

# Elections in the United States

A Quick Overview



# Levels of Elections

## National

- President
- Legislature (House and U.S. Senate)

## State

- Executive (Governor, Attorney General, etc.)
- Legislature (Assembly and state Senate)

## Local

- Municipal (City): City Council, Mayor
- County: Supervisor, Sheriff, District Attorney



# California Government







Non-presidential elections

Elections are usually competitions between political parties who want their candidates to win office

## National

- Partisan: party competition

## State

- Partisan: party competition (except for Insurance Commissioner)

## Local

- Nonpartisan: candidates do not identify as political party members (in California)

# Most Elections take place in single-member, winner-take-all districts

- One person is elected per district
  - Examples:
    - One person per Congressional district (national)
    - One person per Assembly district (state)
    - One Sheriff (county)
- The person who receives the most votes wins the election (an absolute majority is not necessary)
- It is thought that this contributes to a system with two major parties
  - Voters do not want to “waste” their vote by voting for a party with less of a chance to win



# Stages of Elections

- There are usually two stages in U.S. elections
  1. Primary Election: narrows the choice of candidates
    - Usually the primary election chooses the candidate for a party
  2. General Election: the winner is chosen
- California 2020 example
  1. Primary Election March 3, 2020
  2. General Election November 3, 2020

# A Typical Type of Primary: Closed Primary

- Candidates are listed on party ballots. Voters declare a party preference before the election & only those voters can vote for that party's candidate and can only choose candidates from that party's list
- Example:
  - A voter registers to vote as a member of the Libertarian Party
    - On Primary Election Day, that voter is given a Libertarian Party ballot
      - For non-partisan elections, the ballot is the same
      - For partisan elections, the choices are only among Libertarian candidates
    - On Election Day for the general election, all voters are given the same ballot, one that lists one party candidate for each office
  - A voter that declines to register with a party can only vote in non-partisan elections

# Primary v. General Election in a Closed Primary

## **Libertarian ballot (Primary)**

- Candidate 1, Libertarian Party
- Candidate 2, Libertarian Party
- Candidate 3, Libertarian Party

