



THE GILDER LEHRMAN
INSTITUTE *of* AMERICAN HISTORY

TEACHING CIVICS THROUGH HISTORY

How We Elect a President: The Electoral College (7–9)

by Tim Bailey

UNIT OVERVIEW

This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s Teaching Literacy through History resources, designed to align to the Common Core State Standards. These units were developed to enable students to understand, summarize, and evaluate original materials of historical significance. Through a step-by-step process, students will acquire the skills to analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned viewpoints on primary sources.

One of the most important and least understood processes in American government is how we elect a president. The Electoral College system was created by the members of the Constitutional Convention in 1787. The process is articulated in Article II of the United States Constitution. The Twelfth Amendment was added to the Constitution in 1804 to address problems with the selection of the president and vice president. Even today, many American citizens do not understand the purpose or workings of the Electoral College and its function in selecting the president and vice president of the United States. In addition, some people think the United States should do away with the Electoral College and institute a popular vote to elect the president.

Over the course of these lessons, students will learn about the history, purpose, and function of the Electoral College. The students will demonstrate their understanding by reading complex documents, answering questions, analyzing a map, and writing a short argumentative essay based on the texts.

UNIT OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Read and demonstrate an understanding of complex documents
- Identify main ideas, recognize conflicting arguments, and synthesize and draw logical inferences from text
- Answer questions referencing information from documents
- Write an essay addressing a prompt, citing specific evidence from documents
- As an extension exercise, examine, work with, and discuss past and present elections using a map
- Demonstrate understanding of the history, purpose, and function of the Electoral College

NUMBER OF CLASS PERIODS

This unit may be completed in two days along with homework assignment(s).

GRADE LEVEL(S) 7–9

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

You may select one or more Essential Questions from the following list as a framework for the lessons:

- In what ways is our nation’s election of a president democratic? . . . undemocratic?
- To what extent are presidents elected by the people?
- Should we maintain or change (reform) the way we elect our presidents?
- To what extent does the Electoral College insulate the selection of a president from “popular passion” and the “fury of democracy”?
- To what extent do our presidential elections reflect our nation’s democratic and republican ideas and governing principles?

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.9-10.1: Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content. (A) Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among the claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence. (B) Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying data and evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both claim(s) and counterclaims in a discipline-appropriate form and in a manner that anticipates the audience’s knowledge level and concerns.

LESSON 1

OVERVIEW

In this first lesson, students will read an article explaining the function of the Electoral College. Then, individually or in small groups, they will read arguments for and against the Electoral College and answer questions based on the text.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Read and demonstrate an understanding of complex documents
- Identify main ideas, recognize conflicting arguments, and synthesize and draw logical inferences from text
- Answer questions referencing information from documents
- Demonstrate understanding of the history, purpose, and function of the Electoral College

MATERIALS

- Article II, Section 1 and the Twelfth Amendment, US Constitution
- “How We Choose Our President: What Is the Electoral College?” by Tim Bailey based on the National Archives’ US Electoral College website, [archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college](https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college).
- Critical Thinking Questions: “How We Choose Our President”
- “Arguments for the Electoral College” adapted from “The Electoral College,” revised May 1992, by William C. Kimberling, Deputy Director, FEC Office of Election Administration, [fec.gov/pdf/eleccoll.pdf](https://www.fec.gov/pdf/eleccoll.pdf).
- “Arguments against the Electoral College” adapted from “The Electoral College,” revised May 1992, by William C. Kimberling, Deputy Director, FEC Office of Election Administration, www.fec.gov/pdf/eleccoll.pdf.
- Whiteboard, overhead projector, ELMO, or other display device

PROCEDURE

Note: This material will have deeper meaning if students are familiar with the elections of 1800, 1824, 1876, and 2000. Conversely, instruction on those elections could follow this lesson, with this lesson serving as an introduction.

1. For homework before this lesson, hand out copies of Article II, Section 1 of the United States Constitution and the Twelfth Amendment. Instruct the students to make notes about content they do not understand and prepare questions for in-class review.
2. Discuss the information in the Historical Background with the class.

