

GEOGRAPHY APPLICATION: REGION

The Electoral College

Directions: Read the paragraphs below and study the map carefully. Then answer the questions that follow.

Delegates to the Constitutional Convention of 1787 debated the question of presidential election. Some wanted direct election. Others favored election by Congress. They compromised on a plan of indirect election by electors picked by popular vote. Called the electoral college, the plan is a double-election system.

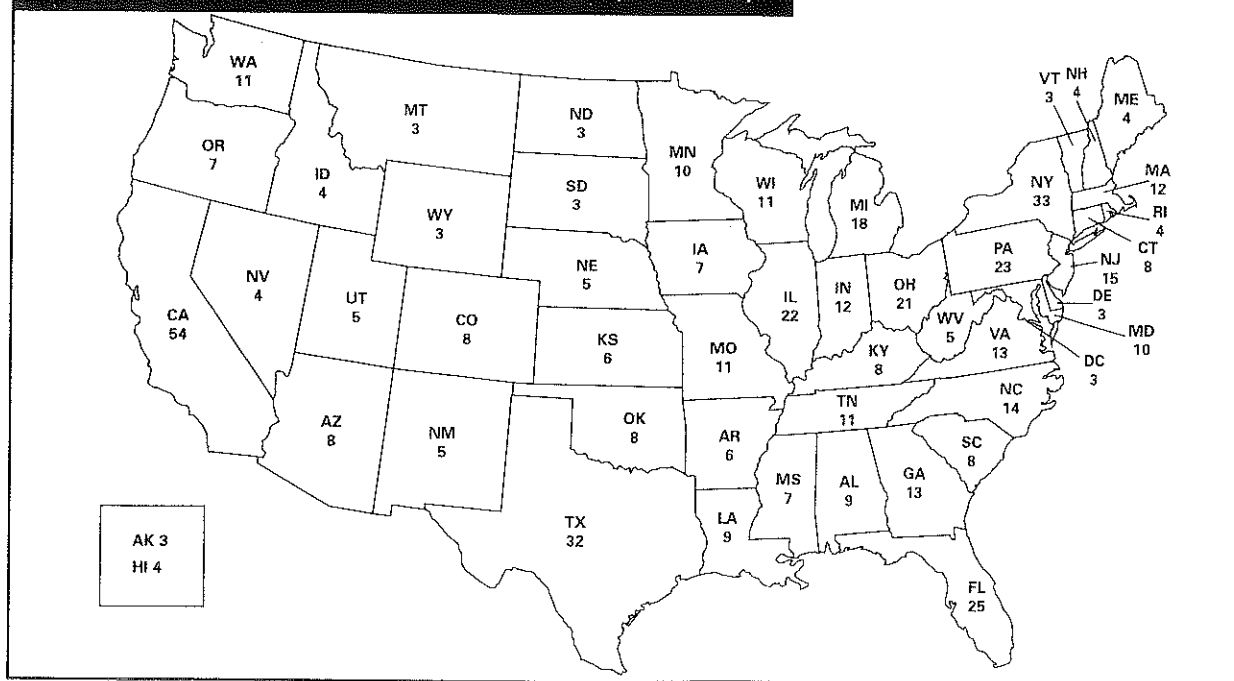
Here is how it works. Political parties in each state choose electors, people pledged to support a party's candidate. The number of electors for each party equals the combined number of that state's U.S. senators and representatives. (Today there are 535 U.S. senators and representatives, plus 3 electors from the District of Columbia, for a national total of 538 electors.) A candidate must have a majority to win. Then, if no one receives 270 electors' votes, the House of Representatives chooses a

winner from the top three vote getters.

On election day, citizens vote for president. Their votes, however, are actually for electors pledged to that person. The candidate getting the majority of popular votes gets all the electoral votes of the state.

Then, about six weeks after the election, electors meet at their state capitals to cast ballots directly for president. But this may not mirror the country's popular vote. If, for example, someone gets a small majority in a few states with a big electoral count but loses heavily in many small states, a minority of nationwide popular votes can control a majority of electoral votes. In fact, three times—1824, 1876, and 1888—a candidate not having the largest popular vote became president through the electoral college.

Electoral Votes for Each State in the 1990s (Total=538)



© McDougal Littell Inc. All rights reserved.

Interpreting Text and Visuals

1. How was the electoral process for choosing the president decided on at the Constitutional Convention? _____

2. How is the number of electoral votes for each state determined? _____

3. What do you think caused some delegates to the Constitutional Convention of 1787 to be unwilling to let the people elect the president directly? _____

4. Which six states and one district have the fewest electoral votes? How many does each have? _____

How many electoral votes does your state have? _____
5. How does the electoral college's "double-election" system work? _____

6. Explain how a presidential candidate can lose the overall popular vote and still become president. _____

7. What possible criticism do you see of the six-week delay between the popular vote and the electors' vote? _____