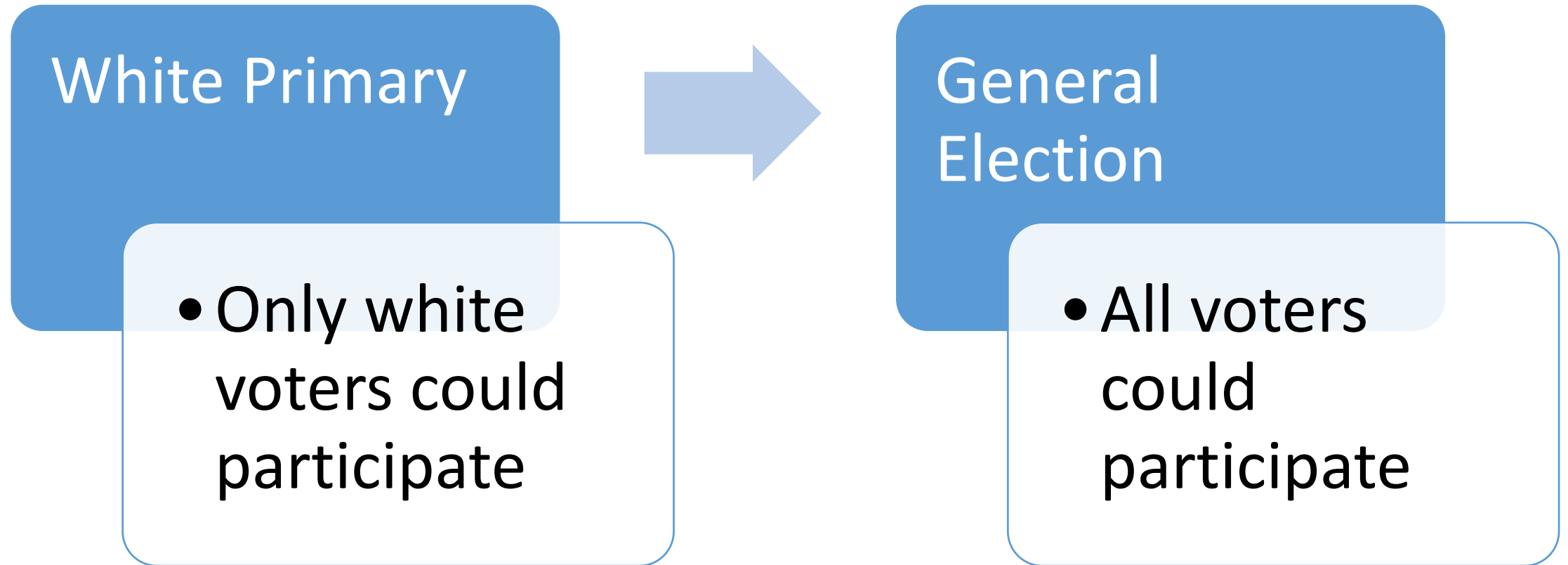
## **General Election ballot**

- Candidate A, Libertarian Party
- Candidate B, Democratic Party
- Candidate C, Republican Party
- Candidate D, Green Party

Closed Primary: the party members choose who will be the party candidate in the general election



# Importance of primary elections illustrated by exclusion of Black voters in Southern states



# Some Other Types of Primaries

- Open Primary
  - Candidates are listed on party ballots. Voters can arrive at polls without declaring party preference, but vote from one party list.
- “Top Two” (California – instituted with proposition 14 in 2010)
  - All candidates are listed on the same ballot. All voters can vote for anyone from any party. Votes are tallied by candidate: the top two candidates go on to the general election.
    - Not used for presidential election primaries

- Example of ballot listing all candidates of all political parties

COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO  
PRIMARY ELECTION  
March 7, 2000

**UNITED STATES SENATOR**

Vote for One

<b>29</b>	<b>LINH DAO</b> , Republican High-Tech Entrepreneur
<b>30</b>	<b>DIANE BEALL TEMPLIN</b> , American Independent Attorney/Businesswoman
<b>31</b>	<b>JAN B. TUCKER</b> , Green Licensed Private Investigator
<b>32</b>	<b>JOHN M. BROWN</b> , Republican Telephone Equipment Salesman
<b>33</b>	<b>MEDEA SUSAN BENJAMIN</b> , Green Nonprofit Organization Director
<b>34</b>	<b>DIANNE FEINSTEIN</b> , Democratic United States Senator
<b>35</b>	<b>TOM CAMPBELL</b> , Republican Congressman/Educator
<b>36</b>	<b>JOSE LUIS "JOE" CAMAHORT</b> , Reform Research Scientist/Engineer
<b>37</b>	<b>BILL HORN</b> , Republican County Supervisor/Rancher
<b>38</b>	<b>RAY HAYNES</b> , Republican California Senator
<b>39</b>	<b>BRIAN M. REES</b> , Natural Law Physician
<b>40</b>	<b>MICHAEL SCHMIER</b> , Democratic Attorney at Law
<b>41</b>	<b>VALLI "SHARP" SHARPE-GEISLER</b> , Reform Educator/Technology Coordinator
<b>42</b>	<b>GAIL KATHERINE LIGHTFOOT</b> , Libertarian Registered Nurse
<b>43</b>	<b>JP GOUGH</b> , Republican Businessman/Entrepreneur





