Summer 2020: *Nomination of Electors.*** The political parties in each state nominate their electors. Parties and states have different ways of going about this, but a party's presidential electors are generally loyal or consistent party members. The parties want to be sure they can rely on their electors to cast their votes for the party's nominee for president.
- **Nov. 3, 2020: *Election Day,*** when voters in each state will select their presidential electors. The names of electors are not on the ballot in most states. Rather, when a voter casts a vote for a presidential candidate, s/he is also casting a vote for the electors already selected by the party of that candidate. If a majority of voters in a state vote for the Republican candidate for president, the Republican slate of electors is elected. If a majority vote for the Democratic candidate, the Democratic slate of electors is chosen.
- **Dec. 8, 2020: *Deadline for Resolving Election Disputes.*** All state recounts and court contests over presidential election results must be completed by this date.
- **Dec. 14, 2020: *Meeting of the Electors.*** The electors meet in each state and cast their ballots for president and vice president. Each elector votes on his or her own ballot and signs it. The ballots are immediately transmitted to various people: one copy goes to the president of the U.S. Senate (who is also the vice president of the United States); this is the copy that will be officially counted later. Other copies go to the state's secretary of state, the National Archives and Records Administration, and the presiding judge in the district where the electors meet (this serves as a backup copy that would replace the official copy sent to the president of the Senate if it is lost or destroyed).
- **Dec. 23, 2020: *Deadline for Receipt of Ballots.*** The electors' ballots from all states must be received by the president of the Senate by this date. There is no penalty for missing this deadline.
- **Jan. 6, 2021: *Counting of the Electoral Ballots.*** The U.S. Congress meets in joint session to count the electoral votes.
- **Jan. 20, 2021: *Inauguration Day.*** The president-elect becomes the president of the United States.