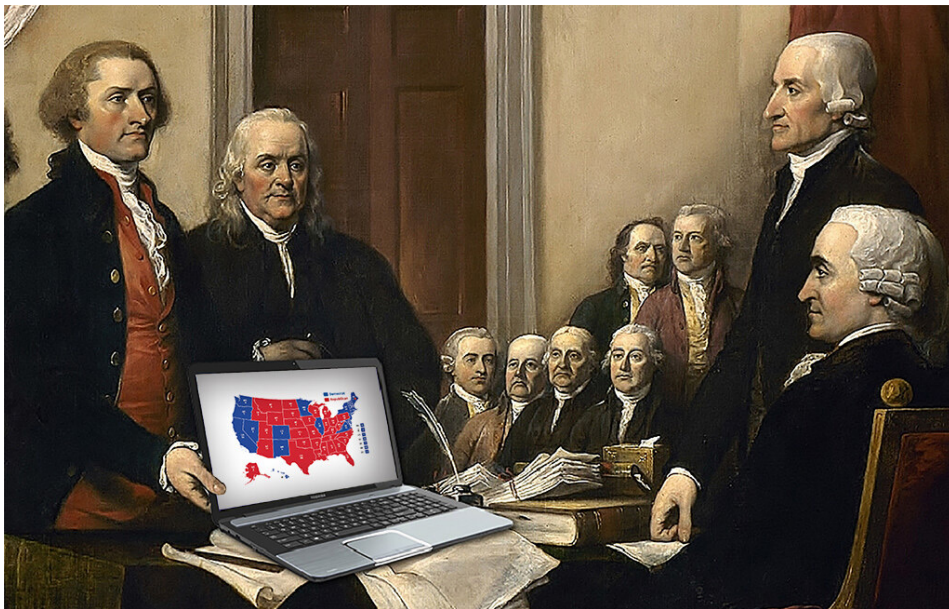

Electoral College

In 1787, the Framers of the Constitution debated for months about how the new U.S. president should be chosen. There was no historical evidence to guide them on how presidential elections should work. Uncertainty prevailed among the members of the Constitutional Convention. Would the people be informed voters? Would presidential candidates interfere with the elections? Would some states have more power than others? Weighing these questions and more, the Framers considered their many options for choosing the country's leader.



The Framers' ultimate goal was to establish a representative democracy. They wanted to create a limited government and a system of balanced power for the sake of U.S. citizens. They knew that, above all else, the election of the executive branch needed to reflect these principles.

During the Constitutional Convention, the Framers struggled with establishing a fair representation system in the presidential election. They had to consider the interests of not only the federal and state governments but also those of U.S. citizens. Through compromise, the delegates decided that the executive branch would be elected by both the people and the states. A federal body called the Electoral College was created to bridge the gap between these two groups.

Today, Article II of the Constitution and the 12th Amendment explain the electoral process. Each state is assigned a certain number of electors based on their number of representatives and senators in Congress. Washington, D.C., is also given three Electoral College votes because the people who live there are not represented in Congress.

Each state's residents decide who will represent them in the Electoral College. These electors are responsible for knowing the voting results from their states. Most electors then commit all of their electoral votes to the popular winner for their states. This is sometimes referred to as a "winner takes all" philosophy.

With this system in place, a presidential candidate can be elected without receiving the majority of the popular vote. In the 21st century, two presidents who lost the popular vote have been elected by the Electoral College. For some, these results warrant a reexamination of the electoral college system. This week, you will explore the possible arguments in favor of and against the electoral college system and decide for yourself