# Why top two?

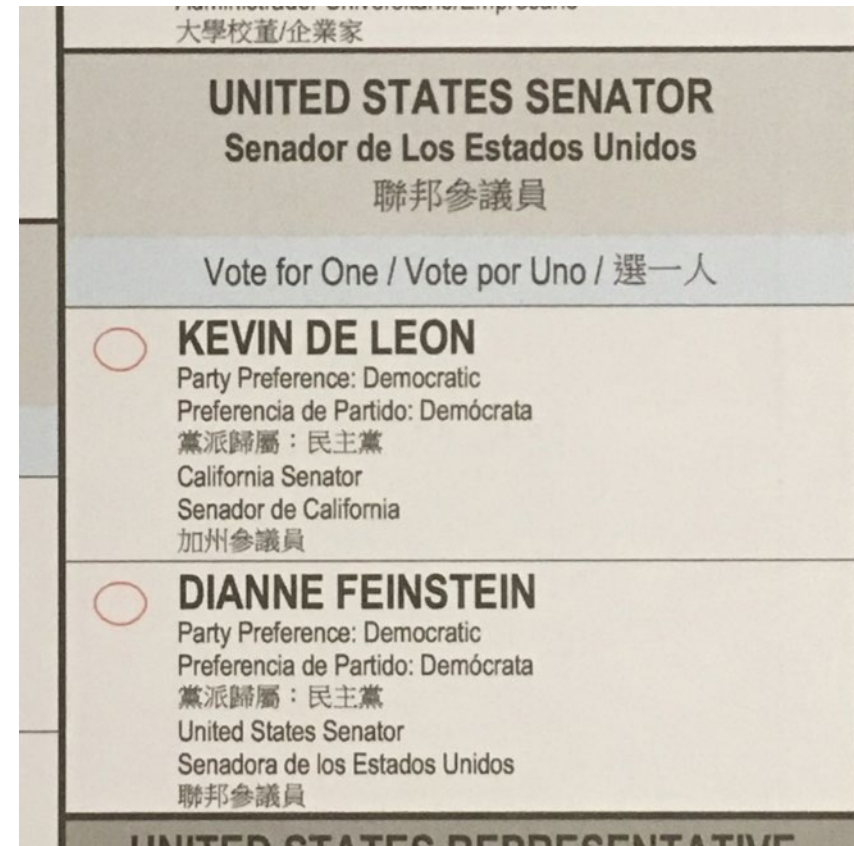
- Why top two?
  - Hope that more moderate/centrist candidates would win elections
    - Voter turnout is lower in primary elections
    - Candidates from both parties have to appeal to a wider spectrum of voters
    - Voters unaffiliated with a party (“decline to state”) can vote in primaries
- Results?
  - Moderates?
    - Other changes: redistricting; term limit change
    - Other issues: money!!
  - The “top two” have often been both Democrats though also Republicans
  - Lowest turnout in primaries in 2012 and 2014  
([http://www.fairvote.org/california s 2016 top two primary results at a glance](http://www.fairvote.org/california_s_2016_top_two_primary_results_at_a_glance) )

# Top Two can result in a general election with only one party's candidates

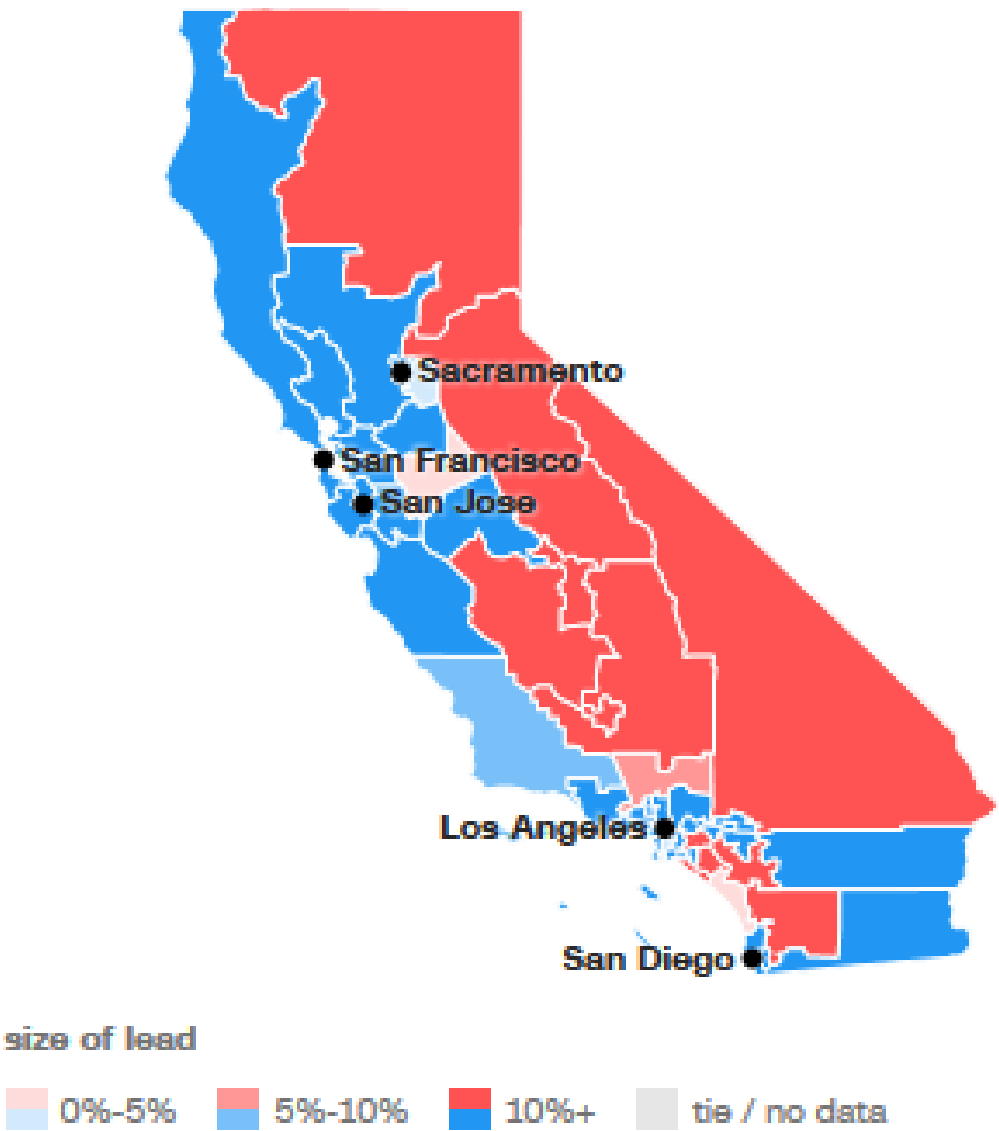
- Example of Primary results in 2016:
  - Open U.S. Senate seat: top two = Kamala Harris (D) and Loretta Sanchez (D)
  - House of Representatives (53 districts):
    - All incumbents went on to general election
    - 47 = Democrat v. Republican
    - 4 = Democrat v. Democrat
    - 2 = Democrat v. non-major party candidate (no Republican ran)

