

Basic Overview of Electoral College and Role of Swing States in U.S. Presidential Elections

Brief Introduction to the Electoral College System

from [USA.GOV](#)

[Schoolhouse Rock video: Electoral College](#)

url - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKWdxWvm-QI>

The Electoral College decides who will be elected president and vice president of the U.S. Learn who is involved and how the process works.

The Electoral College is not a physical place. It is a **process** which includes the:

- Selection of electors
- Meeting of electors who cast votes for the president and vice president
- Counting of the electors' votes by Congress

In other U.S. elections, candidates are elected directly by popular vote. But the president and vice president are not elected directly by citizens. Instead, they are chosen through the Electoral College process.

The process of using electors comes from the Constitution. It was a compromise between a popular vote by citizens and a vote in Congress.

Who is in the Electoral College?

Each state gets as many electors as it has members of Congress (House and Senate). Including Washington, D.C.'s three electors, there are currently 538 electors in all. [Find out how many electoral votes each state gets.](#)

Each state's political parties choose their own slate of potential electors. Who is chosen to be an elector, how, and when varies by state. [Learn more about how electors are chosen.](#)

How does the Electoral College process work?

1. After you cast your ballot for president, your vote goes to a statewide tally. In 48 states and Washington, D.C., the winner gets all the electoral votes for that state. Maine and Nebraska assign their electors using a proportional system.
2. A candidate needs the vote of at least 270 electors—more than half of all electors—to win the presidential election.
3. In most cases, a projected winner is announced on election night in November after you vote. But the actual Electoral College vote takes place in mid-December when the electors meet in their states. See the [Electoral College timeline of events](#) for the 2020 election.

While the Constitution does not require electors to vote for the candidate chosen by their state's popular vote, some states do. The rare elector who votes for someone else may be fined, disqualified, and replaced by a substitute elector. Or they may even be prosecuted by their state.

[Learn more about how the Electoral College works.](#)

Unusual Electoral College scenarios

- 1) **Winning the popular vote but losing the election** - It is possible to [win the Electoral College but lose the popular vote](#). This happened in 2016, 2000, and three times in the 1800s.
- 2) **What happens if no candidate wins the majority of electoral votes?** If no candidate receives the majority of electoral votes, [the vote goes to the House of Representatives](#). This has happened twice. The first time was following the 1800 presidential election when the House chose Thomas Jefferson. And following the 1824 presidential election, the House selected John Quincy Adams as president.

What is a Swing State?

[From Wikipedia](#), the free encyclopedia (edited down/shortened for brevity's sake) with *brief additional information in italics*

In [American politics](#), a **swing state** (also known as **battleground state**, **toss-up state**, or **purple state**) is any state that could reasonably be won by either the [Democratic](#) or [Republican](#) candidate in a statewide election, most often referring to [presidential elections](#), by a [swing](#) in votes. These states are usually targeted by both [major-party campaigns](#), especially in competitive elections.^[1] Meanwhile, the states that regularly lean to a single party are known as "safe states" (or more specifically as "[red states](#)" and "[blue states](#)" depending on the partisan leaning), as it is generally assumed that one candidate has a base of support from which a sufficient share of the electorate can be drawn without significant investment or effort by the campaign.

Due to the [winner-take-all](#) method most states use to determine their [presidential electors](#), candidates often campaign only in competitive states, which is why a select group of states frequently receives a majority of the advertisements and candidate visits.^[2] The battlegrounds may change in certain [election cycles](#) and may be reflected in overall polling, demographics, and the [ideological appeal](#) of the nominees.

Swing states for the 2024 Presidential Election (by general consensus):

Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio

Background

In [American presidential elections](#), each state is free to decide the method by which its electors to the [Electoral College](#) will be chosen. To increase its [voting power in the Electoral College system](#), every state, with the exceptions of [Maine](#) and [Nebraska](#), has adopted a [winner-take-all](#) system, where the candidate who wins the most popular votes in a state wins all of that state's electoral votes.^[3]

The expectation was that the candidates would look after the interests of the states with the most electoral votes. However, in practice, most voters tend not to change party allegiance from one election to the next, leading presidential candidates to concentrate their limited time and resources campaigning in those states that they believe they can [swing](#) towards them or stop states from swinging away from them, and not to spend time or resources in states they expect to win or lose.

Because of the electoral system, the campaigns are less concerned with increasing a candidate's national popular vote, tending instead to concentrate on the popular vote only in those states which will provide the electoral votes it needs to win the election, as many successful candidates have [lost the popular vote](#) but won the electoral college.