3. Display Article II, Section 1 of the US Constitution and the Twelfth Amendment on an overhead or Elmo. “Share read” the text with the class by having the students follow along silently while you begin to read aloud, modeling prosody, inflection, and punctuation. Then ask the class to join in with the reading after a few sentences while you continue to read aloud, still serving as the model for the class. This technique will support struggling readers as well as English language learners (ELL).
4. Discuss the role of these documents in the establishment of the Electoral College and the presidential election process. If the students have questions, or it is obvious that they do not completely understand the purpose and function of the Electoral College, post their questions or issues prominently and leave room for answers.
5. Hand out “How We Choose Our President: What Is the Electoral College” and share read the text with the class as described above.
6. Divide the class into small groups, mixing students of various abilities so that there is a fair distribution of skill level in each group.
7. Hand out the Critical Thinking Questions: “How We Choose Our President” activity sheet. Depending on the ability of the students, you may want to model answers the questions linked to the first paragraph.
8. Give the groups time to discuss the questions and to write down their answers.
9. Review the answers with the students and return to the questions posted at the beginning of class to see if they can now answer those questions. Write down the agreed-upon answers for the whole class to see.
10. Distribute copies of the two handouts, “Arguments for the Electoral College” and “Arguments against the Electoral College.” Tell the students to read the two handouts for homework, noting any questions, and to be prepared to discuss the texts during the next class session. (If sufficient time remains, the students may begin these readings in class.

LESSON 2

OVERVIEW

Students will review and discuss the two handouts on the Electoral College that they previewed for homework. They will use the information to respond to questions and then write an argumentative essay using information from the documents.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Read and demonstrate an understanding of complex documents
- Identify main ideas, recognize conflicting arguments, and synthesize and draw logical inferences from text
- Answer questions referencing information from documents
- Write an essay addressing a prompt, citing specific evidence from documents
- As an extension exercise, examine, work with, and discuss past and present elections using a map
- Demonstrate understanding of the history, purpose, and function of the Electoral College

MATERIALS

- “Arguments for the Electoral College” adapted from “The Electoral College,” revised May 1992, by William C. Kimberling, Deputy Director, FEC Office of Election Administration, fec.gov/pdf/eleccoll.pdf.
- “Arguments against the Electoral College” adapted from “The Electoral College,” revised May 1992, by William C. Kimberling, Deputy Director, FEC Office of Election Administration, www.fec.gov/pdf/eleccoll.pdf.
- In Your Own Words: “Arguments for and against the Electoral College”
- “The Best Way to Elect the President of the United States”
- Whiteboard, overhead projector, ELMO, or other display device

PROCEDURE

1. Ask students whether the handouts they read for homework helped them understand the arguments for and against the Electoral College. If the students have questions, or it becomes obvious that they did not completely understand the arguments, post their questions or issues, leaving room for answers.
2. Hand out the In Your Own Words: “Arguments for and against the Electoral College” activity sheet, and ask the students to take out “Arguments for the Electoral College” and “Arguments against the Electoral College.”

3. Divide the class into small groups (either keeping the groups from the previous lesson or creating new groups), mixing students of various abilities so that there is a fair distribution of skill level in each group. You may choose to model answering the first question or two on the worksheet.
4. Give the groups time to discuss the questions and to write down their answers.
5. Review the answers with the students and return to the questions posted at the beginning of class to see if they can now answer those questions. Add agreed-upon answers for the whole class to see.
6. Hand out “The Best Way to Elect the President of the United States” and have students address the prompt as a take-home assignment: “In a short essay, make a series of arguments that supports either the current Electoral College system of electing the president or a change to a popular vote system.” Remind them to use evidence taken directly from the documents provided in the two lessons.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Students may continue their examination of the Electoral College system with a variety of extra credit assignments. Their projects may then be presented in class.

