

Chapter 13: The Presidency

Section 5

Lecture Notes



AMERICAN
GOVERNMENT

PEARSON

► Objectives

1. Describe the features of the presidential campaign.
2. Explain how the electoral college provides for the election of the President.
3. Identify several flaws in the electoral college system.
4. Outline the advantages and disadvantages of proposed reforms of the electoral college.

▶ Key Terms

- **swing voter:** a voter who has not made up his or her mind at the start of a campaign
- **battleground State:** a State in which either candidate could win
- **district plan:** a plan in which each State chooses electors as it chooses members of Congress

▶ Key Terms, cont.

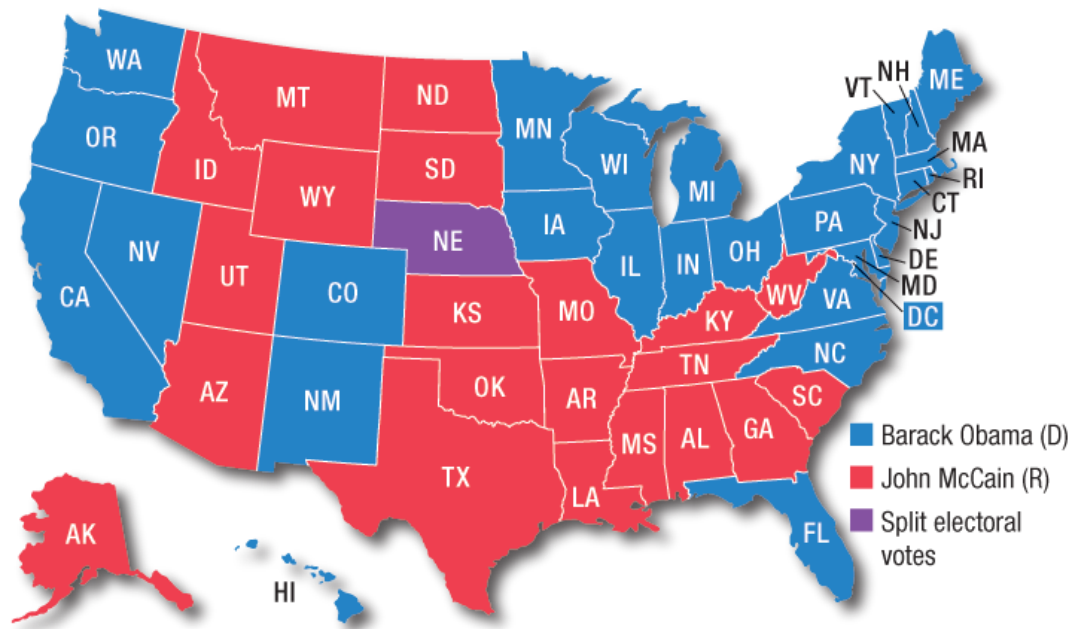
- **proportional plan:** a plan that gives each presidential candidate a share of the State electoral vote equal to his or her share of the State popular vote
- **direct popular election:** a plan that would abolish the electoral college and replace it with a direct popular vote for president
- **national popular vote plan:** a plan to reform the electoral system to accomplish a direct popular vote

► Introduction

- Does the election process serve the goals of American democracy today?
 - This question is still widely debated.
 - Critics note that the current electoral process does not always elect the winner of the popular vote.
 - Supporters note that the winner of the popular vote usually wins the presidency and that the current process preserves the influence of the individual States.