# 2018 Senate Race Example

- Listed together on the ballot in June:
  - Dianne Feinstein (Democratic)
  - Kevin De Leon (Democratic)
  - James P. Bradley (Republican)
  - Arun K. Bhumitra (Republican)
  - John Parker (Peace and Freedom)
  - And many others...
- On Ballot in November:



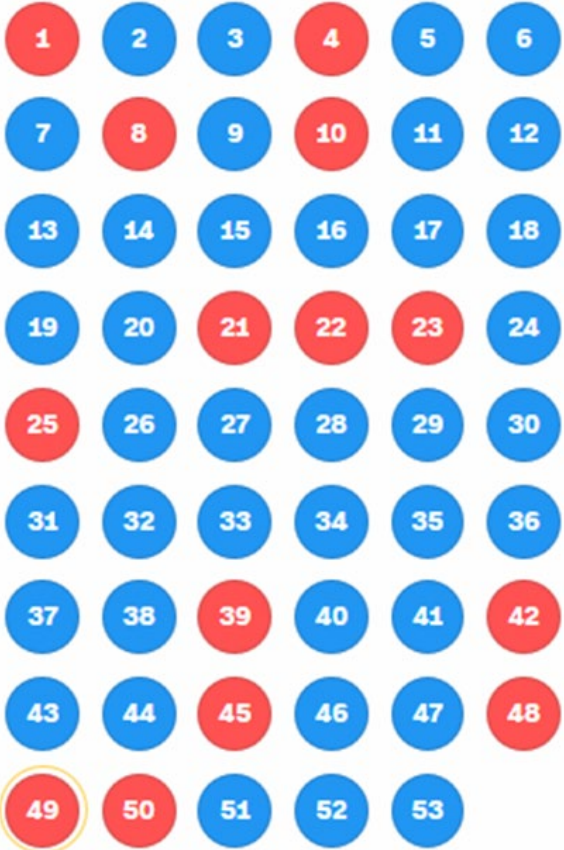
district results map



california house

select district to see details

14 republicans 39 democrats 0 other



key race runoff 0 seats remaining  
party change  
updated 2:02 pm ET, Feb. 16

2016 election

<http://www.cnn.com/election/results/states/california>

# Another Possibility: Ranked-Choice Voting

- Voters get one vote, but instead of voting for one person they can rank the candidates in order of preference
  - If their #1 candidate gets too few votes, the ballot is transferred to the next one on the list until a candidate gets a majority of the vote
  - Voters can vote for their favorite candidate without having to worry if they are wasting their vote

