

## 4.2 WHAT IS THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE?

**Essential Question(s):** What is the Electoral College? How is the Electoral College democratic or not?

### Overview

In the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, President Donald Trump won even though he did not win the popular vote. Why? He won the Electoral College vote. In other moments in U.S. History, the presidential candidate who won the popular vote was not elected, as the other candidate won via the Electoral College (including George W. Bush in 2000). These election results have led to an increasing number of people calling for an end to the Electoral College. And yet, despite rising interest in dismantling the Electoral College, the historic precedent, and the lingering questions and concerns about its potential replacement, have allowed it to endure.

### Snapshot

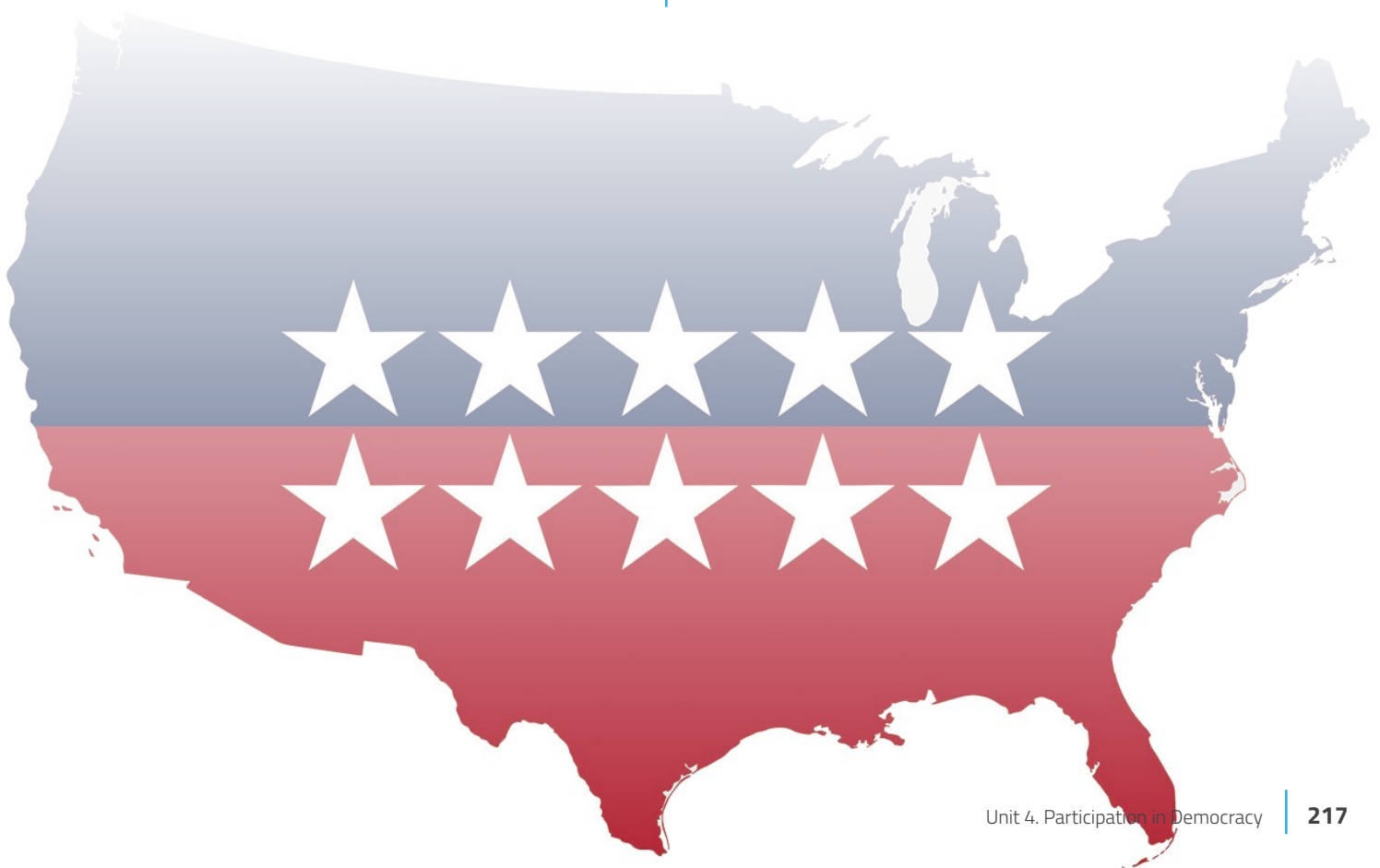
**What Students Will Learn:**

In this lesson, students will learn about the Electoral College and its origins, as well as the more contemporary movement advocating for the [National Popular Vote](#) and the interstate compact that would support it.

**Standard(s):**

D2.Civ2.9-12

**Time:** 50 minutes



## Objectives

- Explain the rationale for having the Electoral College.
- Explain the rationale for dismantling the Electoral College.
- Prepare for a Philosophical Chair dialogue on whether the Electoral College should be eliminated.

## Differentiation

- Consider having students work as partners.
- Newsela provides articles at different lexile levels so you can differentiate to several reading levels if needed. (You will need to create a FREE Newsela account in order to access the article.)