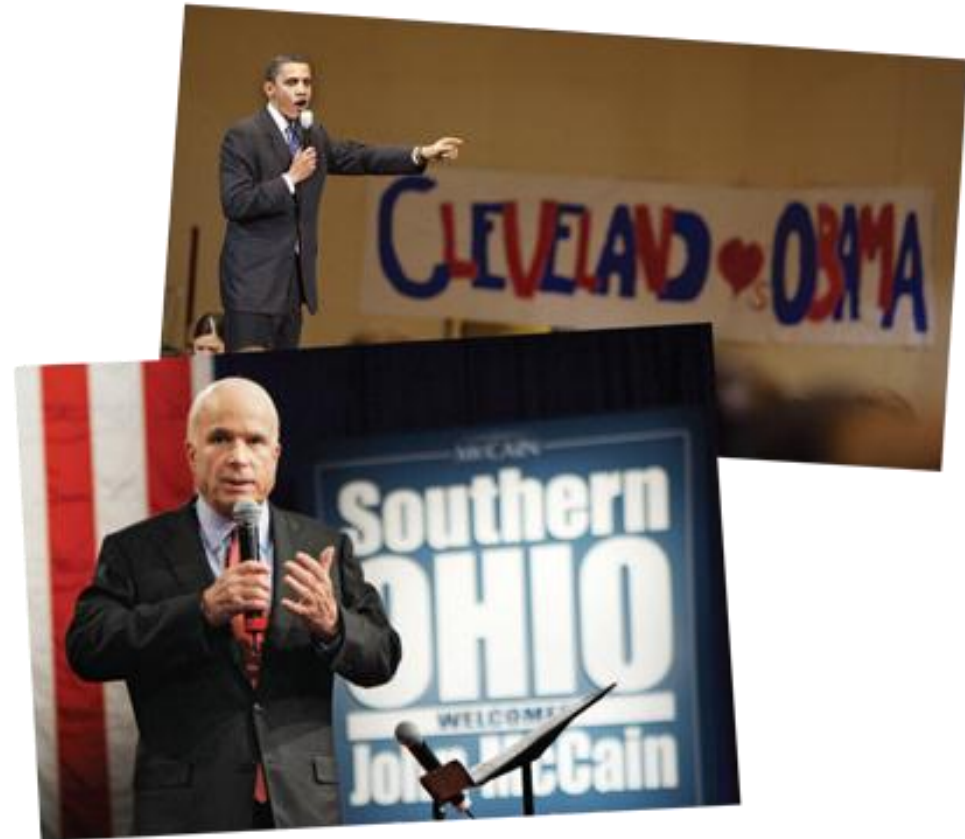
► Presidential Campaigns

- Presidential campaigns now begin long before the party conventions.
- Candidates focus their time and money on battleground States and swing voters, trying to persuade uncommitted voters to support vote for them.



► Presidential Campaigns, cont.

- Voters are bombarded with ads, interviews, speeches, and press releases.
- Since the 1960s, candidates also routinely debate each other in nationally televised events.



► Presidential Campaigns, cont.

- Checkpoint: What role does the popular vote play in a presidential election?
 - The people vote for presidential electors, rather than directly for a candidate.

