



## Scholar Exchange: Learning About National Elections

# Introductory Class Outline and Worksheet

### INTERACTIVE CONSTITUTION RESOURCES

- Resources for [Learning About National Elections](#)

### CLASS OUTLINE

- INTRODUCTION
- PART I: INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN ELECTIONS
- PART II: THE FOUNDING STORY
- PART III: FAITHLESS ELECTOR CASES

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What is the basic constitutional framework for elections in the United States?
- When do they happen, and why?
- What is the Electoral College, and how does it work?
- Why did the Framers create the Electoral College, and what were the arguments behind their decision?
- What was the Twelfth Amendment, and how did it alter the original Constitution's Electoral College system?
- How have the states implemented the Electoral College over time?
- What has the Supreme Court said about the Electoral College?
- What are the modern debates over the Electoral College?

### BIG TAKEAWAYS

- First, the Original Constitution left elections and voting largely to the states. So, it's a story of [federalism](#) and state power. That's why elections for things like state Governors, state legislators, mayors, county legislatures, town councils, and school boards happen at different times in different places. The Constitution left those decisions largely to the state and local governments themselves. So, some of your parents may be voting for Governors and school board members this year. And some of them may have to wait for another year.

- Second, the Original Constitution created different election timetables for different parts of the *national* government. Members of the U.S. House of Representatives are elected every *two* years. Members of the U.S. Senate are elected every *six* years—with only 1/3 of the Senate up for election at any time. The President is elected every *four* years. So, the President's term is in between those of the U.S. House (the shortest) and the U.S. Senate (the longest).
- Several Amendments extend protections to new groups, including protections based on race (Fifteenth Amendment), sex (Nineteenth Amendment), and age (Twenty-Sixth Amendment). While the states still play a central role in elections, various Amendments establish an increased role for the national government in some contexts—most notably, through the enforcement clauses of the Fifteenth, Nineteenth, Twenty-Fourth, and Twenty-Sixth Amendments. (This is still a federalism story.) And we also see a new role for voters in Senate elections (Seventeenth Amendment) and DC voters in presidential elections (Twenty-Third Amendment).
- At the Founding, the Electoral College was a compromise between those who supported congressional election of the President and those who supported a role for the American people in selecting a President. Over time, the Electoral College has remained in place, but within this system (and beginning in our nation's earliest years), the American people have played a key role in presidential elections.

**NOTES:**

## WARM UP

Consider the following question:

**Can a state punish an Electoral College elector when she casts her vote for a presidential candidate that differs from the one that actually won the popular vote in that state in the most recent presidential election?**

## PART I: INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN ELECTIONS

What is one place that voting is mentioned in the Original Constitution?	
What does it say about voting?	

## Two Big Takeaways

1. The Constitution left elections and voting largely up to the \_\_\_\_\_. Voting is, therefore, a story of federalism.
2. The Original Constitution created different election timetables for different parts of the national government.
  - a. Members of the House of Representatives are elected every \_\_\_\_\_ years.
  - b. Members of the U.S. Senate are elected every \_\_\_\_\_ years.
  - c. The President is elected every \_\_\_\_\_ years.

## Voting Amendments

What is one voting amendment that has been added to the Constitution?	
What does it say about voting?	

## PART II: THE FOUNDING STORY

What were some big issues the Framers needed to address when creating the Executive Branch?

### The Election of 1800

Write down one word to describe the Electoral College before 1800.

Write down two words to describe the Electoral College's role in the election of 1800.

Write down three words to describe how the Electoral College has changed since 1800.

## PART III: FAITHLESS ELECTOR CASES

What is a "faithless elector"?

What did the Supreme Court decide in *Chiafalo v. State of Washington* and *Colorado v. Department of State*?