## What's Needed

- ☐ Writing utensil and paper or 1:1 technology
- ☐ WiFi, internet, computer, screen or projector, speakers
- ☐ "Does your vote count? The Electoral College explained" YouTube video (2012, 5:21 min., TED-Ed, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9H3gvnN468&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9H3gvnN468&feature=youtu.be))
- ☐ "What if the Electoral College is tied?" YouTube video (2012, 3:36 min., CGP Grey, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHEDXzOfENI&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHEDXzOfENI&feature=youtu.be))
- ☐ Make copies of the article "Born in Strife: After 230 years, Electoral College still creates divisions," (Newsela, December 1, 2016, <https://www.adl.org/media/16231/download>, one for each student).
- ☐ Make copies of the "YouTube Watcher's Guide to the Electoral College" and "Electoral College Philosophical Chairs Prep Worksheet," one of each for each student.

## Classroom Setup

Students will work independently. Desks should be set up to best support individual work time with easy access to viewing the display.

## Direct Teaching

1. Welcome students to class and begin a discussion by asking:  
*Should the person who wins the majority of votes in an election always be the winner?*
2. Explain to students that the U.S. has a representative democracy, meaning the people elected represent the population that voted for them. One aspect of our representative democracy includes the role of an Electoral College in deciding who is the President.

## Key Vocabulary

Electoral College  
national popular vote  
House of Representatives  
Senate  
vote  
voters



3. Explain to students that this may raise some questions: “What is the Electoral College? What is the purpose of the electoral college? How many people are in the electoral college? What happens if there is a tie in the electoral college?”

**Note:** If there is time, you can have students share answers to these questions. Otherwise, they can be asked rhetorically, to set up the viewing of the video.

4. Distribute the “[YouTube Watcher’s Guide to the Electoral College](#)” to each student. Explain to students that they are going to watch two YouTube videos that explain the Electoral College. One will give a brief overview of the process, while the other talks about what happens if there is a tie.
5. Show students both videos, “[Does your vote count?](#)” and “[What if the Electoral College is tied?](#)”
6. Provide a few minutes for students to find a partner and discuss the videos. Explain to students that during their discussions they should discuss things that:
  - confirmed their previous knowledge;
  - extended their knowledge; and
  - challenged their knowledge.

Have them record their responses.

7. Distribute to each student the Newsela article, “[Born in Strife: After 230 years, Electoral College still creates divisions](#),” and read aloud as a whole class. Ask students to mark the text while they read. Suggested markings are:
  - + for new information
  - ! for surprises
  - ? for questions
  - for important information
8. Facilitate a brief discussion by asking some of the following questions:
  - Why was the Electoral College created?
  - In what ways is the Electoral College democratic?
  - In what ways is the Electoral College not democratic?
  - What is the impact on equity given that the Electoral College overvalues the votes of rural Americans and undervalues votes of those in more concentrated, urban populations? Consider the representation of marginalized groups in rural vs. urban areas.
9. Explain to students that they will be participating in a Philosophical Chairs dialogue during the next class period to exchange ideas and information about whether the Electoral College should be abolished in the U.S.
10. Distribute the “[Electoral College Philosophical Chairs Prep Worksheet](#).” Read through the worksheet and answer questions that students may have about the assignment. Provide students work time. If they do not finish in class, assign as homework.

Tell students they should come to the next class period prepared with research and facts that support their position.

## Closing

Ask students to share one of the questions on their prep sheet.

# YOUTUBE WATCHER'S GUIDE TO THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE

## “Does your vote count? The Electoral College explained”

1. Who does the Electoral College elect? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Since \_\_\_\_\_ there have been 538 electors.
3. Each state gets a specific number of electors based on \_\_\_\_\_
4. What happens if someone wins the popular vote, but does not earn the needed amount of electoral votes?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What is one reason why people are critical of or opposed to the electoral college? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What is one reason why people are in favor of the Electoral College? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What is a “Safe State”? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What are “Swing States”? \_\_\_\_\_
9. How many votes does a candidate need to win? \_\_\_\_\_
10. What are your thoughts on this process? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## “What if the Electoral College is Tied?”

1. If the Electoral College is tied, who breaks the tie? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Each \_\_\_\_\_ gets one vote in the House.
3. This result also happens if there are more than \_\_\_\_\_ candidates for President and none of them get most of Electoral College votes.

4. \_\_\_\_\_ had the most votes from U.S. people and the electoral college but not the majority. The States picked \_\_\_\_\_ to be President instead.
5. If there is a tie, the Senate picks the \_\_\_\_\_
6. Both the House of Representatives and the Senate have even numbers of votes (50 for House, 100 for Senate). If there is a tie in the House for President, the Vice President becomes the acting President until the House decides. If both the House and the Senate cannot agree on the President and Vice President, the \_\_\_\_\_ becomes the acting President until they agree.
7. What are your thoughts on this process? \_\_\_\_\_

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# ELECTORAL COLLEGE PHILOSOPHICAL CHAIRS PREP WORKSHEET

Complete this worksheet and include textual evidence for your answers based on research and facts that support your stance.

1. Circle the position you are starting from: I believe the Electoral College **should be abolished** / **should not be abolished**. The reason I believe this is because:

a.

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b.

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c.

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2. Based on your same stance identified above, people believe this side of the argument because:

a.

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b.

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c.

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**3. Two questions I have about the Electoral College are:**

a. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. One argument the opposing side might have to support their case is:

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5. Other notes:

[illegible]