

insights

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Presidential Electors

Presidential Electors: Individuals selected to vote for president and vice president in the Electoral College.

Back to School

Gripped by the fever of our presidential horse race every four years, it often goes overlooked that U.S. citizens do not technically vote for their preferred presidential candidate. Instead, voters cast their ballots for presidential electors, who in turn vote for their candidate in the [Electoral College](#). But who are these electors?

Keep the Faith

The Electoral College system is written into the Constitution. Each state receives the number of electors equal to the sum of their U.S. senators and representatives. The winning candidate's electors are [appointed](#) as the state's electors (or, in the case of Maine and Nebraska, electors are appointed proportionally). The Constitution says less about the electors themselves. But it does require states to certify and transmit their Electoral College results and prohibits U.S. senators and representatives from serving as electors.

Electors are chosen by state political parties, typically in recognition for their service to the party. The winning candidate's electors meet in their state in December after the election, where they formally cast their votes for president and vice president. There is no federal law requiring electors to vote according to the results of a state's (or congressional district's) popular vote. Electors who do not vote for the winner, known as "faithless electors," may be fined or disqualified under state law.

You're Gonna be Popular

The winner of the popular vote has lost the election five times in U.S. history, including twice in the last 20 years. This has prompted renewed scrutiny of the Electoral College and increased attention on the role of presidential electors. In the 2016 election, there were seven faithless electors, the largest number an election had seen to date. The Supreme Court ruled this year that states can enact requirements on how presidential electors can vote. This was a major win for state efforts such as the National Popular Vote Interstate [Compact](#), a movement to change state laws to require electors to vote for the winner of the national popular vote.

Over the last few years, Democrats have become more vocal about reforming or abolishing the Electoral College. Last year, Senate Democrats [introduced](#) a constitutional amendment that would do just that. Election reform might find itself on the 2021 congressional agenda should Democrats capture the Presidency and Senate.

Happy Election Day from the Thompson Coburn Lobbying & Policy team!

authorsTest

christopher

Christopher T. Murray