

Electoral College and Interest Group Free Response Assignment

Free Response Essays Directions: Provide separate, well-constructed responses to each essay prompt. Unless the directions indicate otherwise, respond to all parts of both questions. It is suggested that you take a few minutes to plan and outline each answer. Each response should take no more than 25 minutes to complete, to include planning, in order to simulate test-day conditions. In your response, use substantive examples where appropriate. Make certain to number each of your answers as the question is numbered below.

QUESTION 1: Electoral College A significant feature of the Electoral College is that most states have a winner-take-all system.

- (a) Describe the winner-take-all feature of the Electoral College.
- (b) Explain one way in which the winner-take-all feature of the Electoral College affects how presidential candidates from the two major parties run their campaigns.
- (c) Explain one way in which the winner-take-all feature of the Electoral College hinders third party candidates.
- (d) Explain two reasons why the Electoral College has not been abolished.

A. The winner-take-all system of the electoral college describes how the majority of states give all their electoral college votes to the candidate who wins a plurality of the popular vote within the state. The only states that do not participate in this system are Nebraska and Maine, where electoral votes are divided based on districts won by candidate. Under the winner-take-all feature, however, an entire state's electoral votes are determined solely by the statewide popular vote.

B. The winner-take-all feature of the Electoral College significantly influences the behavior of the major political candidates in any given Presidential campaign. Because of the winner-take-all system, major political candidates tend to handle their campaign very strategically, battling one another for the electoral votes of key swing states. As a result, they spend much more time campaigning in those states who tend to have changes in political parties every election in hopes of gaining a plurality of the state's popular vote, thereby taking all the valuable electoral votes. More money and time is invested and focused on these swing states because of the winner-take-all system.

C. Third party candidates are hindered greatly by the winner-take-all system because it is unlikely for them to gain a plurality within an entire state. Take Ross Perot, for example, who won nearly twenty million votes nationwide in the 1992 Presidential Election, but garnered absolutely zero electoral votes. Without a concentrated base of support, it is nearly impossible for third-party candidates to gain the plurality needed to win a winner-take-all electoral contest, meaning they will almost never win enough electoral votes to actually win an election, only hoping to focus enough on a few states to prevent any candidate from winning a 270 majority.

D. The Electoral College has faced a lot of negative feedback, especially over the past decade or two, but it is an integral part of the democratic processes of this Republic as described in the United States Constitution, making it a very difficult institution to rid ourselves of. A Constitutional Amendment would be required to abolish or alter the Electoral College's system. This is one reason why it has not yet been abolished, the sheer difficulty and impracticality of it. Furthermore, the Electoral College has also avoided abolishment by offering great benefits to smaller states, giving them more leverage as a result of how electoral votes are distributed, this being the number of state representatives plus the number of state senators. Less populous states are thus weighted more favorably and are not drowned out by more populous, more urban states. These are just two reasons why the Electoral College remains intact today.