1. A student or a group of two or three students might examine samples of online graphs and / or maps that present visual representations of the Electoral College (for example, “Today’s Electoral College Map” at <http://election.princeton.edu/electoral-college-map/>). In order to receive extra credit the student must (a) explain how the image assists a viewer in understanding the Electoral College system and (b) demonstrate that the image is from a reliable and responsible source (newspaper, magazine, web site).

LESSONS 3 AND 4

OVERVIEW

In these two lessons, based on the foundational knowledge from the first two lessons, students will read, analyze, and assess current news articles about the Electoral College today. They will learn how to use the AllSides widget on the TCH webpage. AllSides.com is a website that identifies articles written from right, center, and left viewpoints on the political spectrum. The students will engage in group discussions that emphasize civil discourse and distinguishing facts from opinions.

MATERIALS

- Articles from AllSides.com on the TCH website, gilderlehrman.org/tcth and the AllSides website (www.AllSides.com) on the topic of the [Electoral College](#)
- Analyzing a News Article activity sheet
- Teacher’s Resource (optional): Civil Discourse Guidelines. The guidelines provided here are adapted from “Managing Difficult Classroom Discussions,” Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning, Indiana University Bloomington, citl.indiana.edu/teaching-resources.

PROCEDURE

1. Introduce the scope and purpose of the next two days. A demonstration of the AllSides material will allow students to comfortably begin to research materials that reflect a spectrum of right, center, and left viewpoints on the political scale.
2. Students will then explore (either in groups or individually) some of the articles concerning the controversial issues about the Electoral College.
3. You may assign three articles from AllSides representing different points on the political spectrum (right, center, left) or allow students to select their own three articles.
4. Students will read the three articles and complete the Analyzing a News Article activity sheet.
5. Facilitate a class discussion among the students about their responses to the questions in the activity sheet. To help maintain civil discourse throughout the discussion, you may ask the students to develop guidelines to follow as they discuss potentially divisive issues that affect them and their families or communities. We have provided examples of such guidelines on the Teacher’s Resource information in the handouts. Student input is important, and helping them create the rules for civil discourse themselves will give them greater commitment to follow those rules.
6. As a summary activity, students will develop an oral or written response to the following questions: “How do the important issues presented in the Electoral College articles reflect, refute, and/or compare with the text of the scholarly articles that explain how effectively the Electoral College functions to elect the President of the United States? Should the Electoral College be maintained, reformed, or abolished for future presidential elections?” Make sure the students cite evidence from the articles and use their historical and scholarly knowledge to support their viewpoints.

Current examples of news articles with their respective viewpoints (**L** for Left, **C** for Center, and **R** for Right) that are featured **on the AllSides website** include the following selections:

- a. “The Elective College Will Destroy America” (L)
- b. “The Supreme Court Declined an Invitation to Blow-up the Presidential Election” (L)
- c. “How America’s Electoral College Favors White Voters” (L)
- d. “Trump, Biden, and the Road to 270 Votes” (C)
- e. “Left-Wingers and Right-Wingers Disagree on Legitimacy of the Electoral College” (C)
- f. “U.S. Supreme Court Restricts ‘Faithless Electors’” (C)
- g. “High Court Opens Door to Electoral College Subversion” (C)
- h. “Supreme Court Rules that States Can Punish ‘Faithless Voters’” (R)
- i. “Why Republicans Should Get Behind a National Popular Vote Too” (R)
- j. “Voting Rights and Voter Fraud: VA Bill Is the Latest Effort by Democrats to ‘Kill’ Electoral College” (R)
- k. “Should We Keep the Electoral College?” (L, C, R) – a summary of three viewpoints

LESSON 5

OVERVIEW

The final component of the Electoral College unit is the design, development, and evaluation of a student civic engagement project. The projects will be supported by the historical background presented in Lessons 1 and 2; the ability to discuss, analyze, and assess articles on current issues; the students' interest in issues that relate to the presidential election; how the tabulated results of the popular vote and the Electoral College vote in their state as well as states across the nation affect and contribute to the outcome of the presidential election, and how these election results, both the popular and Electoral votes, affect and reflect the people's preferences in their communities, state, and entire nation. They will choose engagement activities, formulate action steps for implementation, and present on the effectiveness of their projects.