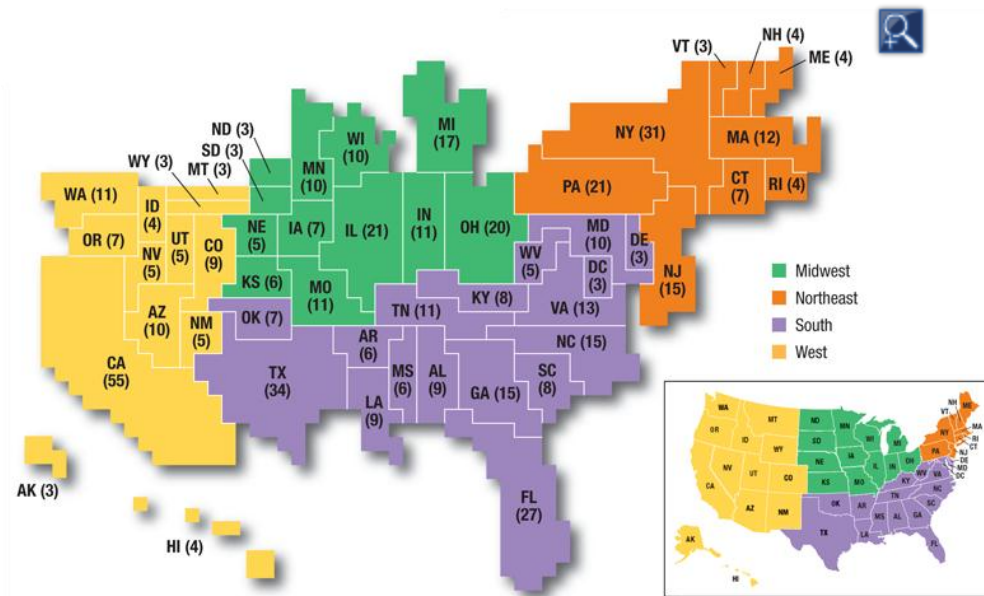


▶ Choosing Electors

- Presidential electors cast the actual votes for President and Vice President. Electors are chosen by the results of the State popular vote on election day.
- Electors meet at their State capital after the election and cast one electoral vote for President and one for Vice President. The results are sent to Washington and tallied.
- The Framers expected electors to use their own judgment, but now electors are expected to vote for their party's candidates.

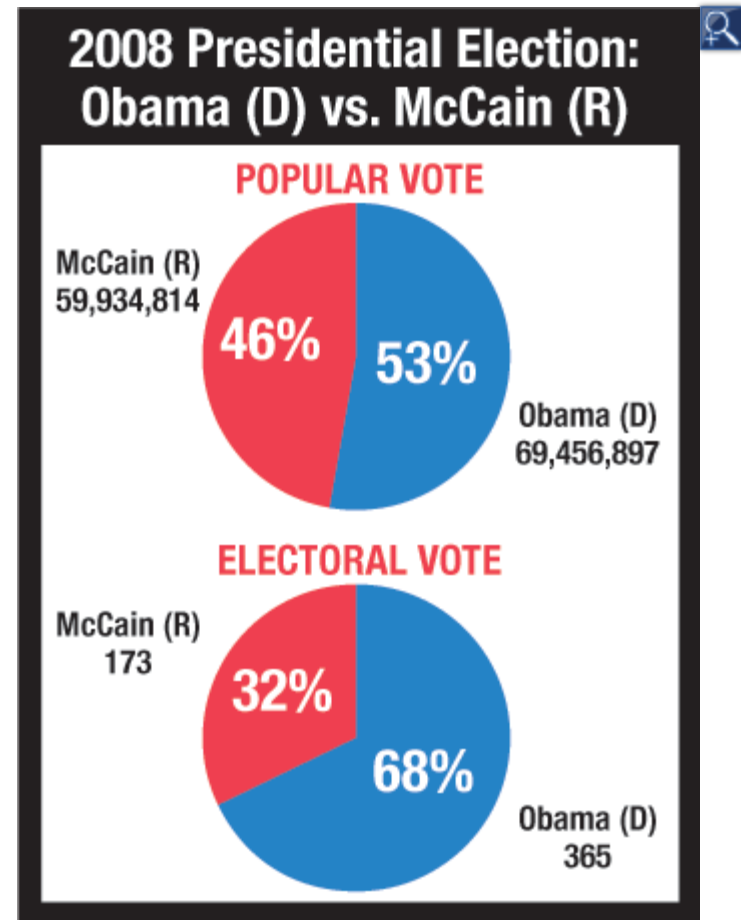
▶ Counting Electoral Votes

- Each State has as many electors as it has members of Congress.
- Each State receives at least three electors, two for its Senate seats and one for the House.



▶ Counting Electoral Votes

- The winner-take-all system gives *all* a State's electoral votes to the candidate who wins the State popular vote.
 - How does this graphic show the impact of the winner-take-all system?



Source: Federal Election Commission



► Defects in the Electoral College

- The winner-take-all system and the unequal distribution of State electoral votes means that the winner of the electoral vote might lose the popular vote.
- This has happened four times. Fifteen Presidents have won with less than a majority of the popular vote.



► *Bush v. Gore*

- In 2000, Al Gore narrowly won the popular vote, but George W. Bush won the electoral college by one vote.
- Florida's popular vote was disputed, leading to a recount stopped by a 5-4 decision of the Supreme Court, giving Bush Florida's 25 electoral votes.

