

Who Elects the President? A look at the Electoral College in America and its alternatives.

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Students will debate in class the merits and faults of the Electoral College system, whether or not the system is relevant today, and the merits and faults of alternatives to the system. If it is necessary or desirable for balance students may be assigned positions for debate.

Questions for discussion

- What is the Electoral College?
- Why do we have an Electoral College?
- Evolution of voting rights in America
- What happens if a candidate fails to win a majority of the Electoral votes?
- What alternatives have been proposed to the Electoral College

Alternatives to the EC system

- Small electoral districts
- The Maine solution
- Proportional division of electoral votes
- Direct election of the President by nationwide popular vote

Problems and pitfalls of the Electoral College system

- A president may be elected with fewer popular votes than his opponent, lending a tinge of illegitimacy to his presidency.
- A close vote in one state can hold up an election, regardless of vote totals nationwide.
- Voters in less populous states have greater influence on the awarding of electors, and by extension actual votes, than do voters in more populous states. For example- Wyoming has 3 electoral votes (the minimum number allowable under the Constitution) for its population of about 750,000. South Carolina has 8 electoral votes for its population of about 4,000,000. In Wyoming, therefore, one electoral vote represents 250,000 people. In South Carolina one vote represents 500,000.
- Voter apathy may result from a feeling that "my vote does not matter."
- Students may suggest other problems.

Problems and pitfalls of alternate systems

- Multiple candidates may result in no one candidate receiving a majority of the popular vote. In fact this situation is quite common.
- What would happen under a popular system if no candidate won a majority? Would the election still go to the House of Representatives? Would the compromises that would result from that system reflect the will of the people any better than the electoral system?
- Students may suggest other issues

Assessment

Students will be tested on the Electoral College, and will be required to write an in class essay arguing either in favor of maintaining the current system or replacing the electoral college with another system. Students must adequately defend their choice.