MATERIALS

- Civic Engagement Project Proposal activity sheet

PROCEDURE

1. Based on the knowledge and understanding of the historical roots of current civic and social issues facing their communities and the nation; their literacy, research, and critical thinking skills; and their experience discussing, analyzing, and assessing present-day articles written from different perspectives, the students will design and develop civics-outreach activity projects on topics that interest them with action steps for implementation.
2. The students may work collaboratively or independently to plan, implement, and present civic engagement activities or projects that relate to the process and procedures of electing the President of the United States.
3. The students will work collaboratively with you to develop a list of civic activities or projects related to popular participation in presidential elections and analysis and assessment of the factors in determining the outcome of the democratic process, that have an impact in their lives and the residents of their community and state. Some examples would include the following activities and projects:
 - Increasing student participation in voter registration drives
 - Poll-watching and assistance at election sites
 - Researching the status and prospect of establishing a more equitable redrawing of election district boundaries to counter gerrymandering
 - Developing a student referendum on whether or not the Electoral College needs to be maintained, reformed, or abolished
 - Creating a schoolwide "270 To Win" project for students, either individually or collaboratively, to track and subsequently report the presidential election results of the popular vote and corresponding awarding of electoral votes in their state, region, and the nation as well as develop, analyze, and assess how these election results (both popular and electoral)

- demonstrate and explain why one candidate was successful and the other candidate was unsuccessful in winning the presidential election
- Creating and conducting a poll of the student body’s viewpoints on such topics as lowering the voting age to sixteen, permitting online voting, expanding voter accessibility regarding opportunities for registration and casting ballots; etc.
4. Distribute the Civic Engagement Project Proposal activity sheet to each student or student group. The student or group will complete the Project Proposal and submit it to the teacher for evaluation and approval. The teacher should return it to them with suggestions and request revisions before signing off.
 5. Guidelines for student action projects:
 - Identify issues related to popular voting, the Electoral College, and the democratic process that affect and are important to students’ lives and their communities.
 - Select an issue to address.
 - Research the chosen issue and discuss what specific actions, decisions, and policies could improve the situation.
 - Plan an action or program that could effect change, keeping in mind what the specific goal is, who or what body or organization has power to facilitate or make the change, how that person or body can be approached, and what specific action-steps could impact and influence the person or body.
 - Carry-out and implement the action-steps (e.g., write letters, convene meetings with community members or officials, create flyers/exhibitions/websites, etc.), depending on the specific goals of the project.
 - Assess the effort when it is completed in order to understand its successes and challenges, and ways the students could continue learning and achieving progress in the future.
 6. Based on the time available and your students’ experiences, establish a schedule of due dates for implementation and presentation of the projects. Discuss what the challenges were and how the students addressed those challenges; how successful their civic engagement projects were; what they could do to be more effective in the future.

Article II, Section 1, US Constitution, ratified 1788

The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America. He shall hold his Office during the Term of four Years, and, together with the Vice President, chosen for the same Term, be elected, as follows:

Each State shall appoint, in such Manner as the Legislature thereof may direct, a Number of Electors, equal to the whole Number of Senators and Representatives to which the State may be entitled in the Congress: but no Senator or Representative, or Person holding an Office of Trust or Profit under the United States, shall be appointed an Elector.

The Congress may determine the Time of choosing the Electors, and the Day on which they shall give their Votes; which Day shall be the same throughout the United States.

No Person except a natural born Citizen, or a Citizen of the United States, at the time of the Adoption of this Constitution, shall be eligible to the Office of President; neither shall any Person be eligible to that Office who shall not have attained to the Age of thirty five Years, and been fourteen Years a Resident within the United States.

The President shall, at stated Times, receive for his Services, a Compensation, which shall neither be increased nor diminished during the Period for which he shall have been elected, and he shall not receive within that Period any other Emolument from the United States, or any of them.