# Presidential Elections

# Main Sources of Presidential Election Rules and Procedures

## 1. The Constitution: the Electoral College

1. States choose Electors who vote for President and Vice President, majority of Electoral College Votes necessary to win
2. Each state gets same # Electoral votes as # of representatives in House + Senate
3. If no candidate receives a majority of the Electoral College votes then the House of Representatives chooses the President from the top 3 vote winners

## 2. State Law

1. Popular election of electors
2. Winner-take-all elections (except Maine & Nebraska)

## 3. Political Parties (their rules and procedures)

1. Primaries/Caucuses
2. Conventions



Presidential Primaries are  
different

# Presidential Primaries in California

- **Modified Closed Primary System for Presidential Elections**
- California's current "modified" closed primary system for Presidential elections was chaptered on September 29, 2000 and took effect on January 1, 2001. Senate Bill 28 (Ch. 898, Stats. 2000) implemented a "modified" closed primary system that permitted voters who had declined to provide a political party preference (formerly known as "decline to state" voters) to participate in a primary election if authorized by an individual party's rules and duly noticed by the Secretary of State.
- *From the California Secretary of State website (which includes further information):*
- <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/political-parties/no-party-preference/>

## Elections & Voter Information

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## No Party Preference Information

### Voting in Presidential Primary Elections

Voters who registered to vote without stating a political party preference are known as No Party Preference (NPP) voters. NPP voters were formerly known as "decline-to-state" or "DTS" voters.

For presidential primary elections: NPP voters will receive a "non-partisan" ballot that does not include presidential candidates. A nonpartisan ballot contains only the names of candidates for voter-nominated offices and local nonpartisan offices and measures. However, NPP voters may vote in a political party's partisan election if the political party, by party rule duly noticed to the Secretary of State, authorizes NPP voters to vote in the next presidential primary election. An NPP voter may request the ballot of one of the political parties, if any, that authorizes NPP voters to vote in the presidential primary election.

The following parties have notified the Secretary of State that they will allow No Party Preference voters to request their party's presidential ballot in the March 3, 2020, Presidential Primary Election:

American Independent Party  
Democratic Party  
Libertarian Party

## History Behind California's Primary Election System

### Closed Primary System

A "closed" primary system governed California's primary elections until 1996. In a closed primary, only persons who are registered members of a political party may vote the ballot of that political party.