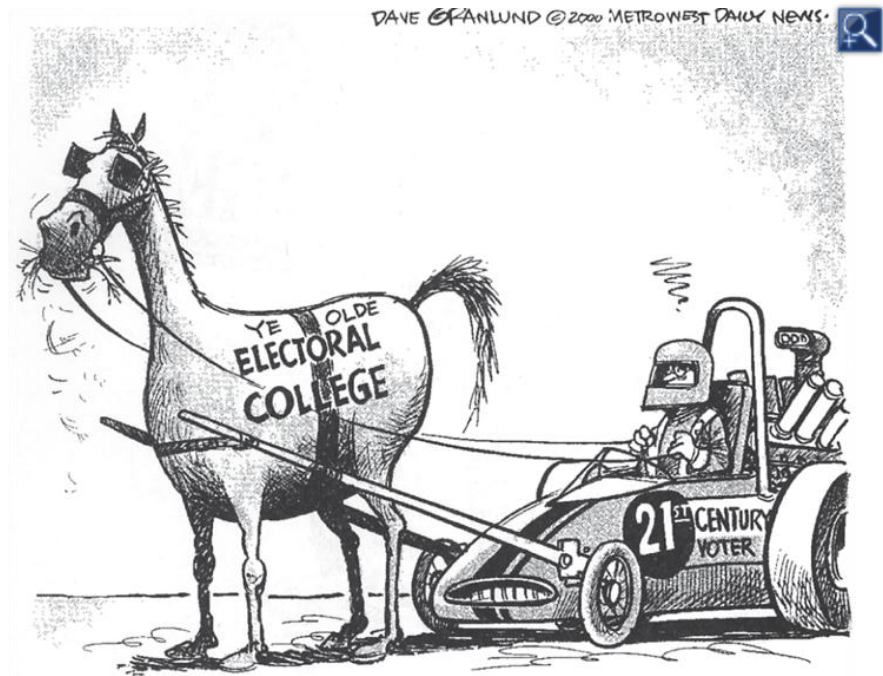


▶ The House

- Electors are not required by the Constitution to pick the winner of the popular vote in their State.
- It is possible that a presidential election will need to be decided in the House.
 - House votes are by State, not individual members, which gives small States undue influence.
 - If a majority of State representatives cannot agree on a choice, the State loses its vote.

► The House, cont.

- The House vote also requires a majority of 26 States, which could be difficult to achieve. A minority party could also control a majority of state delegations.
 - What does this cartoon imply about the electoral college?



▶ Proposed Reforms

- The *district plan* lets every State congressional district select its own electors by popular vote.
- The *proportional plan* gives each candidate a share of the State electoral vote equal to their share of the State popular vote.
- These plans require no constitutional amendment but do not guarantee that the winner of the national popular vote will win the election. More elections might have to be decided by the House.

▶ Direct Popular Election

- The direct popular election plan abolishes the electoral college. Voters would vote directly for President and Vice President.
- The plan has popular support but faces several obstacles:
 - It would take a constitutional amendment to get rid of the electoral college.
 - It would make individual States less important.
 - It would force candidates to campaign everywhere, at great expense.

▶ National Popular Vote Plan

- The national popular vote plan calls on States to reform the electoral college and has wide support.
 - All State electoral votes would be given to the winner of the *national* popular vote.
 - All States would enter into a compact that would make this change effective only if approved by States totaling at least 270 electoral votes.
- So far only 4 States have successfully changed their electoral laws. But 20 other States have tried.

▶ Defending the Electoral College

- Checkpoint: What are the arguments for keeping the electoral college system?
 - It is a known process. Reforms may have unknown flaws.
 - The present system usually identifies the president-elect quickly and clearly.
 - The electoral college promotes the nation's two-party system.
 - Only two presidential elections have ever gone to the House of Representatives.

► Review

- Now that you have learned about whether the election process serves the goals of American democracy today, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question.
 - Does the current electoral process result in the best candidates for President?