Before he enter on the Execution of his Office, he shall take the following Oath or Affirmation:—"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my Ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

Twelfth Amendment, US Constitution, ratified 1804

The Electors shall meet in their respective states and vote by ballot for President and Vice-President, one of whom, at least, shall not be an inhabitant of the same state with themselves; they shall name in their ballots the person voted for as President, and in distinct ballots the person voted for as Vice-President, and they shall make distinct lists of all persons voted for as President, and of all persons voted for as Vice-President, and of the number of votes for each, which lists they shall sign and certify, and transmit sealed to the seat of the government of the United States, directed to the President of the Senate;—The President of the Senate shall, in the presence of the Senate and House of Representatives, open all the certificates and the votes shall then be counted;—The person having the greatest number of votes for President, shall be the President, if such number be a majority of the whole number of Electors appointed; and if no person have such majority, then from the persons having the highest numbers not exceeding three on the list of those voted for as President, the House of Representatives shall choose immediately, by ballot, the President. But in choosing the President, the votes shall be taken by states, the representation from each state having one vote; a quorum for this purpose shall consist of a member or members from two-thirds of the states, and a majority of all the states shall be necessary to a choice. [And if the House of Representatives shall not choose a President whenever the right of choice shall devolve upon them, before the fourth day of March next following, then the Vice-President shall act as President, as in case of the death or other constitutional disability of the President.]* The person having the greatest number of votes as Vice-President, shall be the Vice-President, if such number be a majority of the whole number of Electors appointed, and if no person have a majority, then from the two highest numbers on the list, the Senate shall choose the Vice-President; a quorum for the purpose shall consist of two-thirds of the whole number of Senators, and a majority of the whole number shall be necessary to a choice. But no person constitutionally ineligible to the office of President shall be eligible to that of Vice-President of the United States.

* Superseded by section 3 of the Twentieth Amendment.

How We Choose Our President: What Is the Electoral College?

1. When you vote for the president of the United States of America, you are in fact voting for some else to cast a vote in your place. That person is called an “elector,” and even though you vote for the next president on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November, 538 electors from across America will make the vote that counts on the first Monday after the second Wednesday in December. If all of this seems confusing, maybe the following will help to make it more understandable.
2. The process of choosing an elector to vote for the president instead of choosing the next president through your own vote is part of a system called “The Electoral College.” The Electoral College was established in Article II of the United States Constitution. This article explains that every state will get one vote for president for every person they send to the United States Congress. For example, Hawaii sends four people Congress: two to the US Senate and two to the House of Representatives. Therefore, because they have four congressional members, they get to choose four electors to vote for president. These electors pledge to vote the way the people in their state voted. For example, if most of the people in Hawaii voted for the Republican Party candidate in November, then all of the electors have promised to vote for the Republican Party candidate when they vote for the president in December. Nearly every state has this “winner-take-all” system (with the exception of Maine and Nebraska). If a presidential candidate wins by even one vote in California, he or she gets all 55 of California’s electoral votes. Currently, it takes 270 of the possible 538 electoral votes to win the election.
3. This system may seem strange since most of the elections that people are familiar with are “popular” elections. In a popular election the candidate who gets the most people to vote for him or her wins the race. However, because of the Electoral College system, this is not always the case for the presidency. In fact, four times in our country’s history the person who won the presidential election had fewer popular votes than the person who lost the election. Most recently, in 2000, President George W. Bush had 500,000 fewer popular votes than his opponent, Al Gore. Yet Bush was declared the president because he had 271 electoral votes to Gore’s 266. Then why was the Electoral College established in the first place if someone can win an election without getting the most popular votes?
4. There are several reasons the founders of our country created the Electoral College. First, it gave small states the power to help choose the president. This is a power that they would have lost in a popular election for president. For example, in 2012 more than 13,000,000 people of voting age lived in New York, and that state got 29 electoral votes for president. Compare that to the ten with the smallest populations. Although those ten states only had 6,000,000 voters combined, together they had 32 electoral votes. So although these states together had less than half the number of eligible voters that New York had, they got more electoral votes than New York. Therefore, the Electoral College allows small states a way to have a say about who would be president without being dominated by the big states. Second, transportation and technology at the time of the writing of the Constitution made it nearly impossible to hold a popular election for president. It would have taken months to gather all of the votes from across the country, count them, and send the results to

Washington D.C. because the fastest form of communication was a letter carried by a rider on a horse. Of course, now technology has made this issue obsolete. In fact, many people are calling for an end to the Electoral College. They think that a popular vote for president would encourage more people to vote. However, others think that the Electoral College has done a very good job of electing our nation's leader and should be kept as it is.