### Open Primary System

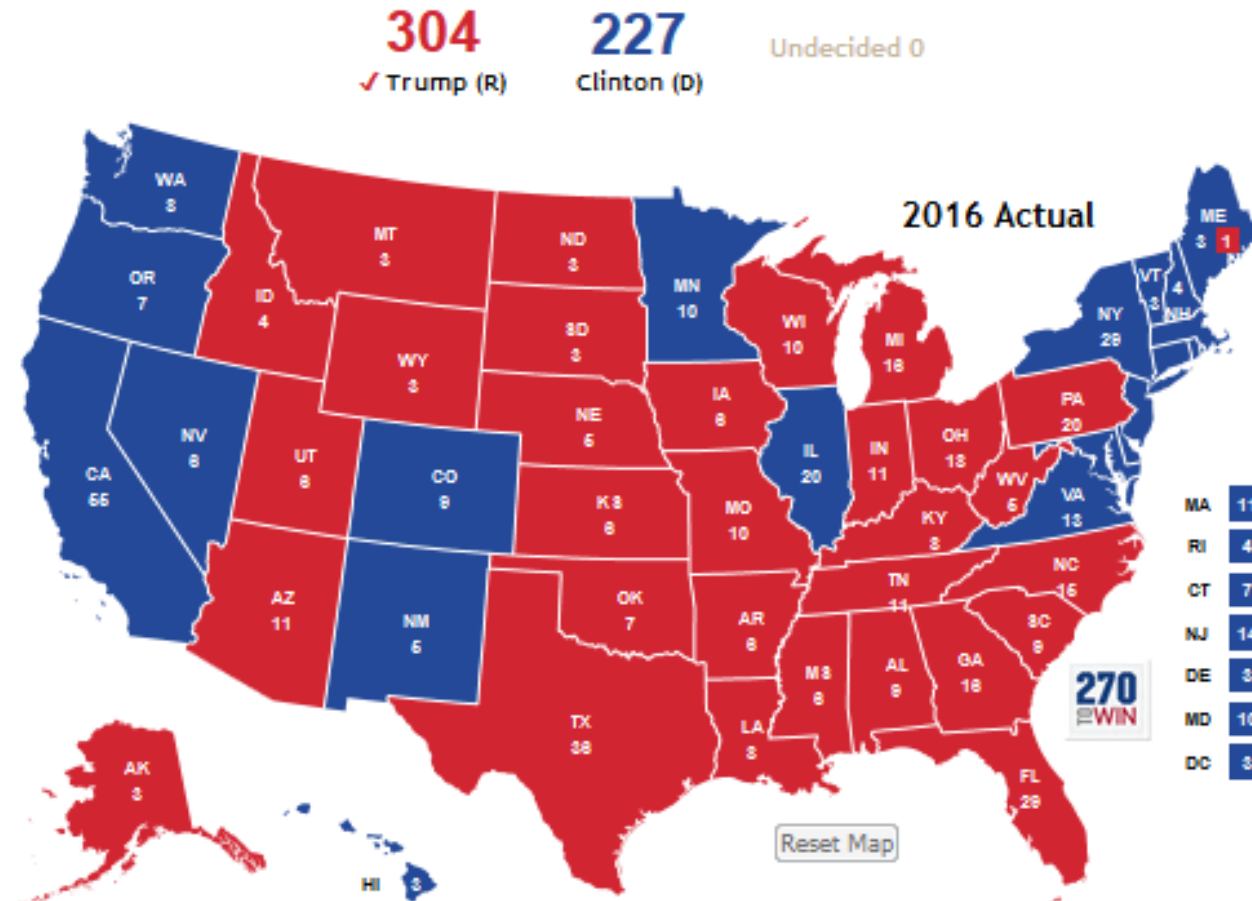
The provisions of the "closed" primary system were amended by the adoption of Proposition 198, an initiative statute approved by the voters at the March 26, 1996, Primary Election. Proposition 198 changed the closed primary system to what is known as a "blanket" or "open" primary, in which all registered voters may vote for any candidate, regardless of political affiliation and without a declaration of political faith or allegiance. On June 26, 2000, the United States Supreme Court issued a decision in *California*

