

Why or Why not Electoral College Should be Abolished?

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Introduction

The Electoral College should be abolished because it allows the presidential candidate who receives fewer votes nationwide to win office, assigns unequal practical influence to voters depending on where they live, and directs campaigns toward a narrow group of competitive states. The system is constitutional and historically rooted, but longevity alone does not establish democratic fairness. The United States has repeatedly changed election rules when older arrangements no longer matched the principle of political equality. A direct national popular vote would make every ballot count toward the same national result and would give the presidency to the candidate supported by the largest number of voters.

Abolition, however, cannot occur through ordinary federal legislation alone. The Electoral College is established by Article II and modified by the Twelfth Amendment. Replacing it directly would normally require a constitutional amendment. States also possess broad authority over the manner in which electors are appointed, which has produced the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact as an alternative route. This essay argues for abolition while examining the strongest federalism, regional-balance, recount, and coalition-building arguments offered in defense of the current system.

How the Electoral College Works

The Electoral College is a process in which voters choose slates of electors, the electors meet in their states and cast votes for president and vice president, and Congress counts those votes. The National Archives confirms that there are 538 electors and that 270 are needed for a majority. Each state receives electors equal to its number of representatives plus two senators, while the District of Columbia receives three under the Twenty-Third Amendment.

Most states use a winner-take-all rule: the candidate who wins the statewide popular vote receives all of the state's electors. Maine and Nebraska use a district-based arrangement with two electors awarded according to the statewide result. The Constitution does not require the dominant winner-take-all method. It developed through state law and party competition. As a result, criticism of the Electoral College often combines two issues: the constitutional allocation of electors and the state rules that convert narrow statewide victories into complete electoral-vote blocks.

The Democratic Case for Abolition

The National Popular Vote Can Lose

The clearest objection is that the candidate with the most votes nationwide can lose the presidency. This occurred in 1824, 1876, 1888, 2000, and 2016, although the political circumstances of these elections differed. A democratic system can reasonably use districts or federal institutions for legislative representation, but the presidency is a single national office held by one person. When two citizens vote for that office, their ballots should contribute equally to selecting the winner.

Defenders sometimes answer that candidates campaign according to existing rules and might behave differently under a popular vote. That is true, and national totals from past elections cannot simply be treated as results from a different system. Yet the structural objection remains: the current rules deliberately permit a nationwide vote loser to become president. A direct-vote system would establish the same winning criterion before the campaign—receive more votes than any other candidate—and candidates would adapt to that rule.

Unequal Weight from the Senatorial Addition

Electoral votes are based partly on House representation and partly on each state's two senators. The senatorial component gives smaller states more electors per resident than larger states. This does not mean that a ballot is literally counted twice inside a state; it means that the state's electoral influence relative to population is unequal. The arrangement reflects federalism and the constitutional compromise that gave states equal representation in the Senate, but applying the same advantage to selection of the national executive creates a second layer of unequal representation.

The practical effect is complicated by winner-take-all rules. Small-state voters are not necessarily the most politically courted voters. Many small states are safely aligned with one party and receive little campaign attention. The greatest influence usually belongs to closely divided states whose electoral votes could change the outcome. Therefore, the current system does not consistently protect small states; it protects competitive states.

Battleground-State Concentration

Presidential campaigns have limited time and money, so they concentrate on states where additional effort may change electoral votes. A voter in a strongly Democratic or strongly Republican state may be counted in the official result, but the campaign has little strategic reason to persuade or mobilize that voter once the statewide outcome appears certain. Under a national popular vote, an additional vote in California, Wyoming, Texas, Vermont, or any other state would add equally to the national total.

A national campaign would not visit every community, and candidates would still target media markets and demographic groups efficiently. The improvement is that the incentive would no longer stop at state borders. Rural voters in a large state and urban voters in a small state would contribute directly to the same total rather than being submerged inside predictable statewide outcomes.

Faithless Electors Are Not the Main Problem

The original argument emphasizes the possibility that party-selected electors could choose according to self-interest. Faithless electors are a legitimate constitutional concern, but they have never changed a presidential result. In *Chiafalo v. Washington* (2020), the Supreme Court unanimously upheld state enforcement of an elector's pledge. Many states bind electors or provide replacement procedures.

The stronger criticism is therefore not that 538 individuals regularly override the people. It is that votes are aggregated through state units in a way that can reverse the national result. Focusing too heavily on faithless electors understates the ordinary, predictable mechanism producing inequality.