Source: Adapted from the National Archives' US Electoral College website, [archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college](https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college)

NAME _____ PERIOD _____ DATE _____

Critical Thinking Questions: "How We Choose Our President"

Answer the following questions based on information in the numbered paragraphs of "How We Choose Our President: What Is the Electoral College?"

In paragraph 1: (a) Who is an elector? (b) What is the responsibility of an elector?

In paragraph 2: (a) How are the number of electors determined for each state? (b) Explain the effect of the "winner takes all" system.

In paragraph 3: (a) What is meant by the term "popular election"? (b) How is it possible to win the popular election for president and still lose the election?

In paragraph 4: (a) What argument was used to support the creation of the Electoral College system? (b) Why have some people called for a change to a popular vote for president?

Arguments for the Electoral College

Proponents of the Electoral College system normally defend it on the philosophical grounds that it:

- contributes to the cohesiveness of the country by requiring a distribution of popular support to be elected president,
- enhances the status of minority interests,
- contributes to the political stability of the nation by encouraging a two-party system, and
- maintains a federal system of government and representation.

. . . Proponents argue that the Electoral College system **contributes to the cohesiveness of the country by requiring a distribution of popular support to be elected president**. Without such a mechanism, they point out, presidents would be selected either through the domination of one populous region over the others or through the domination of large metropolitan areas over the rural ones. Indeed, it is principally because of the Electoral College that presidential nominees are inclined to select vice presidential running mates from a region other than their own. For as things stand now, no one region contains the absolute majority (270) of electoral votes required to elect a president. . . . Such a unifying mechanism seems especially prudent in view of the severe regional problems that have typically plagued geographically large nations such as China, India, the Soviet Union, and even, in its time, the Roman Empire. . . .

. . . The Electoral College system is designed to work in a rational series of defaults: if, in the first instance, a candidate receives a substantial majority of the popular vote, then that candidate is virtually certain to win enough electoral votes to be elected president; in the event that the popular vote is extremely close, then the election defaults to that candidate with the best distribution of popular votes (as evidenced by obtaining the absolute majority of electoral votes); in the event the country is so divided that no one obtains an absolute majority of electoral votes, then the choice of president defaults to the States in the U.S. House of Representatives. One way or another, then, the winning candidate must demonstrate both a sufficient popular support to govern as well as a sufficient distribution of that support to govern. Proponents also point out that, far from diminishing minority interests by depressing voter participation, the Electoral College actually **enhances the status of minority groups**. This is so because the votes of even small minorities in a State may make the difference between winning all of that State's electoral votes or none of that State's electoral votes. And since ethnic minority groups in the United States happen to concentrate in those States with the most electoral votes, they assume an importance to presidential candidates well out of proportion to their number. . . . Changing to a direct election of the president would therefore actually damage minority interests since their votes would be overwhelmed by a national popular majority.

Proponents further argue that the Electoral College **contributes to the political stability of the nation** by encouraging a two-party system. There can be no doubt that the Electoral College has encouraged and helps to maintain a two-party system in the United States. This is true simply because it is extremely difficult for a new or minor party to win enough popular votes in enough States to have a chance of winning the presidency. Even if they won enough electoral votes to force the decision into the U.S.