# The Electoral College

# 2016 Electoral College Results from 270towin.com

## 2016 Presidential Election Interactive Map

270 electoral votes to win



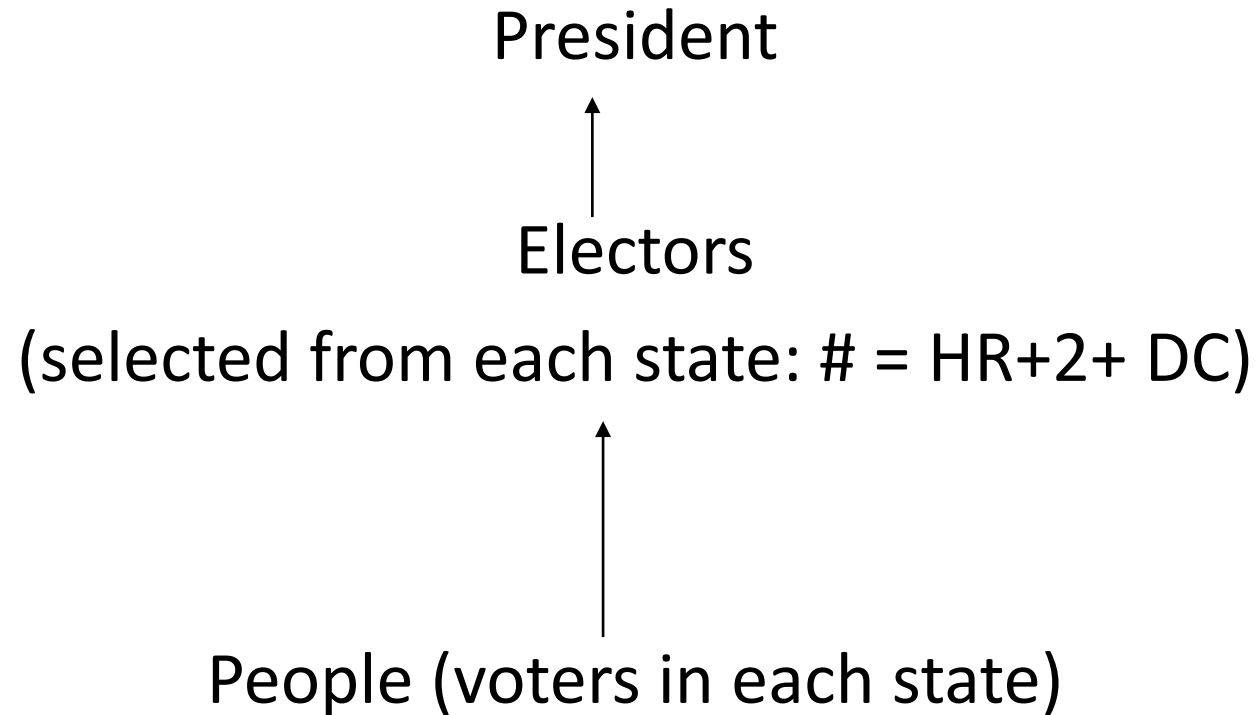
## 2016 Actual

- Donald J. Trump (R) ✓  
Electoral 304  
Popular 62,980,160
- Hillary R. Clinton (D)  
Electoral 227  
Popular 65,845,063
- Gary E. Johnson (L)  
Electoral 0  
Popular 4,488,931
- Jill E. Stein (G)  
Electoral 0  
Popular 1,457,050
- D. Evan McMullin (IND)  
Electoral 0  
Popular 728,830

(R) Republican  
(D) Democratic  
(L) Libertarian  
(G) Green  
(IND) Independent



# Electoral College



# Example: Wyoming

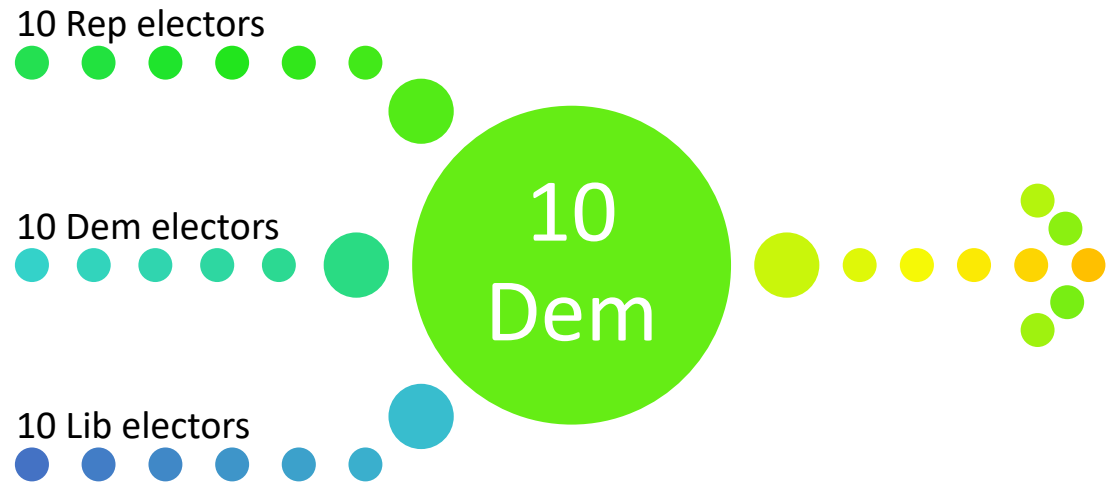
- Wyoming has 2 Senators and 1 House representative
- How many Electoral College votes?
- 3 Electoral College votes
  - Because  $2+1 = 3$
- Results in 2016:
  - 70% Trump
  - 23% Clinton
  - 5% Johnson





