

Subject: Civics and Government

Grade Level: 9–12

Standards:

Indiana DOE

Academic (3)

USG.3.1 Purposes, Principles, and Institutions of the Government of the United States

Analyze the United States Constitution and explain characteristics of government in the United States, which define it as a federal, presidential, constitutional, and representative democracy.

USG.3.13

Explain the electoral process in terms of election laws and election systems on the national, state, and local level.

USG.5.7 Roles of Citizens in the United States

Explain how citizens in United States participate in public elections as voters and supporters of candidates for public office.

Nationwide

National Standards for Civics and Government (3)

D2.Civ.1 Civic and Political Institutions

Distinguish the powers and responsibilities of local, state, tribal, national, and international civic and political institutions.

D2.Civ.2

Analyze the role of citizens in the U.S. political system, with attention to various theories of democracy, changes in Americans' participation over time, and alternative models from other countries, past and present.

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D2.Civ.4

Explain how the U.S. Constitution establishes a system of government that has powers, responsibilities, and limits that have changed over time and that are still contested.

Materials Needed:

Students will need access to:

A computer or laptop or a way to show video in class

Students may need headphones

Access to PBS Learning Media

Access to the internet

Learning Objectives:

- Understand why the framers of the Constitution established an electoral college.
- Consider why various elections failed to produce a final slate of presidential electors and how these problems were solved.
- Compare the strengths of the electoral college to those of a direct popular vote.

Introduction/Anticipatory Set:

American citizens do not vote directly for presidential candidates. Instead, they choose electors who vote for the candidates. This assures residents of small states that their votes will influence the outcome as much as those of large states. However, it can lead to contested elections, and unfaithful electors can leave some citizens without a voice in national elections. As a result, many people believe we need to change this process.

Body of Lesson:

1. The United States is a republic rather than a democracy. In a republic, citizens elect representatives who speak and vote on their behalf in national decisions. In a democracy, citizens speak and vote directly in national decisions. This is why U.S. citizens choose electors to represent them in choosing a President.

- a. Learning Activity:

- i. View the video, “History of the Electoral College.”

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- ii. Have students answer these questions, based on the video:
 1. How does the electoral college balance the interests of large and small states?
 2. Why did the framers of the Constitution believe Congress would decide most presidential elections? Why did this not happen?
 3. Some critics of the electoral college say that a Presidential election should be a national plebiscite, in which each citizen casts a direct vote for the candidate of choice. What problem does Dr. Jett see with this?
2. Dr. Jett says that the framers of the Constitution “feared giving one person too much power, and then a populist candidate could too easily become a despot. Remember, they had just fought a war against a tyrannical government.”
 - a. Learning Activity:
 - i. Have students research the meaning of *populism*, *despotism*, and *tyranny*. Discuss their findings as a group.
 - ii. Ask, How does our presidential election process help us avoid the rise of populism, despotism, or tyranny?
3. Controversy swirls around the question of who is eligible to vote, for example:
 - a. Should all absentee ballots be allowed, or only if hardship prevents a voter from physically going to the polls?
 - b. Should political parties be allowed to register voters or provide transportation to the polls?
 - c. Should convicted felons be allowed to vote after they serve their sentences?
 - d. Learning Activity:
 - i. Encourage students to discuss these questions. It will be obvious that they have conflicting opinions, often passionate opinions.
 - ii. Ask, As long as these questions persist, which is most likely to represent the will of the majority—the electoral college or a direct popular vote?

Summary/Closure

While our modern minds are perplexed by some procedures that writers of the Constitution established for our country, they had a practical purpose. The electoral college is a good example. There may be simpler ways to choose a President, but those alternatives have other disadvantages. At worst, other methods of electing a President could subvert the freedoms we now enjoy.

Extension Activities

Read “About the Electors” (<http://alturl.com/gzznh>) for details about the Constitution’s provisions concerning electors. Several presidential elections failed to determine which electors would represent certain states, so this question had to be resolved in other

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ways. Have three groups of students read the following articles and prepare a one-page report (about 250 words) describing that election's problem with electors and how it was resolved:

- 1824 Election – “1824 United States Presidential Election” (<http://alturl.com/jgdpo>)
- 1876 Election -- “The Compromise of 1877 Ends Reconstruction” (<https://www.studentsofhistory.com/compromise=1877>)
- 2000 Election – “How the 2000 Election Came Down to a Supreme Court Decision” (<http://alturl.com/patof>)

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