

Key terms

What's the deal with the Electoral College?

Crash Course: Big Questions on US Government • Episode 5

1. **Electoral College:** The group of people who actually cast their votes for president.

Each state's electors are pledged to reflect the will of that state's voters, and a candidate needs 270 of the 538 electoral votes to win, not necessarily to win the nationwide popular vote.

2. **Popular vote:** Where the people directly decide the winner of an election.

It's possible for a candidate to win the popular vote nationwide and still lose the presidency. That happened most recently in 2016.

3. **Slate of electors:** Group of electors a state gets in the electoral college.

The size of each state's slate equals the number of senators and representatives it has in Congress. Two electors for its senators, plus one for each House seat.

4. **Winner-takes-all:** When the party that gets the popular votes in a state receives all the state's electors.

Forty-eight states and Washington, D.C, use this method, meaning even a narrow win in a state delivers all of that state's electoral votes to one candidate. Maine and Nebraska are the exceptions, awarding some electors by congressional district.

- 5. Faithless elector:** An elector that votes against the candidate they are pledged to support.

It's rare, but it happened in 2016 when seven electors broke their pledges, costing Trump two electoral votes and Clinton five.

- 6. Battleground states:** States that have a decent shot of swinging one way or another in an election.

Because their outcome is uncertain, they tend to get most of the candidates' attention, advertising, and campaign visits.

- 7. National Popular Vote Interstate Compact:** An agreement between states to automatically give all their electoral votes to the winner of the national popular vote.

It wouldn't eliminate the Electoral College, but it would help ensure the nationwide popular-vote winner also wins the presidency.