Arguments for Keeping the Electoral College

Federalism and the Role of States

Supporters argue that the United States is a union of states, not merely a national population, and that presidential election should reflect this federal structure. The Electoral College requires candidates to assemble geographically distributed support rather than relying entirely on the largest population centers. It also gives states a formal constitutional role in appointing the executive.

This argument deserves respect because federalism is central to the Constitution. Yet states would remain politically powerful under direct election. They administer elections, determine voter eligibility within constitutional limits, elect senators and representatives, regulate many public policies, and shape party organization. The question is whether federalism requires unequal weighting in the selection of one national officer. The Senate already represents states equally; the presidency need not duplicate that arrangement.

Coalition Building and Regional Legitimacy

Another defense is that the system encourages broad coalitions and prevents a candidate from winning through overwhelming support in one region. In practice, however, winner-take-all can reward geographically narrow strategies if victories are efficiently distributed. A national popular vote would also require a broad coalition because no single city, state, or region contains enough voters to decide a modern presidential election. Candidates would need votes from metropolitan, suburban,

small-town, and rural communities across the country.

Recounts and Administrative Complexity

Critics of direct election warn that a close national result could require recounts in many jurisdictions rather than one contested state. Election administration is decentralized, and states differ in ballot design, recount triggers, and certification procedures. A national popular vote would therefore require clearer nationwide standards for reporting, audits, recounts, and dispute resolution.

This is a serious design issue, not a reason to accept unequal voting power indefinitely. The Electoral Count Reform Act of 2022 clarified parts of the certification and congressional counting process without eliminating state administration. A constitutional amendment creating direct election could similarly establish uniform rules for national tabulation and recounts while allowing local officials to conduct voting.

The National Popular Vote Interstate Compact

The National Popular Vote Interstate Compact attempts to produce a popular-vote winner through existing state power. Member jurisdictions agree to award their electors to the candidate who wins the nationwide popular vote, but the agreement activates only when participating states possess at least 270 electoral votes. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, Virginia joined in 2026, bringing participation to 18 states and the District of Columbia with 222 electoral votes. The compact therefore remained 48 electoral votes short of activation as of April 2026.

The compact has practical appeal because Article II allows state legislatures to determine the manner of appointing electors. It would retain the constitutional Electoral College while making its result follow the national popular vote. Nevertheless, legal and administrative questions would likely be litigated, including whether congressional consent is required under the Constitution's Compact Clause and how disputes over national totals would be resolved. A constitutional amendment would provide greater permanence and clarity, but the compact demonstrates that states are not required to preserve winner-take-all rules.

What an Abolition Amendment Should Include

A successful amendment should do more than delete the words "Electoral College." It should establish a national popular election for president and vice president, define the winning threshold, and address the possibility that no candidate receives a majority. A simple plurality rule is easy to understand but could elect a candidate with a low share in a fragmented field. A national runoff between the top two candidates or ranked-choice voting could ensure broader support, though either would require detailed administration.

The amendment should also authorize uniform national standards for certification, audits, recounts, and judicial review while preserving accessible local election administration. It should specify treatment of presidential and vice-presidential tickets, deadlines, succession problems, and disputed returns. Reform must be operational, not merely symbolic.

Would Direct Election Silence Rural or Small-State Voters?

A common claim is that candidates would campaign only in large cities. This treats cities as politically uniform and overlooks the distribution of voters. Large states contain millions of rural and conservative voters, while small states contain urban and liberal voters. Under winner-take-all, minority-party voters in every safe state have little influence on the electoral result. Under direct election, each of those votes would count toward the national total.

Candidates would still prioritize places where outreach is efficient, but modern campaigns already rely heavily on national media, digital advertising, fundraising lists, and demographic targeting. The relevant comparison is not between personal visits to every county and visits only to cities. It is between a system where votes everywhere add equally and a system where campaign value depends heavily on statewide competitiveness.

Conclusion

The Electoral College should be abolished because the presidency is a national office and should be awarded to the candidate who receives the most support from the nation's voters. The system can reverse the national popular result, gives unequal electoral influence through state allocation, and causes campaigns to neglect voters outside battleground states. Federalism, coalition building, and recount administration are legitimate concerns, but they can be protected through other institutions and addressed in the design of a direct-election amendment.

The strongest reform would be a constitutional amendment establishing a national vote with clear certification and recount rules. The National Popular Vote Interstate Compact offers an intermediate route and had reached 222 pledged electoral votes by April 2026, but it had not yet taken effect. Regardless of the method, the democratic principle is straightforward: every eligible citizen's vote for president should carry equal weight, and the candidate with the most votes under the established national rule should win.

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