

Every four years, Americans who are eighteen or older have a big responsibility. Our votes decide who becomes the President of the United States. Unfortunately, the U.S election system isn't that simple! This is Electing a U.S President in Plain English.

It's easy to imagine every US citizen's vote being counted together on Election Day. But this is not the case. U.S elections are not decided by the total or 'popular' vote, but individual states.

Let me explain:

It starts with your vote. On Election Day, you'll vote for president and their vice president. You get one choice. Then, all the votes in your states are counted. The candidate with the most state-wide votes becomes the candidate your state supports for president.

This happens across the country until each state has selected their candidate. We end up with most of the fifty states and the district of Columbia voting to support one candidate each. But there's a problem. We can't elect a president by just counting up the choices of these states: U.S states are different.

Consider this: California has about thirty-six million people; Kansas has less than three million. We need a way for California's choice to have more influence on the election because the state has more people. The question becomes: how do we make sure (that) each state has the right amount of influence on the election?

Well, we need a way to account for the population of each state. As an example, let's consider my home state of North Carolina. Like every state, it is divided up into congressional districts that are based on population. North Carolina has thirteen districts, California has fifty-three and Kansas has four. When it comes to a state's influence on the election, the number of districts matters most. More population equals more districts, equals more influence.

The influence a state has in the election is measured by the number of Electors. This number comes from the number of districts in a state plus the number of U.S senators, which is always two. North Carolina has fifteen Electors, while California has fifty-five.

When a candidate wins the voting in a state, they win that state's number of Electors. That's why big, popular states can be so important to candidates. Their electors add up quickly and the number of electors is what really matters.

Here's why: if you add up the Electors of all fifty states and the district of Columbia, there are five hundred and thirty-eight in total. The candidates' goal on Election Day is to win the majority of five hundred and thirty-eight, or two hundred and seventy electors. Once a candidate wins enough states to reach the two hundred and seventy majority, they have won the election and become the President-elect (Yaaay!)

So, let's recap. Your vote helps your state choose a single candidate. That candidate receives all the electors from your state. The candidate who can win enough states, to reach two hundred and seventy total electors wins the national election and becomes the President-elect. Then, on the following January 20th the President-elect is sworn in as the next President of the United States. And it all starts with your vote, make it count.

I'm Lee Lefever and this has been Electing a U.S President in Plain English on the Common Craft Show.