

# VOTE

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The delegates at the Constitutional Convention of 1787 had sought to draft and sign a cohesive Constitution since May 25, and by late August tension loomed large as several crises unfolded.

Rivalries between small and large states and disagreements about the structure of government had ignited quarrels during the summer months.

The delegates decided a federal structure best suited the nation, mixing centralized government with state government. The Connecticut Plan resolved the conflict over representation by allowing for a bicameral legislature divided into one house based on population and another based on equality of the states.

Despite settling these arrangements, danger of renewing tension remained as the convention moved on to creating a means of selecting the president.

After considering several election proposals, including direct popular election, election by both houses of the Congress and election by the Senate only, the delegates reached an impasse.

Several opponents of direct popular election argued that the population lacked the awareness and knowledge to vote for candidates unless they hailed from the voter's home or neighboring state. Others said congressional selection made the president subservient to Congress and encroached on a separation of government powers.

To break the deadlock, a committee was appointed to explore alternative methods. James Wilson of Pennsylvania proposed an Electoral College plan in June based on congressional apportionment. The committee found it to be a viable alternative and proposed the idea.

In keeping with the federal nature of the government and the Connecticut Plan adopted previously, the delegates endorsed Wilson's Electoral College idea.

The endorsement came not from unanimous support, but from compromise and pragmatism. Extreme pressure to reach agreement pushed the delegates to accept the alternative to the other proposals that were stalemated at the convention.

Problems arising from such a plan would not be immediate because the delegates knew George Washington would be chosen president regardless of the system, and this lack of immediacy suffered little scrutiny.

The system proved somewhat flawed in its first trials. Some changes in the Electoral College ar-

angement thus evolved in the years after its adoption as problems presented themselves. Because of these developments, the framers' intentions were never realized.

From the legislative caucuses of the 1796 presidential election arose political parties and recruitment of electors who pledged to support the parties' candidates.

Before this development, electors had been regarded as statesmen, but the free elector became one bound to commitment. In turn, electors came to be chosen not for their wisdom, but for the predictability of their vote.

A "faithless elector" emerged from these changes as well. Samuel Miles, a Federalist elector in the 1796 presidential election, voted for Thomas Jefferson instead of Federalist John Adams and caused outrage in the Federalist party.

A second change in the system resulted from the development of national party politics as well. The framers accepted the system with the assumption that the Electoral College would act as a nominating agency, and the House would act as a selection agency, but the House's role shifted instead to one of last resort in the case that no candidate received a majority of the popular vote. Unless this happened, the Electoral College was the final point of decision.

Finally, the Constitution was amended to resolve the framers' oversight in constructing the system. The framers had planned originally for the strongest candidate to become president and the next strongest to become the vice president. Party politics altered practical application of this because the two were not always of the same philosophy, and in the case of the 1796 election the two — Adams and Jefferson — were actually quite hostile.

As a result, the 12th Amendment was proposed and ratified in 1824, requiring separate votes by the electors for president and vice president.

Despite these changes, not all of the systems' flaws have been smoothed. Critics call the system undemocratic because the "winner-takes-all" rule gives all of a state's votes to the majority winner, including those intended for an opponent. The system also makes it possible for the loser of the popular vote to win enough electoral votes to become elected, as happened in 1888 when Benjamin Harrison defeated Grover Cleveland. Cleveland won the popular vote, but Harrison won more electoral votes.

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