

# No Country Still Uses an Electoral College – Except the US

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The United States is the only democracy in the world where a presidential candidate can get the most popular votes and still lose the election. Thanks to the Electoral College, that has happened five times in the country's history. The most recent examples are from 2000, when Al Gore won the popular vote but George W. Bush won the Electoral College after a U.S. Supreme Court ruling, and 2016, when Hillary Clinton got more votes nationwide than Donald Trump but lost in the Electoral College.

The Founding Fathers did not invent the idea of an electoral college. Rather, they borrowed the concept from Europe, where it had been used to pick emperors for hundreds of years.

I have studied how countries have used electoral colleges. None have been satisfied with the results. And except for the U.S., all have found other ways to choose their leaders.

The Holy Roman Empire was a loose confederation of territories that existed in central Europe from 962 to 1806. The emperor was not chosen by heredity, like most other monarchies. Instead, emperors were chosen by electors, who represented both secular and religious interests.

When the Founding Fathers were drafting the U.S. Constitution in 1787, Pennsylvania delegate James Wilson proposed that the president be elected by popular vote. However, many other delegates were adamant that there be an indirect way of electing the president to provide a buffer against what Thomas Jefferson called "well-meaning, but uninformed people."

For 21 days, the founders debated how to elect the president, and they held more than 30 separate votes on the topic – more than for any other issue they discussed. Eventually, the complicated solution that they agreed to was an early version of the electoral college system that exists today, a method where neither Congress nor the people directly elect the president. James Madison later recalled that the final decision on how to elect a U.S. president "was produced by fatigue and impatience."

After the U.S. Constitution went into effect, the idea of using an electoral college to indirectly elect a president spread to other republics. For example, in the Americas, but also in Europe. Over time, however, these countries changed their minds. All of them abandoned their electoral colleges and switched to directly electing their presidents by votes of the people. Colombia did so in 1910 and Chile in 1925.

There is an effort underway in the U.S. to replace the Electoral College. The National Popular Vote Interstate Compact, currently agreed to by 17 U.S. states, including small states such as Delaware and big ones such as California, as well as the District of Columbia, is an agreement to award all of their electoral votes to whichever presidential candidate gets the most votes nationwide. It would take effect once enough states sign on that they would represent the 270-vote majority of electoral votes. The current list reaches 209 electoral votes.

A key problem with the interstate compact is that in races with more than two candidates, it could lead to situations where the winner of the election did not get a majority of the popular vote, but rather more than half of all voters chose someone else.

Notably, neither the U.S. Electoral College nor the interstate compact that seeks to replace it are systems that ensure that presidents are supported by a majority of voters.