



Background Reading for Role-Play the Vote

Many people feel that the Electoral College is an outmoded method for electing the United States president, but dismantling it – or even modifying it – could have unexpected consequences. The original intent of the Electoral College as outlined in the Constitution was to protect the importance of states as geopolitical units. Each state elects a number of electors equal to the number of U.S. Congressional districts in the state plus two (the number of U.S. senators from each state), thus ensuring that every state has at least three electors. In 1961, the 23rd Amendment provided Electoral College representation for the District of Columbia.

The Constitution does not specify how the members of the Electoral College will be determined. In almost all states, the winner of all electoral votes is determined by the statewide winner of the popular vote in a winner-take-all contest. However, two states have a different system. In Maine and Nebraska, each congressional district is represented by an elector selected by the popular vote in that district, and two electors are awarded to the winner of the statewide popular vote.

Maine also uses an innovative approach to voting known as ranked choice voting. Instead of selecting only one candidate, voters rank all candidates in their order of preference. If no candidate receives at least 50% of the vote, the candidate with the fewest number of votes is dropped. Ballots that were cast for the dropped candidate as first choice are recounted with each voter's second choice counting as their vote. The process repeats until one candidate receives at least 50% of the votes. This method is also called an instant run-off since there is no need to hold a second election if a winner doesn't emerge from the first round of vote counting.

Another scenario that has been suggested and ratified by 15 states is the National Popular Vote plan. According to this plan, the electoral votes of each state would go to the national winner of the popular vote instead of to the winner of the state popular vote. This plan has been enacted into law in 15 states, but it is connected to an interstate compact that it will only go into effect when, and if, enough states ratify the plan to carry the majority of the electoral votes. This plan would ensure that the candidate who wins the national popular vote also wins the Electoral College vote.