

GR 6.2 - How a President is Elected

Directions: You will read the following sections that talk about how a president is elected into power. You will then answer the questions on a piece of paper and submit in the corresponding assignment on google classroom. This assignment is due on Friday.

The Presidential Election Process

The president of the United States is not elected directly by the people. Instead, it's a multi-step process:

- **Primaries and Caucuses:** These take place in each state and help political parties choose their candidate. Voters express their preference, and the results determine how many delegates each candidate gets.
- **Party Conventions:** Each major party holds a convention to officially nominate their candidate for president.
- **General Election:** Held in early November. Voters across the country cast their ballots for president and vice president.
- **Electoral College Vote:** While people vote in the general election, what actually determines the winner is the **Electoral College**—a group of 538 electors. Each state gets a certain number of electoral votes based on its population. A candidate needs **270 electoral votes** to win.

In 2024, **Donald Trump was elected president again**, even though he had been **convicted of a felony**. Many students wonder: how is that legal? The U.S. Constitution **does not prohibit** someone with a criminal record—or even someone who is in prison—from running for president, as long as they meet three requirements:

- At least 35 years old
- A natural-born citizen
- Has lived in the U.S. for at least 14 years

Some critics argue this shows a flaw in the system, while others claim the people should be able to vote for whoever they want, no matter their legal status. Trump's re-election shows how **polarized public opinion** has become, and how the legal system and election systems don't always align the way people expect.

Questions

- 1) Why do you think the Founders created the Electoral College instead of having a direct popular vote?
- 2) What are some steps before the general election so important to the election process?
- 3) Should someone with a criminal record be allowed to run for president? Why or why not?

The Electoral College

The Electoral College is the system the United States uses to officially elect the president. When Americans cast their votes during a presidential election, they are technically voting for a group

of electors who have pledged to support a particular candidate. Each state gets a number of electoral votes equal to the total number of its representatives and senators in Congress. For example, California has 54 electoral votes (52 House members + 2 Senators), while a smaller state like Wyoming has just 3. Most states use a winner-takes-all system: whichever candidate wins the popular vote in that state receives all of the state's electoral votes. Only Maine and Nebraska use a different method that can split electoral votes between candidates. There are a total of **538 electoral votes**. To become president, a candidate must win at least **270** of them. If no candidate reaches 270, the decision goes to the House of Representatives, where each state delegation casts one vote for president. The system was created by the Founding Fathers in the Constitution as a compromise:

- They didn't want Congress alone to choose the president
- But they also didn't trust the idea of a direct popular vote at the time
- They wanted to give all states—big and small—some say in the outcome

However, the system has led to controversy. In five elections, the candidate who won the popular vote did not become president. Most recently, this happened in 2016, when Hillary Clinton received more votes overall, but Donald Trump won the Electoral College. Some critics say this system gives disproportionate power to smaller states and swing states. Supporters say it protects the influence of rural areas and prevents just a few big cities from deciding the election.

Questions

- 4) How does the Electoral College give smaller states more power in presidential elections?
- 5) Do you think the winner-takes-all system used by most states is fair? Why or why not?
- 6) Should the U.S. keep the Electoral College, change it, or replace it with a national popular vote? Explain your opinion using evidence from what you've read.

The Role of Swing States

Some states consistently vote for one party, while others—called **swing states**—can go either way in an election. Because of this, candidates often focus their time, money, and messaging on swing states like Pennsylvania, Florida, and Arizona. This creates a situation where some states get much more attention than others, even if they aren't the largest.

Questions

- 7) Why do candidates spend more time campaigning in swing states?
- 8) Do you think this focus on swing states is a problem? Explain your reasoning.

The Power of Public Opinion

Public opinion refers to the general attitudes, beliefs, and values held by the American people. Presidents and candidates constantly monitor public opinion through polls, media coverage, and social media trends. It plays a major role in how campaigns are run, what policies are emphasized, and how politicians communicate with the public. Presidents may use public opinion to guide their decisions—or try to shape public opinion through speeches, press conferences, or social media. In the past, presidents had to rely on news networks or newspapers to communicate. Today, they can go directly to the public through platforms like

Twitter or Facebook. Public opinion can be a double-edged sword as it can help leaders stay in touch with the needs and concerns of the people, but it can also encourage decisions based on popularity instead of long-term consequences. In some cases, misinformation, conspiracy theories, or emotional rhetoric can sway public opinion in dangerous ways.

Questions

- 9) How does public opinion influence presidential campaigns and decisions?
- 10) Should presidents make decisions based on public opinion? Why or why not?
- 11) What does Trump's 2024 victory tell us about how divided public opinion is in America?