House of Representatives, they would still have to have a majority of over half the State delegations in order to elect their candidate—and in that case, they would hardly be considered a minor party. In addition to protecting the presidency from . . . third-party movements, the practical effect of the Electoral College . . . is to virtually force third-party movements into one of the two major political parties. Conversely, the major parties have every incentive to absorb minor-party movements in their continual attempt to win popular majorities in the States. In this process of assimilation, third-party movements are obliged to compromise their more radical views if they hope to attain any of their more generally acceptable objectives. Thus we end up with two large, pragmatic political parties which tend to the center of public opinion rather than dozens of smaller political parties catering to divergent and sometimes extremist views. . . .

Finally, its proponents argue . . . that the Electoral College ***maintains a federal system of government and representation***. Their reasoning is that in a formal federal structure, important political powers are reserved to the . . . States. In the United States, for example, the House of Representatives was designed to represent the States according to the size of their population. . . . The Senate was designed to represent each State equally regardless of its population. And the Electoral College was designed to represent each State's choice for the presidency (with the number of each State's electoral votes being the number of its Senators plus the number of its Representatives). To abolish the Electoral College in favor of a nationwide popular election for president would strike at the very heart of the federal structure laid out in our Constitution and would lead to the nationalization of our central government—to the detriment of the States. . . . The fact is, they argue, that the original design of our federal system of government was thoroughly and wisely debated by the Founding Fathers. State viewpoints, they decided, are more important than political minority viewpoints. And the collective opinion of the individual State populations is more important than the opinion of the national population taken as a whole. Nor should we tamper with the careful balance of power between the national and State governments which the Founding Fathers intended and which is reflected in the Electoral College.

Source: Adapted from "The Electoral College," revised May 1992, by William C. Kimberling, Deputy Director, FEC Office of Election Administration, fec.gov/pdf/eleccoll.pdf.

Arguments against the Electoral College

Those who object to the Electoral College system and favor a direct popular election of the president generally do so on four grounds:

- the possibility of electing a minority [someone not receiving the majority of votes] president,
- the risk of so-called “faithless” Electors,
- the possible role of the Electoral College in depressing voter turnout, and
- its failure to accurately reflect the national popular will.

Opponents of the Electoral College are disturbed by ***the possibility of electing a minority president*** (one without the absolute majority of popular votes). Nor is this concern entirely unfounded since there are three ways in which that could happen. One way in which a minority president could be elected is if the country were so deeply divided politically that three or more presidential candidates split the electoral votes among them such that no one obtained the necessary majority . . . There are two possible resolutions: either one candidate could throw his electoral votes to the support of another (before the meeting of the Electors) or else, absent an absolute majority in the Electoral College, the U.S. House of Representatives would select the president in accordance with the 12th Amendment. . . . A second way in which a minority president could take office is if, as in 1888, one candidate’s popular support were heavily concentrated in a few States while the other candidate maintained a slim popular lead in enough States to win the needed majority of the Electoral College. . . . A third way of electing a minority president is if a third party or candidate, however small, drew enough votes from the top two that no one received over 50% of the national popular total. Far from being unusual, this sort of thing has, in fact, happened 15 times including (in [the twentieth] century) Wilson in both 1912 and 1916, Truman in 1948, Kennedy in 1960, Nixon in 1968, and Clinton in both 1992 and 1996. . . .

Opponents of the Electoral College system also point to ***the risk of so called “faithless” Electors***. A “faithless Elector” is one who is pledged to vote for his party’s candidate for president but nevertheless votes for another candidate. There have been 7 such Electors in [the twentieth] century and as recently as 1988 when a Democrat Elector in the State of West Virginia cast his votes for Lloyd Bentsen for president and Michael Dukakis for vice president instead of the other way around. . . .

Opponents of the Electoral College are further concerned about ***its possible role in depressing voter turnout***. Their argument is that, since each State is entitled to the same number of electoral votes regardless of its voter turnout, there is no incentive in the States to encourage voter participation. Indeed, there may even be an incentive to discourage participation (and they often cite the South here) so as to enable a minority of citizens to decide the electoral vote for the whole State. . . .