# Example: Minnesota

- Minnesota: 2 Senators and 8 House representatives
- How many Electoral College votes?
- 10 Electoral College votes
  - Because  $2+8=10$
- Results in 2016:
  - 45% Trump
  - 47% Clinton
  - 4% Johnson



# Example: Wisconsin

- Wisconsin: 2 Senators and 8 House representatives
- How many Electoral College votes?
- 10 Electoral College votes
  - Because  $2+8=10$
- Results in 2016:
  - 48% Trump
  - 47% Clinton
  - 4% Johnson

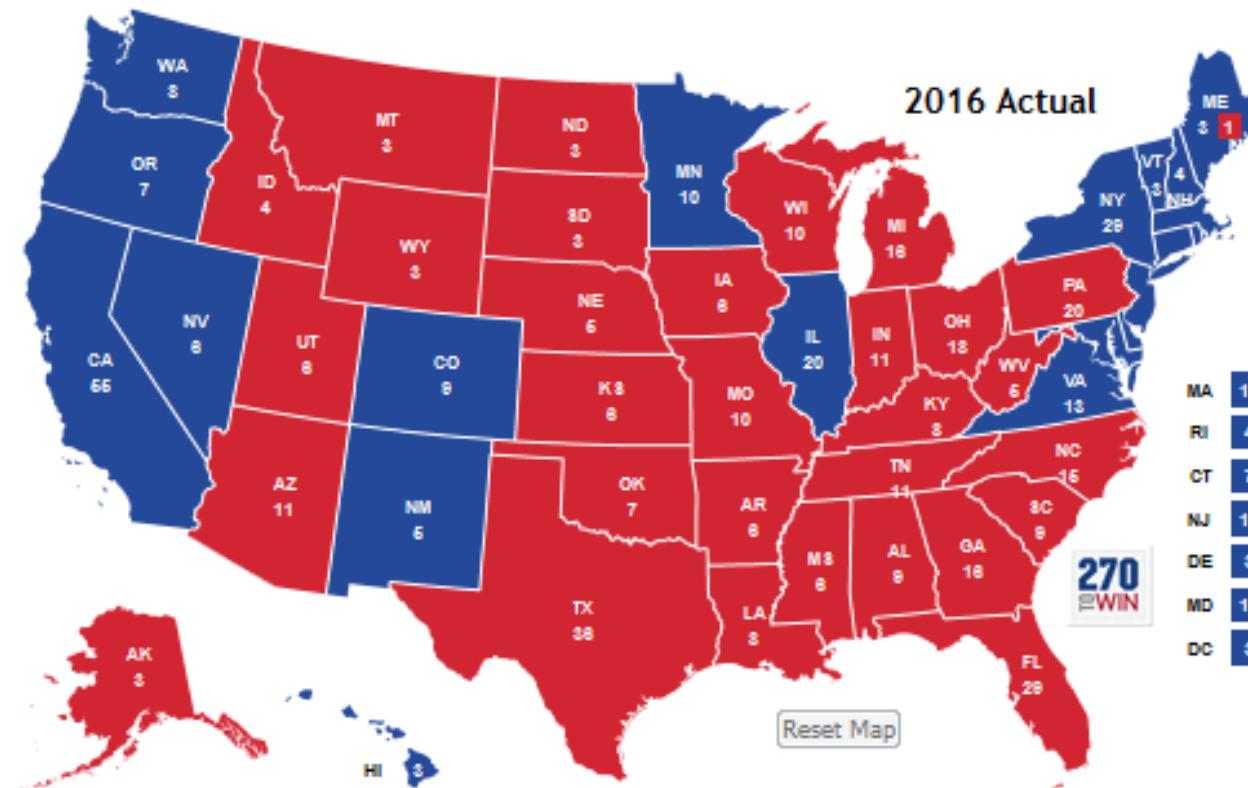


# 2016 Electoral College

## 2016 Presidential Election Interactive Map

270 electoral votes to win

**304** **227** Undecided 0  
✓ Trump (R) Clinton (D)



## 2016 Actual

Donald J. Trump (R) ✓  
Electoral 304  
Popular 62,980,160

Hillary R. Clinton (D)  
Electoral 227  
Popular 65,845,063

Gary E. Johnson (L)  
Electoral 0  
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(R) Republican  
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