Finally, some opponents of the Electoral College point out . . . ***its failure to accurately reflect the national popular will*** in at least two respects. First, the distribution of Electoral votes in the College tends to over-represent people in rural States. This is because the number of Electors for each State is determined by the number of members it has in the House (which more or less reflects the State’s population size) plus the number of members it has in the Senate (which is always two regardless of the

State's population). The result is that in 1988, for example, the combined voting age population (3,119,000) of the seven least populous jurisdictions of Alaska, Delaware, the District of Columbia, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming carried the same voting strength in the Electoral College (21 Electoral votes) as the 9,614,000 persons of voting age in the State of Florida. Each Floridian's potential vote, then, carried about one third the weight of a potential vote in the other States listed. A second way in which the Electoral College fails to accurately reflect the national popular will stems primarily from the winner-take-all mechanism whereby the presidential candidate who wins the most popular votes in the State wins all the Electoral votes of that State. One effect of this mechanism is to make it extremely difficult for third-party or independent candidates ever to make much of a showing in the Electoral College. If, for example, a third-party or independent candidate were to win the support of even as many as 25% of the voters nationwide, he might still end up with no Electoral College votes at all unless he won a plurality of votes in at least one State. And even if he managed to win a few States, his support elsewhere would not be reflected. By thus failing to accurately reflect the national popular will, . . . the Electoral College reinforces a two-party system, discourages third-party or independent candidates, and thereby tends to restrict choices available to the electorate.

Source: Adapted from "The Electoral College," revised May 1992, by William C. Kimberling, Deputy Director, FEC Office of Election Administration, www.fec.gov/pdf/eleccoll.pdf.

NAME _____ PERIOD _____ DATE _____

In Your Own Words: Arguments for and against the Electoral College

Begin with “Arguments for the Electoral College.” There is a statement in **bold type** in each paragraph. Use your own words to explain that statement.

Paragraph 1: **“contributes to the cohesiveness of the country by requiring a distribution of popular support to be elected president”**

Paragraph 2: **“enhances the status of minority groups”**

Paragraph 3: **“contributes to the political stability of the nation”**

Paragraph 4: **“maintains a federal system of government and representation”**

Which of the four arguments for the Electoral College is most convincing? Explain your answer.

NAME _____ PERIOD _____ DATE _____

Continue with "Arguments against the Electoral College." There is a statement in **bold type** in each paragraph. Use your own words to explain that statement.

Paragraph 1: **"the possibility of electing a minority president"**

Paragraph 2: **"the risk of so called 'faithless' Electors"**

Paragraph 3: **"its possible role in depressing voter turnout"**

Paragraph 4: **"its failure to accurately reflect the national popular will"**

Which of the four arguments against the Electoral College is most convincing? Explain your answer.

NAME _____ PERIOD _____ DATE _____

Analyzing a News Article

Source: _____
newspaper/magazine/website

Article Title: _____

Date published: _____

1. What did you already know about this topic?

2. Basic information presented:

Who?

What?

When?

Where?

Why?

How?

3. Does your article have a right/center/left point of view? What evidence leads you to that conclusion?

NAME _____ PERIOD _____ DATE _____

Civic Discourse Guidelines*

1. Listen respectfully without interrupting.
2. Allow everyone the opportunity to speak.
3. Criticize ideas, not individuals or groups
4. Avoid inflammatory language, including name-calling.
5. Ask questions when you don't understand; don't assume you know others' thinking or motivations.
6. Don't expect any individuals to speak on behalf of their gender, ethnic groups, class, status, etc. (or the group(s) we perceive them to be a part of).
7. Base your arguments on evidence, not assumptions.

*These guidelines provided here are adapted from "Managing Difficult Classroom Discussions," Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning, Indiana University Bloomington, citl.indiana.edu/teaching-resources/diversity-inclusion.

NAME _____ PERIOD _____ DATE _____

Civic Engagement Project Proposal

Name _____ Date _____ Period _____

Project Title: _____

Project Participant(s): _____

Project Goal: _____

Action Steps: _____

Teacher's Comments

Questions to Consider:

Revisions Needed:

Approved: _____